

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**The Bacchae of Euripides: Ritual Theatre**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis attempts to document the research and process of the director for the production of The Bacchae of Euripides, translated and adapted by C.K. Williams, which appeared in the University Theatre, October 18 - 28, 1995. The thesis begins with an overview of the background material that the director found particularly helpful in achieving her vision of the play. It continues with a play analysis of the text, and then documents the pre-production process involved in putting a mainstage production together. Furthermore, it outlines the rehearsal period, including techniques and observations made by the director. Finally, the process is reviewed, in summary, with the perspective that time and distance lend.

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**For my family**

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The Bacchae and theatre as ritual: why I wanted to do this play.**

It was a hot and humid day in May when I brought home a stack of Shakespeare, Strindberg, all the Jacobean horror I could handle, and a pile of Greek tragedies. I was looking for plays to put on my thesis list. My production was still over a year away. One play in particular caught my attention. It was a recent translation/adaptation of Euripides' Bacchae. That summer I fell in love with the Bacchae, and would continue to rediscover its beauty over the course of the next year and a half.

What was it that so caught my imagination? The language, of course appealed to me; the beauty of a poetry so elemental that it can survive the outrageous fortune of translation. I was compelled by the portraits of Pentheus; a rash but powerful young king who, despite his intelligence, doesn't have the self-knowledge to save himself from the power of Dionysus, the god that shimmers like a snake - beautiful and deadly.

I also welcomed the opportunity to provide audiences with a truly theatrical experience. I wanted to explore a kind of drama which can only receive its fullest expression in live theatre. The nature of the stage is that we are always aware that we are watching a performance. There is no mistaking the illusion of the world for the real one. So why do so many contemporary theatrical productions try to "fool" audiences with naturalistic settings and performances? It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the economic paradoxes at work in contemporary theatre. However, I wanted to experiment with how far I could go away from naturalistic representation on the stage to prove that the dominion of theatre was in the human imagination. Therefore, I welcomed the opportunity to work with gods, masks, singing, dancing, drumming, and dismemberment. I was also happy to present people with a truly theatrical performance that has the shape and feeling of a ritual.

The story of Pentheus is the reenactment of a very ancient ritual, deeply rooted in our collective spiritual consciousness. It is clearly a story of sacrifice; the eternal cycle of birth, death, and renewal, though deceptively wrapped in delicious poetry and psychological cloaks. It is a tragedy, which is a type of ritual; we know the ending ahead of time, or if we don't, then



we guess it quickly (since Dionysus tells us everything we need to know about the story ahead of time, in the prologue). Tragedy is not the destination, but the journey.

There is always something both comforting and frightening in the inevitability of tragedy; perhaps because we know we are journeying towards our own inevitability, and the experience holds mystery for us. Mystery is spiritual. Some Webster's definitions of "mystery" include: "something that cannot be or has not been explained or understood"; "a detective story", "secret religious rites not revealed to the uninitiated, esp. those of ancient religions", and "a religious tenet which rests on revelation and cannot be understood in terms of human reason."<sup>1</sup> All of these definitions are part of the Bacchae. What I wanted to give people was a religious experience; a theatrical communion, that would celebrate and illuminate the mysteries of Nature. And that, my friend, is a ritual.

Finally, it was something more intuitive that really won my religious devotion. The play reeks of life; it is soaked in it. It has a feeling, seeping through the language and the story, of uncontrollable Nature that blindly seeks to come out of us into the light. It is like blades of grass that erupt through the cracks in the concrete. It is the power of Dionysus - the power of our innermost desires - that will break through the most controlled façade, the most practised and cultivated mask.

Since I feel that power - as all artists do - I wanted to remind others of its dazzling beauty and its danger. Dionysus is in us all. Many artists in many fields tell a similar story of having a sensation of "letting go" and giving in to the art when it is really going well. I know as a painter I have often had that sensation of watching myself create, thinking, "That's really good - I wonder what will happen next." As an actor it comes as an active trance-like state where the body and voice seem to operate of their own accord. I am sure there is an equivalent in every field, where instinct seems to take over.

In some religions the god is invited into the body and an ecstatic trance takes hold, causing wild, erratic dancing. Members of some Christian-based religions experience "speaking in tongues" (said to come from God), and some others experience demonic possession (said to come from the devil). The secular descendants of Dionysiac religion can be witnessed "going out dancing" in any downtown nightclub in any major city. Alcohol is still the catalyst for

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<sup>1</sup> The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English Language. Can. ed. 1988.

ecstatic behaviour. The Greeks believed that the god came into the body through the wine and therefore any erratic behaviour is attributable to the god. Today you might hear someone say, "I wasn't myself last night", or, "I can't believe I did that; I'm normally not like that at all." We still blame the alcohol, but we have lost the name of the god in us.

However, Dionysus is also the god of madness as well as ecstasy. His influence can be seen in the newspapers every day, in the men who never seemed abnormal until the day they walked to the top of a tower, or into a fast food restaurant, or into a college, or stood up in a subway, and opened fire on the strangers around them. We see him in the sex slayers who hunt men and women and then rape, murder, mutilate, tear in pieces, or devour their prey. These are people compelled beyond reason by some instinct that cannot be suppressed. Although it happens all around us, we still have the naïvete to be shocked by a story of a mother who tears her son limb from limb. I think Euripides would appreciate the irony.

Due to lightning-rapid advances in science and technology that we have experienced in the past hundred years, we think we have conquered Nature. Although we may harness the power of the wind, water, sun and atom, we may never fully control that Nature within ourselves which stirs us, moves us, beyond our reason and our will. By remembering this, we honour Dionysus. He gives us that which we are most proud and most ashamed of. We must respect him - not because of what he is, but because he is. This is the god I wanted to give back to people.

## CHAPTER ONE: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH<sup>2</sup>

### Euripides: Ironic Vision

Euripides' very skilfully employed irony (dramatic and otherwise) in his work to make people look or feel differently about their world. It appears in every one of his plays, and is used in a variety of ways to bring about a variety of responses.

He particularly seemed to enjoy using dramatic irony to demonstrate to people the true nature of the gods they worshipped. Apparently, gods and goddesses are not subject to the same moral code as mortals. However, if they were, they would fall short of the minimum that we expect from ourselves and others. In particular, plays like Ion and the Hippolytus show portraits of gods and goddesses who are less noble than the mortals whose lives they manipulate and sometimes destroy. As R.P. Winnington-Ingram points out, "It is indeed possible that he [Euripides] felt intensely antagonistic to a view which saw gods as men, attributed to them human motives and, at the same time, responsibility for events, and then worshipped them as not only powerful but wise and beautiful."<sup>3</sup>

The "happy ending" - the recognition and reconciliation between mother and son that we find in Ion makes the play more of a tragicomedy than a true tragedy. However, at the heart of the Ion is this sobering question: what kind of gods ravish young girls and desert them? And more importantly, what kind of people are we to worship beings who perform acts that, were they mortal, we would find cowardly and deplorable? Although rape was nothing new to 5th century Athens, and the status of women perhaps equalled that of children,<sup>4</sup> what Euripides presents us with is not an attack on a hapless slave who can expect no better from the men she is in contact with, but the rape of Creusa, a girl from a wealthy family of good standing. This rash act, not committed by a street thug, but by the god Apollo, endangers the life and welfare of the girl, who must have the baby hidden away from her family, and secreted away to the cave that was the scene of the crime. Had her family found her out, she would likely have

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of Euripides' life and work, refer to Appendix 1 at the back of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> R.P. Winnington-Ingram, Euripides and Dionysus (1948. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969) 27.

<sup>4</sup> For a more in depth evaluation of the role of women in Athenian society see Eva C. Keuls' The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985).

been cast out of the home, and would not have a hope of marrying. This kind of reckless endangerment, then, is something peculiarly in the domain of a god; any mortal might have had to think of consequences, or might have had some compassion in the situation. Who will stand up to a god, and what good can come of it?

It is Apollo's misused son, Ion, who is about to rush into the temple to ask his father some very difficult questions, when he is prevented by the appearance of Athena. Ion has a right to ask about the misuse of his mother, and about his own conception (which had been put down to some lower class adventure). Ion, in fact, throughout the play, has exhibited a kind of nobility and honour not to be found in his divine father. It is a lovely example of dramatic irony that such an upstanding youth should be unwittingly sweeping the steps of his own father's temple like a slave.

In the end, Apollo remains absent and never makes an appearance to defend himself, but suspiciously sends Athena to make excuses. We can therefore only assume some shame or guilt or sheer cowardice on his part, none of which deserves the worship due to a god.

In the Hippolytus, we again see gods whose pettiness and spitefulness make them less worthy of honour than the mortals they destroy. The quarrel between Aphrodite and Artemis would almost seem funny, were there not the lives of some very noble people at stake. Hippolytus may indeed deserve Aphrodite's wrath for his singular devotion to Artemis and stubborn snobbery, but Phaedra and Theseus must suffer just for being in the way. Phaedra especially gains our sympathies; she would rather die than tell Hippolytus of her illicit love for him, and in the end she does die, rather than live in shame.

Artemis and Aphrodite are not constrained by such earthly concerns as shame. At the end of the play we learn that Artemis, having felt no real pity for the fate of those that in essence, died for her, but rather feeling the sting of personal injury aimed at her by Aphrodite, swears revenge. As the myth goes, she destroys Aphrodite's mortal love, Adonis; another pawn swept aside in a cat-fight of Olympian proportion. In the end, the greatness of characters like Phaedra, and even the over-resolute Hippolytus stand out against the smallness of the goddesses entrusted with their protection.

In the Bacchae, Euripides uses dramatic irony not to belittle a god, but to give him added strength. Dionysus, like Aphrodite, demands to be worshipped, not so much because he

deserves it, but because he is a force to be reckoned with. Not that Euripides is advocating that religion be based on abject fear, but rather that demonstrating a healthy respect for acknowledged forces in nature puts us in a position of power in dealing with them. Pentheus has no such respect and attempts to pit his own mortal power against an intangible principle, with disastrous results.

There is dramatic irony in the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus, in that Pentheus, with all his intelligence and the whole masculine power of the military behind him, is unable to defeat an unarmed, effeminate man and a group of housewives. To be fair, the sensual stranger is a god, so Pentheus never has a chance. However, Dionysus doesn't really defeat Pentheus, but only gives him the tools with which to hang himself. Pentheus is the source of his own destruction. He comes up with the idea to spy on the Maenads, and thus sets up his own transformation, rejecting open combat for devious voyeurism.

Furthermore, Pentheus, this emblem of rational masculinity, allows himself to be dressed as a woman before setting out for Cithaeron. The young king, who has previously shown himself to be controlling, aggressive, and somewhat drunk on his own power, revels in his role reversal into a submissive, passive, sensual female personality. "But if feminization is the emblem of Pentheus' defeat, Dionysos' effeminacy is a sign of his hidden power. Here are two males, cousins in fact through their genealogical ties, both engaged in a masculine contest for supremacy. One, however, gains mastery by manipulating a feminised identity, and the other is vanquished when he finally succumbs to it."<sup>5</sup>

It would surely prove poetic justice for Pentheus to be destroyed by a band of Maenads. But what makes Pentheus' death ironic (in a "monkey's paw" sense of an outcome opposite to that which is expected, therefore seeming to mock one's expectations) is that he is set upon by his own mother. His desire to return to the womb is sadly granted, as she who made him now unmakes him:

DIONYSUS  
...You'll return with someone else.

PENTHEUS

My mother...

---

<sup>5</sup> I. Zeitlin, "Playing the other", *Nothing to do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, eds. Winkler, John J., and I. Zeitlin, (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1992) 64.

DIONYSUS  
...a model for all men...

PENTHEUS  
That's my purpose.

DIONYSUS  
You'll be carried home...

PENTHEUS  
You're spoiling me!

DIONYSUS  
...in your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS  
...No, you're *spoiling* me.<sup>6</sup>

There are smaller dramatic ironies as well, as when the chorus sings prophetically about looking for Dionysus on Olympus, "in the forest where Orpheus played his lyre" (Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides. 38.) and where Orpheus was himself torn apart by Maenads, quietly foreshadowing Pentheus' own tragedy.

There is also the pathetic dramatic irony of Agave herself, calling for her son Pentheus to come and see the trophy that she proudly carries home; the trophy being her son's own head that she has torn from his body.

Overall, Euripides' use of different forms of irony in the Bacchae increases the depth of the tragedy; in each case it twists the knife in an already painful wound, and in Aristotelian fashion, brings about a greater catharsis.

In plays dealing with war Euripides uses dramatic irony to show us the human condition under extreme duress. He shows us how civilised behaviour cannot be expected under uncivilised conditions (Hecuba, Andromache), how we do not learn from our mistakes (Suppliants, Phoenicians), how suffering is common to us all (Trojan Women), how innocence perishes from the folly of men (Iphigenia in Aulis), and how heroes are the villains who win (Electra, Orestes).

In other plays he uses dramatic irony to help people to look differently at traditionally accepted stories. In Medea and Heracles, we see familiar figures turned upside down under the

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<sup>6</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 60.

pressure of extreme emotion. In the former work, Euripides tries to understand the psyche of a woman who would murder her children, and in the latter he finds simple salvation for a man who murdered his family.

Euripides showed his contemporaries the true nature of the gods they worshipped, and was compelled to show them that the wars they waged, whatever their justification, only added to the gross of human suffering. He shows us that there exists an essential human experience - a capacity for suffering, that unites all people, regardless of age, sex, or allegiance. His use of irony (dramatic irony, in particular), sometimes gentle, sometimes scathing, is a trademark of an artist who insisted on showing people what they didn't want to see, in a form that would force them to re-view their world and its basic premises.

### **Choosing a translation**

The first major step then, after deciding on a play, was to decide on which translation of that play to use. The C.K. Williams adaptation/translation was the one that inspired me to propose The Bacchae in the first place, but I thought it would be valuable to look into other versions, in order to make sure I had the translation that would work the best for me.

Since I was interested in emphasizing the contemporary in The Bacchae, I tended to look at contemporary translations. Having dealt with plays in translation before, I had noticed a very definite trend: the translator or adapter of a piece inevitably speaks to his/her own social/cultural/historical milieu. For instance, although Philip Vellacott is a very insightful scholar of the classics, I find his translations wordy, highly wrought, and suited to a British reader in 1954. For instance, Vellacott translates a segment of the chorus as follows:

The brash unbridled tongue,  
The lawless folly of fools, will end in pain.  
But the life of wise content  
Is blest with quietness, escapes the storm  
And keeps its house secure.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Vellacott, trans., The Bacchae and other plays, by Euripides, ed. Betty Radice. (1954. London: Penguin Classics-Penguin Books, 1973) 204.

The same passage in Williams is as follows:

Tongues  
without bits:  
defiance  
without law:  
together  
they create  
disaster.  
But this, the  
life  
of calm, the  
life of rational  
tranquillity, this  
sustains us, this  
holds our house  
together.<sup>8</sup>

Although the alliteration in Vellacott livens up the otherwise static text, it still lacks the freedom of the Williams' version; a freedom that I felt was necessary in conveying the spirit of a band of wild mountain women. For me, the Vellacott chorus spoke like a middle-aged English scholar. The Vellacott also gave me the impression of trying too hard to be true to the word, rather than the meaning, which is excusable for a text that the translator never intended to be acted. For instance, in Vellacott, one line reads, "To know much is not to be wise." The same line in Williams goes, "Knowledge / is not wisdom..." The latter is more concise, natural, and "speakable." Ultimately I was looking for an acting version of the text, rather than a "correct" translation.

David Grene and Richard Lattimore have received a lot of praise in the past for their translations of classic texts. Therefore I looked at their 1959 approach to The Bacchae. Although fresher than the Vellacott, I found the Grene and Lattimore version still had the mark of a scholar rather than a theatre practitioner on it. It is an excellent reading text, less "flowery" than the Vellacott, and the choruses are freer. However, it still did not compare with Williams for my purposes. Some phrases still sounded awkward, for instance:

O Thebes, nurse of Semele,  
crown your hair with ivy!  
Grow green with bryony!  
Redden with berries! O city,  
with boughs of oak and fir,

---

<sup>8</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 25-26.



come dance the dance of god!"<sup>9</sup>

The writing was still too formal for my liking. Phrases like "grow green with bryony" I thought were a little obscure for a contemporary audience with a wide variety of backgrounds. The same section in Williams again had a greater sense of freedom in it. The sentence structure is fragmented, lending the whole of the choruses a feeling of spontaneity.

Thebes, O  
 Thebes, who nurtured  
       her, Semele,  
 garland now  
       yourself, Thebes, with  
       ivy garlands  
 now and  
       with myrtle, luscious  
       myrtle, crown  
 yourself and  
       with oak and  
       fir-twigs: be the Bacchant now.<sup>10</sup>

In all of the Williams' choruses, I found the repetition of words and phrases helped to ground important ideas in an audience's memory; particularly important since a lot of the words would be sung in unison. And again, because rituals involve repetition, I thought the repetition of words in the choruses established a strong connection with ritual.

I still looked at a few other translations, including The Bakkhai by Robert Bagg, published in 1978. Like the rest of the '70's, I found this translation too casual and too shallow. Dionysus' opening line came out, "I'm back!" What I preferred in the Williams translation was the balance between the formality needed to convey the importance and authority of a god, with a flair for the contemporary. The Williams' version was in all ways dynamic. In it, Dionysus explains himself in straightforward terms while retaining dignity. Forgive me, but there was something a little too "American" in Bagg's version. I suppose by "American" I mean that the piece, although honest, was aggressive, brash, and without refinement.

For example, Bagg's opening is as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> David Grene and Richard Lattimore, trans., ed., Euripides V (Chicago: Phoenix Books-University of Chicago Press, 1959) 159.

<sup>10</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 10-11.

**Dionysos**

I'm back! - a god standing on ground  
 where I was born, in Thebes.  
 Lightning ripped me  
 from the pregnant body  
 of Kadmos' daughter, Semele.  
 That blast of flame was my midwife.  
 I am Dionysos, the son of Zeus.<sup>11</sup>

For me, the casualness of the dialogue did not carry much dignity. Although "ripped me from the pregnant body of Kadmos' daughter" conveys a very powerful image of violence, the feeling of the whole is that it is trying too hard to make an impression.

Compare with the opening in Williams (which, granted, Williams created to help introduce a god which a modern audience would be unfamiliar with) :

**DIONYSUS**

I am Dionysus. I am Bacchus.  
 Bromius and Iacchus.  
 Dithyrambus and Evius.  
 I am a god. The son of Zeus.  
 But I have assumed the semblance of a mortal  
 And come to Thebes, where my mother, Semele,  
 The daughter of King Cadmus, gave birth to me.  
 Her midwife was the lightning bolt that killed her.<sup>12</sup>

Here we have the information we need, and the mood for the play is set. The incantation of the various names of Dionysus sets a ritualistic tone which appealed to me theatrically.

Because I saw the play as the enactment of a very powerful ritual of sacrifice, dressed in fascinating psychological robes, I wanted to heighten the ritualistic elements wherever I could. The Williams translation accomplished this beautifully.

Another translation I looked at was by Kenneth Cavander (an Englishman, like Vellacott) written in 1966 for the BBC, and later revised for the Mermaid Theatre in London. I quite liked this version, actually. It was lively and poetic. Cavander's translation was peppered with lovely turns of phrase: "A word spilled can make a stain,"<sup>13</sup> or, in Pentheus' first address:

<sup>11</sup> Robert Bagg, trans., The Bakkhai, by Euripides (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978. Rpt. in Corrigan 367-431) 369.

<sup>12</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 3.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Cavander, trans., The Bacchae, by Euripides (Copyright 1966 by Kenneth Cavander. Rpt. in Stages of Drama, eds. Karl H. Klaus, Miriam Gilbert, and Bradford S. Field, Jr. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. 68-88) 69, l.115.

"If I get this initiator inside / My palace, I'll finish his thumping, jumping, / Hair-shaking, snaking game, I'll initiate / That head away from that body."<sup>14</sup>

However, once again the treatment of the chorus was the deciding element. Take for instance the beginning of the third choral ode:

Gently flowing Dirce,  
Life-stream to these fields,  
Innocent waters,  
Banks that were a cradle for the newborn Dionysos  
The day his father saved him from the blazing thunderbolt,  
The day Zeus shouted:  
"Welcome, my son, welcome to the world!  
My man's loins shall be your womb.  
You'll have a name, and Thebes will know you by it  
Because I will open their eyes."<sup>15</sup>

This is in itself a lovely, flowing piece of poetry, and very "speakable." However, I wanted my chorus to sing, or chant, a great deal of the time, and the very narrative quality of this poetry I thought could lend itself to a kind of ballad, but not perhaps to the kind of ritualistic singing I was aiming for. Again, compare this section to the same section in the Williams version:

Queen  
Dirce, you are  
the daughter  
of Achelous:  
Holy  
Dirce, more  
than holy, for  
to you Zeus  
once  
touched his  
child. Touched him  
to your waters  
as he tore  
him from the unrelenting  
fire  
and placed him  
in his thigh and  
roared:  
You  
*are Dithyrambus!*

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 71, ll. 340-343

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 75.

*Into my male  
womb, come!  
You  
are Bacchus!  
Come, I will  
reveal you to  
Thebes!  
You  
are Bacchus!  
They  
shall call  
you  
Bacchus!* <sup>16</sup>

Here, as before, the formality of the address to Dirce gives the speech a ritualistic quality, but where in the opening address Dionysus is essentially invoking himself, here the chorus begins a formal plea, a prayer to Dirce. There is something hauntingly primal in the sentence structure. Whereas Cavender's chorus speaks in rolling, proper phrases, Williams' chorus is poetic, but bare, undecorated. As I was interested in showing a clean separation between the very civilised, embellished world of Pentheus, and the essential, natural world of the chorus, this approach to the language suited me. Here they speak without embellishment, but with an imperative honesty.

Making sure that the chorus was an active participant in this play was another concern, and the imperative quality of Williams' choruses brings the crisis into the present, and therefore gives the chorus action. They are actively invoking Dirce, actively worshipping a god who is always watching them.

In retrospect, there was one translation that might have challenged my attachment to Williams. I came into contact with a very new translation by Robert Emmet Meagher, written in 1995 for the Shared Experience Theatre Company in London, and later produced by the Centre for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, Missouri. I was immediately intrigued by the author's message that "the definitive aim of this translation has been to provide a playable script, which not only lends itself to but cries out for production, not as a museum piece but as viable contemporary drama. Anything less, as an aim, would be a betrayal of the author, who spent his life not in libraries nor in classrooms but in the theatre."<sup>17</sup> Ah, a man after my own

<sup>16</sup> C.K. Williams, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 34-35.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Meagher, trans., *The Bacchae*, by Euripides. Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 1995) iv.

heart... Not only was the text poetic and playable, contemporary without being casual, but the choruses were rhythmic and, I thought, “singable”. Here is the opening of the first chorus:

I come from the East.  
On holy Mount Tmolos  
I have turned my back  
To leap from Asia,  
To do the sweet bidding of Bromius.  
Light is the labour in his service  
So long as he screams in the ears of my soul.<sup>18</sup>

I wanted to treat the greater part of the choruses as poetic lyrics, rather than prose, and Meagher and Williams were, I felt, most successful in this area. The “screaming” of Dionysus in the souls of his followers in the example above, spoke of the kind of uncontrollable impulse I wanted to show on stage. The chorus has rhythm and poetry and impulse. This was indeed a very exciting and playable text. Unfortunately I was only exposed to this version...after the production. However I am convinced that in the end I still would have sided with Williams.

I felt some sense of loyalty to the Williams’ translation because it was the first one that I had read that summer when I was deciding on proposals, and it was the one I chose to experiment on in my 610 directing class. For this project, I developed a 30 minute section of the Bacchae, (from Pentheus’ declaration to march on the bacchae, to the choral ode following Pentheus’ final exit). I particularly wanted to focus on the production of the chorus, and we approached the text with a variety of techniques. In the odes, we played with different combinations of voices working together and in contrast to each other. The internal rhythm of the language determined how the text would be spoken, and was reinforced with percussion. In places we tried singing portions of the text, and combining the spoken word with underlying vocal music. These experiments would give me fuel for the fire of my later production.

As a dramatic text, I had already discovered the Williams translation offered lots of possibilities. I was initially drawn to it specifically because of the freestyle presentation of the choral sections. Williams points out the difficulty that many translators have had with the odes in that the Greek metre is virtually impossible to recreate in English while still maintaining the flow of the poetry. Authors have tried translating the odes into poetry or prose in a variety of styles, with varying degrees of success. I found Williams’ almost free-form approach to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 3.

odes very appealing in that the fragmentary and imagistic sentence structure begged a creative and original treatment. Many of the passages had a natural rhythm. It also offered a lot in terms of playing with “vocal orchestrations.” The breaks in the text made it easy to imagine a variety of combinations of voices together. The breaking up of the text also made it seem more “musical,” and I felt confident that a composer would be able to work with it. Ultimately I felt this text offered more possibilities than any other I had read, and so this was the one which would be produced.

### Who Is Dionysus?

*I am Dionysus. I am Bacchus.  
Bromius and Iacchus.  
Dithyrambus and Evius.*<sup>19</sup>

Dionysus drives the action of the Bacchae before him like a swarm of Maenads to the mountains of Cithaeron. But who exactly is this seductive figure, smiling mysteriously through the action of the play, even while he is destroying the King of Thebes?

The short answer is that the Greek god Dionysus was the god of wine, ecstasy, abandon, revelry, and madness. He was the patron god of theatre and namesake of the greatest dramatic festival in ancient Greece. Theatre’s origin is widely believed to lie in the religious dithyrambs (songs between a singer and a responding chorus) that sprang up in honour of Dionysus.

The longer answer is that early agricultural societies worshipped a vegetation god; a god of the crop and harvest. Due to the popularity and proliferation of grape-growing, a god of wine sprang up and merged qualities with the local vegetation god, and the phenomena of Dionysus was born. The mythology of the earlier vegetation gods followed a cycle of death and rebirth like the crops they symbolised, so the story of Dionysus was also one of death and rebirth.

The most common story of the birth of Dionysus states that Zeus impregnated the mortal woman, Semele. When Zeus’ wife Hera found out (as she invariably did) about her husband’s infidelity, she flew into a jealous rage (which she invariably did). She performed this trick on Semele: she went to her, under a guise of friendship, and feigned that she was not jealous. Had Semele ever seen Zeus in his true form? No, Semele answered. Well then, said Hera, he

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<sup>19</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 3.

obviously doesn't love you. If he loved you, he would not always come in disguise, like someone ashamed. Semele took this to heart, so the next time Zeus came around in an amorous mood, she made him promise her a favour. He agreed. She insisted that he show himself to her. He protested but she would hear none of it. Reluctantly he agreed, but unfortunately, no one had warned Semele that this would be too much for any mortal to survive, and she was struck by the thunderbolt that was Zeus. The god managed to save the unborn child, Dionysus, and sewed him up in his thigh to hide him from the jealous Hera. When the time came, Dionysus was born out of this male womb, and earned the name Dithyrambus: Twice-Born. Later, when Hera's jealousy reared its ugly head again, Dionysus was changed by his father into a kid, and was sent to Nysa to be raised by the nymphs and satyrs there.<sup>20</sup>

Another version of this story says that when Cadmus, then King of Thebes, heard about his unmarried daughter's unplanned pregnancy, he locked her in a chest and sent it out to sea. When the chest finally washed up on shore, Semele was found dead, but miraculously, the god-child Dionysus survived.<sup>21</sup>

Since Dionysus was twice-born, he was strongly associated with death and the underworld. In Crete, Dionysus went by the name of Zagreus and had the stature of Zeus. In a different version of the twice-born story, it was said that the other gods were jealous of Dionysus, and sent the titans to tear him to pieces and toss his remnants into a cauldron. Athene was able to rescue his heart and was able to rebuild him. Zagreus/Dionysus was buried at the foot of Mount Parnassus and became a powerful underworld deity that welcomed and guided souls. In Egypt, Dionysus came to be identified with the Egyptian underworld god, Osiris, who had been similarly dis- and re-assembled.

Dionysus' character would continue to evolve and eventually his apparent resurrection would supersede all his other qualities. In keeping with his earliest associations as a vegetation god (a god of the harvest, symbolising the eternal death and rebirth of the crops) he became a symbol of "everlasting life." Plutarch would write that Dionysus is "the god who is destroyed,

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<sup>20</sup> "Dionysus", New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (New edition 1968. Rep. 1993) 157.

<sup>21</sup> The chest adrift on the sea that replaces the womb as a safe haven is a common motif in myth and literature. It can be seen in many places, from Russian folk literature to Shakespeare's Pericles, Prince of Tyre.

who disappears, who relinquishes life and then is born again.”<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note that Agave was not the only one under Dionysus’ influence to destroy her offspring. Apparently, Dionysus struck many disbelievers in a similar fashion. The Thracian king Lycurgus was hostile towards Dionysus, forcing the god to flee and imprisoning his bacchantes, much like Pentheus. Dionysus caused the ground to become sterile, and struck Lycurgus with a madness that made him mistake his own son for a grapevine, and tear him to pieces. In Argos, where the god also met with resistance, the women went mad and devoured their children. In Orchomenus, Dionysus terrorised the daughters of the king, Minyas. They had refused to participate in Dionysian celebrations. Expectedly, they soon went mad and one tore her child apart with her bare hands.<sup>23</sup>

This common theme in so many stories connected to Dionysus may or may not be rooted in the rites of the Maenads themselves. Some primitive cultures remaining today believe that individuals take on the properties of the animals they consume, which is a possible psychological insight into the flesh-eating apparent in the Bacchae. The idea that the Maenads in the play may have ripped apart and devoured animals that were thought to contain the spirit of the god, appealed to me. The spirit of Dionysus can be seen in this way to inhabit fawns (in particular), but also goats and cattle. It is interesting to imagine that because only living flesh can contain the spirit of the god, these sacrificial animals were torn apart alive. The terror and gruesomeness of the act would be part of its efficacy and would help to enhance the experience of frenzy, and madness.<sup>24</sup> Like Dionysus, and like Nature itself, these rites would be both beautiful and terrifying. It is important to remember, of course, that at the time of Euripides’ writing of the Bacchae, these wild Maenadic rites were merely legend. Perhaps the original maenads may have indulged in ritual flesh-eating of some kind, but it is not believed to have taken the form of anything presented in Euripides’ play.

The first thing that Dionysus talks of in the Bacchae are his travels. As it happens, Euripides here recounts the mythical travels of Dionysus. According to myth, Dionysus was raised on the geographically obscure Nysa, then set off to spread the gift of wine across the

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<sup>22</sup> “Dionysus”, New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (New edition 1968. Rep. 1993) 160.

<sup>23</sup> “Dionysus”, New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (New edition 1968. Rep. 1993) 159.

<sup>24</sup> “Maenadism in the Bacchae”, Harvard Theological Review (33 1951) 164-65.



world. From the mountains of Thrace he travelled through Boeotia into Attica, where he made himself known and had a series of adventures (many involving women, love, and madness). He left the mainland to adventure by sea, at one point being abducted by pirates, and landing on the island of Naxos where he found the sleeping/weeping Ariadne, whom he married. In Phrygia he was initiated in the mysteries of the great mother goddess Cybele. He continued his travels through Ephesus, Syria, Lebanon, then across the river Tigris on the back of a tiger into Asia, India, Egypt and Lydia.

Like any traveller, his mythical contact with other cultures changed him permanently. In Phrygia his cult adopted the orgiastic rites Pentheus fears in the Bacchae. However, it was in Asia that he underwent the most profound change. Before heading east, he had always been portrayed as a masculine, bearded adult. The Dionysus that emerged, however, was an effeminate, beardless, sensual *ephebe*, clothed in the delicate robes of Lydia. His reappearance in Greece then, was marked by a certain level of distrust.

During Euripides' time, the Peloponnesian war had brought Athenian morale low, and an influx of foreigners had brought the Oriental Dionysus, Sabazius, to Athens. Like the description of Dionysus made by the first chorus in the Bacchae, the Phrygian Sabazius was horned, and his emblem was the serpent. His also were the nocturnal orgies. The resurgence of Dionysus/Sabazius, "...was a return to the past: under the stresses generated by war, the hard-won civilisation of the fifth century was beginning to crack in places, and disagreeably primitive things poked up here and there through the cracks."<sup>25</sup> The degree to which Sabazius and his worship were embraced as a popular movement and distrusted by authority, may be part of Euripides' inspiration in writing the conflict between established authority and the worship of surrender that occurs in the Bacchae.

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<sup>25</sup> "Maenadism in the Bacchae". Harvard Theological Review(33 1951) 172.

## CHAPTER TWO: PLAY ANALYSIS

### Plot/Dramatic Structure: From dawn to darkness...

In Aristotle's terminology, a Greek tragedy can be analysed in the following terms:

A PROLOGUE, which is a type of introduction whereby a character alone on stage, usually a god, sets up the given circumstances of the drama, and outlines the action to come.

A PARODOS, which consists of the first entrance of the chorus and the first choral song/dance.

Several EPISODES which contain the action and dialogue of characters between choral odes.

Several STASIMA, which are the musical odes performed by the chorus between episodes.

And finally, an Exodos, which consists of the action after the last STASIMON.

Furthermore, the choral stasima are broken down into smaller choreographic divisions: the strophe ("movement"), antistrophe ("countermovement"), and epode ("afterpiece").

Typically a messenger arrives and gives a speech, describing an important off-stage event. A scene of lamentation (*kommos*) generally follows.

The rapid alternation of dialogue found, for instance, in the episode where Pentheus questions the Stranger on the nature of Dionysus, is known as *stichomythia*.

The following plot outline clarifies how the Bacchae falls very neatly into Aristotle's ideal dramatic structure for a Greek tragedy.

**PROLOGUE:** The opening of the play is as calm as the world before the dawn. The mood is reverent as Dionysus, newly incarnated as a mortal - the Stranger - recounts his own history; a solemn litany of the names and journeys of Dionysus. He outlines, in precise manner, the play we are about to see. He tells us that the King of Thebes, young

Pentheus, has denied Dionysus' godhead. In retribution, Dionysus has already afflicted the women of Thebes with madness, and they have left the loom and shuttle to celebrate wild Dionysiac rites on the mountain. They are led by Agave, Pentheus' own mother. Dionysus tells us that if Pentheus will be reasonable, he will leave well enough alone. But if Pentheus dares to go to war against the women on the mountain, then Dionysus will fight with his own weapons. We suspect Pentheus will not be reasonable.

**PARODOS:** The chorus are the next to enter. They are women; followers of Dionysus that have followed him down from the mountain to Thebes. They bring with them a kind of light; the sudden burst of poetry and song, summoned by Dionysus himself with his, "Come, women...", is like the first ray of sun across the horizon. The chorus begin singing about the birth of Dionysus. They also sing about Semele (his mother), and the great mother (the goddess) Cybele, and of the joys of music and dancing. The lightness and gaiety of the chorus in their first ode adds a note of playfulness to the solemnity of the ritual. Dionysus is "delectable".

**FIRST EPISODE:** Slowly the other players in the drama make their way to the stage. The retired King of Thebes, Cadmus, and the old blind prophet Tiresias enter in high spirits. The dawn is over and the business of the day has begun as the two old men set out to the mountain to dance for Dionysus.

They are not the only ones up, however, and Pentheus emerges from the palace to announce his displeasure with events in his absence. Spotting the old men, Pentheus expresses disgust with Tiresias, and shame for his grandfather. In his first hot-headed action, Pentheus orders Tiresias' altar to be overturned, and destroyed. In his second ill-conceived act, he orders his soldiers to bring to him the Stranger who has brought the rituals of Dionysus to Thebes. The sun seems to move inexorably forward as the action of the play winds towards its moment of ultimate tension.

**FIRST STASIMON:** The chorus sings of the joys of wine, and instructs how to lead a good life.

**SECOND EPISODE:** Tension increases, and the "heat" of the day seems to build up as the Stranger is captured and brought to Pentheus. The king and the god banter, and Pentheus becomes frustrated with the oblique answers provided by the god-in-disguise.

Pentheus here makes his third and fourth mistakes: in a symbolic emasculation, he dares to cut a lock of the Stranger's hair. He also removes the Stranger's thyrsus (the holy wand of Dionysus). With more arrogance, Pentheus rashly has him imprisoned in the stables.

**SECOND STASIMON:** The chorus, offended by the audacities of the king of Thebes, pray to Dionysus to release the Stranger. Their prayers are answered and the rhythm of the day is broken here by the unnatural occurrence of an earthquake, sent by Dionysus.

**THIRD EPISODE:** The Stranger reappears and comforts the terrified women, explaining how Pentheus began to sweat as he attempted to tie him up, and mistakenly wound the rope around a bull. Pentheus, who has now "lost his cool", has been stabbing at shadows, and reappears on the stage looking for his escaped prisoner.

The play increases in tension until "high noon": a showdown between Pentheus and Dionysus. But a climax is averted as a messenger, a local cowherd, rushes towards the palace and interrupts with important news of the bacchae on the mountain. Pentheus stops to listen, and the messenger recounts wonders: the peaceful business of the women, singing and playing; the ill-devised plan of the cowherds to capture his mother, Agave; the bacchae fighting back, tearing apart cows and bulls with their bare hands, and looting two small towns. The messenger leaves with a small tribute to Dionysus; he brought wine which leads to "sexual love", without which, "what pleasure would there be for humans then?"<sup>26</sup>

The showdown continues. Pentheus declares war on the bacchae, just as we knew he would from the prologue. The Stranger is equally prepared. He psychologically disarms Pentheus, and the tide of the play turns on this one question: "Wouldn't you like to see them on the mountain?"<sup>27</sup> As Pentheus is enticed by what sexual perversions he himself imagines, the sun begins to set on the young king. The arm raised in war-like gesture slowly descends and the play begins its slow arc downward. Pentheus enters the palace.

**THIRD STASIMON:** The chorus revel in the sensuality of Dionysus, celebrating the coming conquest of Pentheus; the breaking down of all walls between the rational and

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<sup>26</sup> C.K. Williams, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 48.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 49.

sensual worlds.

**FOURTH EPISODE:** When Pentheus emerges he is transformed, and so is the world around him. Under the spell of the intoxicating Dionysus, Pentheus sees double; “I think I see two suns / and Thebes too, twice: the seven gated fortress, twice.”<sup>28</sup> The Stranger has dressed him in a woman’s robe and wig. Pentheus enjoys his new role. He teases the Stranger and the chorus, asking, “Do I stand like Ino or my mother?”<sup>29</sup> And as Pentheus, in his women’s drapery, prepares to slink off to Cithaeron to spy on the maenads, he utters this - the most ironic statement in the play, “Let all Thebes see / the one person man enough to dare all this.”<sup>30</sup> The Stranger announces his victory over the king and implies his coming doom.

**FOURTH STASIMON:** The chorus celebrate the bloody fate of Pentheus on the mountain, and prophetically sing the circumstances of his death.

**EXODOS:** Their ecstasy is cut short by the entrance of the second messenger, howling, “Oh house! Oh famous house!”<sup>31</sup> The messenger, who accompanied the Stranger and Pentheus on their reconnaissance mission, relates how Pentheus was spotted by the women, stranded in his spying post at the top of a tall pine. The Stranger disappears and the ringing voice of Dionysus goads the women on as they trap Pentheus, drag him down, and tear him limb from limb. The carnage is initiated by Pentheus’ own mother, Agave, who takes his head and impales it on her ivied thyrsus.

The chorus exults in the bloody success of Dionysus over the King of Thebes. They sing joyously of the pain, the honour, and the horror of Agave.

The spirit of Light seems to fade quickly, the imaginary red of sunset seems to invade the play as Agave makes a bloody return to Thebes with her prize, which she mistakenly believes to be the head of a young lion. This is the bloody climax of the story. The visual sign of the murder of Pentheus - his head on a stick - is a signal that the crime has been punished. All that is left is recognition and mourning. She calls for the city, her father, and even her son to celebrate her prowess. Cadmus enters, a different figure from the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 66.

laughable old man we saw at the beginning. Attendants bring the shattered remains of Pentheus on a litter back to the palace. In a very touching scene, Cadmus must help Agave, still mad with Dionysus, to recognise the head in her hands as her son's, and help her to remember her unnatural crime. The play relentlessly continues its descent into blackness as Agave's madness turns to anguish. We see the sunset of this empire as Agave grieves for her son and for her crime.

Dionysus breaks the natural rhythm of the play for the second time as he appears now in his godly form to sentence Agave and Cadmus to lives of exile, and loneliness.

The chorus have the final words in the play as the tone returns to the reverence of the beginning. But now there is a sadness in the air as the mysteries of the god are revealed only in darkness. Knowledge is only achieved through suffering, and what we hoped for in the dawn takes a turn past our wildest imaginings to become what we regret at midnight.

It should be mentioned at this point that part of the text of the final scene is lost (after line 1329), and some creative reconstruction inevitably has to take place to make the text playable. Williams achieves this quite fluidly.

Whereas Euripides may have been criticised for being diagrammatic in his plot structure and his character drawing, and didactic in his use of the chorus, this play hardly seems contrived, even though it is the most formally constructed of any of his tragedies. True inspiration seems to run through it. It is sewn together seamlessly. The choruses are integral to the action and the odes never stray from the dilemma at hand. The characters are drawn with conviction, and through their actions, logically and inevitably plotted, we see the greater shape of the piece.

Euripides managed to make a beautifully formal tragedy. Tragedies may begin with a disruption in the Natural order, in this case perpetrated by the civil order that is reasoned and controlled (where men are in control and women and children, animals and plants tremble in their path). The journey of the tragedy then, is to set things right in the Natural order.

But Dike [the natural order], a basic norm, plays little part in Euripides' thought: it is for this reason that he is 'the most tragic of poets'. He presents passions or follies as a constant source of misery. Therefore, logically, he draws characters who are extreme, and makes plots that are schematic. To him, the Aristotelian

virtues would have been irrelevant. Sophocles' tragedy is rooted in the conception of a universe which in itself is orderly; Euripides' is one shot through with passions, blind instincts, lunacies.<sup>32</sup>

The structure of the Bacchae, then, is a reversal of civil order. In this case, the natural order is represented by the wild world of Nature, where women occupy the highest mortal positions as holy priestesses, generatrices of the World, and the world itself is a mother that will, like Agave, take back what she gives, and where the passions of animals dominate men. Into this natural order comes Pentheus, an intruder from another world, who, like the hundred princes who tried in vain to cut back the thorny briar from Sleeping Beauty's castle, will be devoured in his attempt to conquer the Natural. Here, Reason and Order is the disruption, setting off balance a world of instinct and passion, inspiration and ecstasy. Whereas in other tragedies, the death of the hero would precipitate a return to a "civilized" state of things, here the death of Pentheus ensures that the castle will forever be covered in thorns. With the death of Pentheus and the expulsion of the house of Cadmus, Nature, in the form of Dionysus, claims the Theban palace for itself, waiting for the true and worshipful prince to inhabit it.

The play operates on a number of levels:

There is the level of superficial melodrama; there is the satire directed against a crude mythology; and clearly of the profoundest importance - there is the permanent significance of Dionysiac religion.<sup>33</sup>

As a melodrama, it shows the passion of a man pitted against a god, dismembered by his own mother. It offers plenty of horror as Agave enters the scene with her son's head on a stick, and pathos verging on the morbidly funny as she attempts to piece together his broken remnants. On another level, we see a critique against a simplistic mythology in the form of the blind prophet Tiresias. We see the difference between a religion that reads oracles in chicken guts, that rationalises the sublime and quibbles over minutiae, and a religion that is born in the body, that is an acknowledgement of forces we are at odds to control. Finally we see the truth of that religion itself, we see that, "Dionysus is only a

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<sup>32</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 198.

<sup>33</sup> R.P. Winnington-Ingram, Euripides and Dionysus (1948. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969) 28.

means to an end. Euripides exploits the Dionysiac revels to produce a dramatic action which helps the spectators to consider the mystery and the precariousness of their own existence.”<sup>34</sup> This multiplicity of levels produces in the end a drama that is entertaining, intelligent, and profound.

### **I Have Soared... (Ritual)**

Ritual is an important dramatic element in the Bacchae. It helps to give shape to the tragedy, as well as lending an air of sanctity to the actions of the chorus and Dionysus. The aura of ritual is apparent from the beginning, from Dionysus’ self invocation - the roll-call of his names and identities in different lands - to the first ode of the chorus, who sing the joys of Dionysian worship:

Blessed, blessed  
     and happy,  
     blessed and  
 blessed again  
     are they who  
     in the holy  
 rituals,  
     consecrate themselves,  
     who  
 know the  
     mysteries.  
     Blessed in spirit, blessed  
 spirit fused,  
     fused  
     with and consecrated  
 to the holy  
     bands upon  
     the mountains,  
 the bands  
     of Bacchus praying  
     in the mountains,  
 blessing, praising  
     Bacchus, holy  
     Bacchus...<sup>35</sup>

This mystical aura is maintained throughout the tragedy. Dionysus’ exchanges with the

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, The Masks of Tragedy (New York: Gordian Press, 1971) 126.

<sup>35</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 7-8.



chorus remind us that nothing is left to chance. Pentheus' downfall is inevitable - we feel it coming - and the magical ceremony comes to a close in the darkness at the end of the play. The chorus has the last word and completes the circle with a brief ode to the ineffability of the gods, and we are left with the feeling that something personally tragic, but universally profound, has passed through us.

### Setting

The Bacchae is set before the palace in Thebes. Beyond Thebes are the wild mountains of Cithaeron, where the Theban women, mad under the spell of Dionysus, perform their rituals. This is a kind of transitional territory; a borderland between the power of Man and the power of Nature, and a battleground where these two forces will mingle and crush against each other. The Theban palace is the "last outpost"; an island of civilization which will soon be consumed by the natural forces it has tried to suppress. Where Pentheus and the palace are intimately connected, so Dionysus and Cithaeron are one and the same, and these geographical landmarks map out the scope of the tragedy. In the battle between a mountain and a molehill, Nature's insensible rock will always conquer, despite the industriousness of the ants below.

### Style

The opening of the play is marked by a crisis, which it is the protagonist's responsibility to overcome. The hero is always someone of high stature, likely a king. The hero is felled by fate or a remarkable coincidence of circumstance. , and *Hubris* (a fatal pride in which he sets himself up as an equal to the gods), lead him to choose poorly at the crucial crossroads of the tragedy. This is *hamartia* , the fatal error which drives the play .<sup>36</sup> There

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<sup>36</sup> NOTE: I say "he" because so many of the tragic heroes are men. As a playwright, Euripides seems particularly interested in heroines. Because of this, some of the most memorable tragic protagonists we have are women: Medea, Phaedra, Hecuba, Andromache, Iphigenia, Electra, et al.

is a crucial moment on which the whole weight of the tragedy is balanced, and a personal recognition, or recognition of the errors of others may follow. Very often a *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, occurs as well.

The chorus is a major feature of Greek tragedy. This group of individuals usually represents some element of society that does not actively participate in the public sphere, for instance, women, old men, and slaves. Of particular interest is the fact that they function as one stage character. As Walton says, "The personality of the chorus was essentially corporate, not individual,"<sup>37</sup> and so they act and think as one. The chorus comment on the action, and speak as a universal voice. The chorus can sometimes be counted on to be objective and state the truth on a situation. In the *Bacchae*, however, the chorus of women is intimately connected to the action on stage, and they are hardly objective. Euripides insists that an audience think for themselves, and though the chorus represents the closest thing to a moderate view in the play, they are extremists; priestesses of Dionysus that vicariously enjoy the excesses of Agave, both in action and regret. "The truth is out there", Euripides seems to be saying, but you have to find it yourself.

In the work of Euripides the tragedy is normally bookended with a prologue and a *deus ex machina*. The prologue sets up the given circumstances of the play and outlines the action to come, and very often a god or gods, or godly device will appear at the end to interrupt the action and finish the play. The prologue in the *Bacchae* is particularly effective: "Here, in fifty verses, not only is the scope of the play defined with perfect clarity, but also the dramatic rhythm is already started. Not often are these introductory monologues so incisive in style."<sup>38</sup> Euripides very cleverly manipulates the plot of the *Bacchae* so that Dionysus, the god, can introduce himself and the tragedy the audience is about to see, explain that he has been incarnated as a mortal in order to carry out his revenge, take part in the action of the play, then reincarnate himself in his godly form and pronounce judgment.

Violence and death are confined strictly to the offstage area in Greek tragedy, although we are allowed to view the anticipation of these events, and also their results (ie. we don't

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<sup>37</sup> J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1939) 171.

<sup>38</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 371.

see Agave slaughter Pentheus, but we see his butchered remains). Because these vital actions happen offstage, messengers relay the news of whatever horrors have occurred to the characters on stage. This is a staggeringly effective technique, since whatever effect could be produced on stage (short of an actual murder) pales in comparison to what an audience can imagine. The messenger speeches are therefore quite vivid, juicy bits of speech. The two messengers in the Bacchae, for example, probably have the most compelling speeches of any of the characters, as well as having distinctive characteristics of their own.

The beautiful thing about the Bacchae then, is how it can more closely adhere to Aristotelian form than any other of his plays (with the possible exception of Hippolytus) and still sparkle with remarkable inventiveness.

### **Whose tragedy is it, anyway?**

This is one of the most interesting questions to come out of the Bacchae. After all, Pentheus is the tragic hero - in that he is the hero of the tragedy. He is the protagonist, his actions set the play in motion, and he is the one who is mourned in the end. But is he too unlikable to have our sympathy? According to Thomas Rosenmeyer, in his essay, "Bacchae and Ion: Tragedy and Religion", Pentheus is a civilized man fighting the good fight and we are therefore meant to sympathise with him. At the beginning of the play he is already at the end of his rope, but we recognise his essentially good nature because of the fondness his grandfather and his mother show towards him. He is, after all, our representative of the civilized life. He is unexperienced, and therefore prone to mistakes, but certainly this makes him all the more human. His nobility is not diminished because he loses. After all, when pitted against the consuming forces of Nature, we all must lose in the end.

This is a good theory, except that it does not seem to smooth over the fact that Pentheus is intensely disagreeable for the greater portion of his time on stage. He is too flawed to have heroic stature. On his first appearance he shows his complete disregard for the ties of

family, tradition, and religion (in his actions against Cadmus, Tiresias and Dionysus, respectively). He is arrogant, rash, presumptuous, quick to anger, and unheroic (particularly in his threats to march the army against a band of unarmed, presumably drunken women). So how can we feel sympathy for him?

On the most simple level, our sympathies must undergo a teeter-totter ride: in the beginning, Pentheus seems hardly sympathetic at all. On the other hand, the smiling Stranger is exotic, clever, sensuous, and takes pleasure at poking fun at the self-righteous. As an audience, we take vicarious pleasure in the taunts that Pentheus suffers as he tries to bait the god. In the end however, our sympathies have taken a drastic turn. Having sided with the duplicitous Dionysus, we find we have aligned ourselves with a fascist: a malicious, petty, self-important deity, whose omnipotence can afford to be tempered with mercy, but is not. Due to their innately unheroic natures we have ruled out both Pentheus, and his antagonist, the wronged Dionysus, as sympathetic heroes.

So, we ask again, “whose tragedy is it”? If not Pentheus, nor Dionysus, then who? Some audience response to our production indicated that Agave suffers the most, and therefore attracted the most sympathy. Strictly speaking, she does possess some characteristics of the tragic hero that Pentheus does not. After all, it is Agave who has the most powerful recognition scene as it dawns on her what she has done to her own son. As an audience we do not see Pentheus when he recognises where his actions have led him. We do not know what effect the sight of his mother descending on him might have had on him, or if he was ever repentant, or ever made the connection between his actions and their consequences. And it is Agave, more than Pentheus, who suffers the greatest reversal of fortune. Pentheus merely loses his life, and agonising as his death might be, he is at last free from fortune’s wheel. Agave must live to see her family and her home destroyed. She is the one who gains wisdom through suffering. She is the one the chorus celebrates, and she is the one who, like Oedipus, will live with the burden of her actions.

But Agave is not the tragic hero. She does not appear until it is too late, and it is not her fatal error, or her insouciant pride that sets the play in motion. Although she is guilty of denying Dionysus, it is her son that wages war on the god. In the end, the civilized order has not been restored. Thebes is conquered, and the royal family expelled. Dionysus

wins.

So, if not Agave, then who? Although, technically speaking, Pentheus is the protagonist, who do we really weep for in the end? The answer is all around us: "In the last analysis Euripides' tragic hero is mankind. Some natural passion breaks the bounds, and the penalty has to be paid, either by the sinner or by those around him or both."<sup>39</sup> Pentheus and Agave expose different aspects of humanity; the part of us that tries to suppress the truth about ourselves, and the part that is consumed by its own desires; the judgmental and the forgiving; the rational and the irrational. It is through identifying with their mistakes that we feel for them. It is therefore "...the central tragedy of man, his capacity for intelligence and self-control, his domination by unreason and folly."<sup>40</sup> This tragedy then includes all of us, and locates humankind at the centre of a universal struggle.

## Characters

Euripides presents us with seven male characters, and one female character. He also includes a chorus of female bacchantes with a chorus leader, and several unnamed attendants. Although the male speaking characters outnumber the females, the chorus is a striking presence on stage and is entirely female. In my production I chose to provide a male "counter-chorus" of guards to equalize the numbers on stage, and demonstrate clearly the conflict between "male" and "female" values. The characters themselves are all clearly drawn and well rounded, if not exactly heroic figures.

## Dionysus

The Dionysus that appears in the Bacchae is the god "of wine, of intoxication, of ecstasy, religious abandon, music, and the ritual hunting and devouring of wild animals."<sup>41</sup> He can participate as an active character in the play because he has incarnated

<sup>39</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 197.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 230.

<sup>41</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) xlviv.

himself as a mortal in order to work his revenge on the young, disbelieving king, Pentheus. He appears in Thebes as his own priest, followed by a band of Asian maenads, bringing the god's worship to the city. At the end of the tale he will appear in his godly form. He will leave his seductive charm behind him with his human skin.

Fresh from Asia, Dionysus returns to Greece in a softer, more androgynous form than when he left it. Pentheus comments with disdain more than once on the appearance of the mysterious Stranger. He is young, unbearded, with long golden curls, blushing cheeks flushed with wine, and pale soft skin, like a woman's.

This Stranger is enigmatic; speaking in riddles to Pentheus, taunting him with a secret knowledge that the king can only guess at. Like the Christian image of the serpent in the garden, the Stranger tempts Pentheus; preying on the young king's vivid sexual imagination, and leading Pentheus to destruction by his own desires.

Dionysus here is the god of ecstasy and madness; two dynamic properties which exist as flip sides of the other, like a coin. And like the random toss of the coin, either property is equally as likely to turn up. But like the coin again, the two sides are part of one whole. And so ecstasy is easily turned to madness, and vice versa. In the play, Agave's madness is a source of ecstasy, as much as it is a source of pain. And Pentheus' ecstasy - his surrender - is like a kind of madness, which leads him blindly to his own destruction.

The femininity of Dionysus here is natural, "after all, madness, the irrational, and the emotional aspects of life are associated in the culture more with women than with men."<sup>42</sup> And thus the followers of Dionysus are women, and his enemies are the followers of the aggressively masculine Pentheus.

### **Pentheus**

*His honest narrowness makes him a round, not a flat character.*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> I. Zeitlin, "Playing the Other", Nothing to do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context, eds. Winkler, John J., and I. Zeitlin, (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1992) 65.

<sup>43</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 373.

Pentheus is the young, inexperienced King of Thebes, whose throne was peaceably passed to him by his grandfather, Cadmus, who wished to spend his old age in quiet retirement. Pentheus, as far as we know, has never been in a battle, and we can see his eagerness to prove himself come out in his recurrent threats to march on the Bacchae. As discussed previously, he is rash, quick to anger, and presumptuous.

He is the next evolutionary step forward from Hippolytus; the young man who rejected the power of Aphrodite (love, and lust) for pride's sake. Because love and sex appeared to him to be undignified activities, the goddess caused another's lust for him to be his destruction. In Pentheus however, lie all the weapons of his destruction, buried deep underneath his external appearance of power and control. Whereas Hippolytus remained true to his ideal to the end, Pentheus' professed hatred of Dionysus seems to stem from a deeply repressed desire to be like him. He is easily enticed to become a voyeur of the Bacchae, hoping to spy on the very activities he claims to oppose. In fact, Dionysus only promises to show him what he already expects to see. He follows the lead set by Pentheus himself:

PENTHEUS

I'd hate to see them drunk - if they were drunk.

DIONYSUS

Even if you'd hate it though - you'd like to see.

Pentheus' rage against the Bacchae only lasts so long as he is excluded from their rites. Once he is included in the group he literally becomes "one of the girls", dressed up by Dionysus in a long gown and wig. His power and rage are simultaneously defused as he passively participates in activities he actively denounces.

We finally feel sorry for Pentheus not because he is a tragic hero - a powerful and virtuous man brought low - but because his appearance of power barely conceals his too human qualities: a quick intellect that lacks wisdom; a rashness that causes him to act before he has fully thought out a situation; a desire to be included; a desire to participate - even if vicariously - in a hedonistic adventure; and a desire to return to the passivity of the womb:

## DIONYSUS

You'll be carried home...in your mother's arms...<sup>44</sup>

Pentheus is full of secrets, and his strong exterior shatters like an eggshell with the slightest tap.

## Tiresias

In traditional Greek legend, Tiresias was a wise, blind prophet, who had the unique opportunity to spend part of his life as a woman. In this play however, Euripides turns conventional opinion on its ear and presents Teiresias as a clever Sophist, a rationalist, and a symbol of conventional religious authority who reduces the power of Dionysus to comfortable pleasantries. He explains that Dionysus, being the god of wine, essentially *is* wine, which is good because it gives pleasure to humankind. He rationalises the story of Dionysus' second (male) birth by saying that there was a misunderstanding; that Dionysus was "shown" by Zeus, and not "sewn" by Zeus into his thigh. In other words, he simplifies the power of the metaphor of Dionysus into a palatable religious doctrine, compatible with a rational religion.

He also attempts to convert Pentheus by implying that Dionysus inspires panic on the battlefield, thus painting the god as a useful ally in warfare. Pentheus also tells us with disdain of how Tiresias supplements himself by telling fortunes and reading the entrails of chickens. This prophet is a bit of a hypocrite; diminishing the proper awe due to gods on the one hand through rationalization, and increasing his own stature and influence by capitalising on superstition. Not that this Tiresias is presented as an evil man. He is quite affable, and the interchange between him and Cadmus is comic and affectionate. There is humour in the sight of these two old men dressed up in fawnskins, waving ivied wands, and preparing to dance all day on the mountain. He warns Pentheus, quite sincerely, about his peril, even after the king has sent soldiers to destroy the prophet's altar. He is at once likable, unlike Pentheus. However, he represents religious dogma that has lost touch with its source. He has the trappings of religion, without true inspiration. He is in strong contrast with the Stranger (Dionysus in mortal's clothing), who possesses the mystery and

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<sup>44</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 60.



ecstasy of true worship, without the outer trappings of sanctity, or the approval of secular authority.

### **Cadmus**

Cadmus is the former king of Thebes; the father of Semele (who gave birth to Dionysus), and of Agave (mother of Pentheus). Cadmus, in legend, was the founder of Thebes. He sowed the teeth of a dragon he slew, and from the earth sprang an army of powerful soldiers. The best of these helped him found the city, and one was married to his daughter, Agave. Their son was Pentheus, "son of Echion, earthborn offspring of the snake." Cadmus was married to the goddess Harmonia, and after Pentheus' death, was destined to be exiled. He and his wife were turned into snakes, and the two of them would lead a barbarian army against Greece. Ultimately he and his wife would be restored, and live in peace.

In the words of Thomas Rosenmeyer, Cadmus is an "arriviste"; an old man proud in the accomplishments of his family, and comfortable in his reputation and old age. Like the later King Lear, he seeks an easy retirement by relinquishing the responsibilities of kingship to his offspring. Like Lear, he will live to see what he has worked so hard for turn to dust.

Cadmus' main folly is that he does not believe in the power of Dionysus so much as he believes in the glory and honour that Dionysus' exalted state brings to the family. This is how he tries to convince Pentheus to change his mind:

Don't break tradition...  
But besides, even if the god isn't a god,  
say he is: it's a pious lie. Semele,  
the mother of a god: consider the honour  
it brings our family...<sup>45</sup>

It is a rather cheap ploy, and he does better to remind Pentheus of the fate of his cousin Actaeon, who was torn apart by his own hounds for bragging that he could out-hunt the

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<sup>45</sup> C.K. Williams, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 22.

goddess Artemis. Unfortunately, like the advice of Tiresias, this is primarily a scare tactic, and can only work on someone who is already converted. It is also a black mark against Cadmus in the eyes of the god, since he is merely rationalizing the profound.

Cadmus shows genuine concern for his grandson in their first meeting on stage. However, his tone changes somewhat after the retrieval of Pentheus' remains, and although he mourns with sincerity the loss of this last branch in his family tree, Cadmus' shows his self-interest when he describes how Pentheus' death will affect him and his position. His old age will no longer be comfortable and he will lose the honour and the family that he prized so much.

### Messenger #1

*...the first Messenger's speech, so well placed - a final warning to Pentheus, which, however, serves only to provoke him to his last act of [hubris], the calling out of the army, as foreshadowed in the prologue.<sup>46</sup>*

For centuries, the messengers in most dramatic literature have been considered poor parts for actors. In Greek drama however, the messengers get some of the finest scenes of anyone in the play. In the Bacchae, the messengers bring us the only eye-witness accounts we have of the activities of the Theban bacchae, and of Pentheus on his spying mission. This accounts for some of the most powerful, visual language in the play.

Neither are the messengers without character. The first messenger appears during a tense moment between Pentheus and the Stranger. The latter has just escaped the stables, and Pentheus has completely lost his cool. The messenger interrupts, and the humour in the moment is apparent as the simple cowherd extols the beauties of his homeland:

### MESSENGER

Pentheus. King of Thebes.  
I come from Cithaeron  
where the white snow gleams  
and falls and never falters...

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<sup>46</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 372.

## PENTHEUS

Is this news urgent?<sup>47</sup>

He goes on to describe in detail how the peaceful maenads turned violent only after their rituals had been interrupted by the misguided cowherds, attempting to restore Agave to the city. The country men had been led by a smooth talker from the city, and there is clear resentment in the voice of the cowherd. The gory description that follows is an account of how the Theban women, in an ecstatic trance-state, performed miraculous acts; tearing cattle limb from limb, and leading an attack on two small towns. As well as defeating the men of the town, the women apparently stole children, looted the village, and “carried fire on their hair / and weren’t scorched.”<sup>48</sup>

This kind of behaviour described by the messenger, is not as unusual as one might think. In an altered mental state, people are often capable of performing things they would not normally be able to do. Everyone, I think, has heard the story of a woman lifting up a car to save a child trapped underneath, or the various stories surrounding persons who have indulged in certain potent drugs and the extra-normal strength that is required to restrain them. The point is that the adrenaline released in such a situation forces the body beyond its normal capacity, and so the maenads in their religious frenzy are rightly to be feared. The word “ecstasy” in its root, means “out of stasis”, and these maenads do leave their normal capabilities and inclinations behind. They have gone out of stasis/stability, and so out of themselves.

The whole description of the maenads’ raid on the Theban villages...corresponds to the known behaviour of comparable groups elsewhere. Among many peoples persons in abnormal states, whether natural or induced, are privileged to plunder the community: to interfere with their acts would be dangerous, since they are for the time being in contact with the supernatural.<sup>49</sup>

The cowherd finishes his tale with a final warning to accept the god, which the king will ignore, and leaves as he began - on a comic note. He points out to Pentheus that the god of wine and drunkenness is responsible for “sexual love” - without which, he asks, “what

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<sup>47</sup> C.K. Williams, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 43.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>49</sup> “Maenadism in the Bacchae”, *Harvard Theological Review*, (33 1951) 162.

pleasure would there be for humans then?" This, more than anything, gives a humorous and affectionate picture of life among the cowherds of Cithaeron.

## Messenger #2

The second messenger to come across the stage in the Bacchae is one of Pentheus' soldiers who had accompanied his master on his spying mission. His speech is particularly powerful, since it describes the events on the mountain, and Pentheus' destruction. His phrases are uncomplicated, and he has a certain "workmanlike" quality about him. His observations are from the point of view of a soldier - of someone who understands physical labour. He describes how the Stranger bends down a tall pine "until it touches the black earth, / until it's bent, curved, the way a bow is curved, / the way a wooden rim is curved on pegs to form a wheel." Being a soldier, the messenger is also very precise in the way that he describes the slaughter, and explains how Agave "took him by the arm, / the left arm, under the elbow, then she planted / a foot against his ribs and tore his arm off."<sup>50</sup> What makes his speech particularly dramatic is that as a soldier he must necessarily have seen much death and violence, so his shock in relating this story reminds us of how unnatural, grotesque, and extraordinary it is.

While the first messenger's speech included a warning to Pentheus, the second messenger's speech contains the moral of the story:

To know your human limits, to revere the gods,  
is the noblest, and I think the wisest course  
that mortal men can follow.<sup>51</sup>

This succinctly, in three lines, sums up the problem and the solution of the play. Because the chorus is made up of worshippers of Dionysus, this second messenger is the closest thing to an objective observer in the play, and concludes his speech with the most pragmatic advice in the whole of the Bacchae. Thus he is one of its most memorable, and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 71.

well-balanced characters.

### Agave

Agave is the daughter of Cadmus, who married Echion - one of the soldiers sprung up out of the dragon's teeth planted by Cadmus. She is the mother of Pentheus, and also his destroyer. Dionysus tells us in the prologue that she and her sister Autonoe spread rumours about Semele; that she had lied and said that Zeus was the father of her baby to hide the shame of bearing a child out of wedlock. Dionysus takes revenge on Agave. He stings her and the other Theban wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, with madness. They flee Thebes and celebrate the rites of Dionysus on the mountain. She leads the attack on the interfering cowherds, and on the other small villages. When Pentheus arrives in his woman's costume, Agave spots him at the top of a tall pine. She then leads the other bacchantes in a hunt that ends in the *sparagmos*, or ritual tearing apart of Pentheus. Returning to Thebes with her son's head on an ivy pike, she glories in what she perceives is a magnificent kill, taking joy in having killed a young lion (so she thinks) "with the white nails of [her] hands."<sup>52</sup> The madness of ecstasy - of being "out of stasis" turns to a madness of grief as the veil of the god leaves her and she recognises where her actions have brought her.

The horror of Agave is that she is a caring mother, who has done what no mother should do - she has unmade her own son. This is a painful paradox - that women who give form to life, can render that life formless again. As Zeitlin points out:

In this primitive regression, women undo the body; its structures cannot hold, its limbs are unbound, and the masculine self, originally so intent on opposing himself to anything feminine, is fragmented and flies apart.<sup>53</sup>

Agave is poignant as she carefully tends to the body of the son she has dismembered.

Her attentions come too late, and there is pathos in seeing her, covered in his blood as she

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>53</sup> I. Zeitlin, "Playing the Other", Nothing to do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context, eds. Winkler, John J., and I. Zeitlin, (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1992) 75.

is, behave as if she were taking care of a sick child.

### **The Chorus**

The chorus that appears in the Bacchae is made up of the Asian women - priestesses of Dionysus - who have followed their god (in his mortal guise) to Thebes. Whereas in some of Euripides' work the playwright seemed to trim the volume of words spoken by the chorus, in this, his last complete play, he gives them a great deal to say, and their odes take up the greater portion of the play. They are an integral force in the action. Their odes push the play forward, and are keenly tuned to the issues. Unlike other Euripidean choruses, these bacchantes never stray from the subject immediately at hand. Intimately connected to the actions and consequences concerning their god in this new city, they are focussed and alive:

...with this chorus Euripides returns to the great tradition. It is no ideal spectator but an actor...; it presents always one of the spiritual forces at work in the play. It presents the mystery, the holiness, the joy of the Dionysiac religion...<sup>54</sup>

This chorus certainly is not an ideal spectator. As followers of Dionysus, they are hardly objective, and the difference between what they practice and what they preach is often shocking. Perhaps more than any other character on stage, the chorus experiences a journey which takes them from a youthful state of innocence - their initial arrival in Thebes, full of the "delectable" joys of worshipping Dionysus; to indignation at the presumptuousness of Pentheus; to outrage at the incarceration of their leader; to panic and terror as they witness an earthquake brought on by the god; to an increasingly eroticised appreciation of Dionysus as they begin to lose themselves in the god, paralleling the surrender of Pentheus; to near madness and frenzy as they pray for the destruction of Pentheus; to ecstasy as Agave returns with Pentheus' severed head; to grief as they mourn with Agave; and finally to a mature kind of piety at the end of the play which soberly acknowledges the events of the day as part of a greater design which only the gods

<sup>54</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 380.

themselves have the distance to see clearly. The air of sanctity breathed by the chorus at the beginning is paralleled at the end, with this important difference; the chorus at the end of the play has gained greater understanding by participating in the suffering of others.

The odes themselves, "...are full of that spirit of natural religion which Dionysus so terribly vindicates,"<sup>55</sup> and contain some of the most beautiful poetry in all Greek drama. Euripides can almost be said to be the first Romantic, since the choral odes in the Bacchae contain so much of the awe and reverence of Nature, the connection to the spirit, the diminution of human achievement in the face of Nature that would so characterise the 19th century poets.

### **The Guards**

In this production of the Bacchae, the guards were to be an extension of Pentheus - of his authority, of his masculinity - and so they deserve mention. The guards appear when Pentheus does. They are his emissaries in the world, and they are a good barometer of his defences; internal and external. While Pentheus is strong in his power, so are they. They run to destroy Tiresias' altar at his instruction, and comb the city to capture the Stranger. However, as Pentheus loses ground to Dionysus, so do his guards. They reluctantly tie up the Stranger to bring him to Pentheus, and are slow to react when their king orders them to imprison him in the stables. They are powerless to act for the rest of the play. Though Pentheus threatens to march on the bacchae, he never does, and his guards merely accompany him on his spying mission. Passively they must watch their leader be destroyed, and in the end they are no longer a unit. The body of the army has split up as Pentheus' own body has been split. One soldier returns to Thebes to warn of Agave's approach - this is the second messenger - but he also states his intention to leave the city before she arrives. Others arrive accompanying the dead Pentheus, but they are no longer an effective army and without a leader they are purposeless.

In this way they parallel the fortunes of Pentheus, and are an effective silent male

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 380.

counter-chorus to the bacchantes on stage. As much as the chorus of women on stage stand for Dionysus and all the “feminine” properties he entails (intuition, sensuality, non-rational/non-linear thinking, emotion, hysteria, Nature), so the guards stand for Pentheus and the “masculine” properties he represents (rational/linear thinking, mind-over-body, physical strength, rigidity, order. discipline, man-against-Nature - civilization).

## Imagery

### Safely Past the Frightening Hunters (Hunt Imagery)

The chorus recurrently uses imagery of the hunt in its odes. It appears when they sing of the joys of being “in” Dionysus, which they compare to the joy of a fawn outwitting its hunters:

... the  
way  
a fawn  
frisks, leaps,  
throws itself  
as it finds itself  
safely past  
the frightening  
hunters, past the  
nets, the  
houndsmen  
urging on  
their straining  
hounds...<sup>56</sup>

The excitement of the chase is a metaphor for the thrill produced by the dance. The sweat and the rush of adrenaline is the same. The sense of playfulness as well as urgency is the same. It is an excitement that is sensual, erotic, dangerous and necessary.

The hunt metaphor is extended to include the god’s vengeance. The gods are seen as hunting impious mortals who are their prey. The chorus describes this as “...the / first step / of the godly hunt / of / the unholy...”<sup>57</sup> Madness, as another tool of vengeance, is

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<sup>56</sup> C.K. Williams, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 53.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 55.



similarly seen as a hunting hound in pursuit of its prey. The chorus incites the “hounds of madness” to find the women on the mountain and “sting them, goad them on” to hunt Pentheus.<sup>58</sup> Even the pursuit of noble goals is a kind of hunt, as the chorus describe “...hunting down / those other / values...”<sup>59</sup>; reverence and piety rather than wisdom, which comes only through suffering. Finally, vengeance in the form of Bacchus himself is invoked by the chorus. They invite him to, “...Hunt / the hunter, / Bacchus...”<sup>60</sup> Where Pentheus has played the hunter to the chorus’ band of fawns, now Bacchus will turn the hunter into the hunted. The world is then seen as a kind of universal food chain, where men pursue animals, and are themselves pursued for sport by the gods.

### **Out from the Human (Animal Imagery)**

There is a great deal of animal imagery in the Bacchae, focussed on Dionysus, Pentheus, and the chorus. These animal associations give the characters shape, and take them - as the chorus would say - “out from the human” and into a more instinctual world. Animal archetypes tie even the aloof Pentheus to elemental Nature and we see that underneath the civilized exterior, an essential bestial nature lies waiting.

Animal imagery in the play is strongest surrounding Dionysus. He shows the physical characteristics of a bull, and his holy animals are the serpent and the fawn. The phallic qualities and associations with women and fertility make the snake a suitable symbolic animal for Dionysus, the god of rebirth. Many representations of maenads in Greek art therefore include the women holding snakes. In the Bacchae, the chorus in the first ode describes how Dionysus rose from his second birth garlanded with serpents. In his honour the maenads “weave serpents.” The second messenger also describes how the women on the mountain danced with serpents, and how these animals also licked the blood from the maenads’ skin after their ecstatic raid on the outlying villages. Like the serpent then, Dionysus is associated with fertility, sensuality, mystery and danger. And like the snake,

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 66.

Dionysus is double-tongued. In his banter with Pentheus he gives enigmatic answers which only the initiated can understand. The snake's reputation for glibness is then imputed to the god as well.

If Dionysus has the mind of a snake, he has the soul of a free-spirited fawn. In traditional maenadic lore, bacchantes would ritually tear apart a fawn or a goat and consume the live flesh, which was said to contain the spirit of the god. The maenads then are fused with the live spirit of the god, and wear fawnskins as a symbol of their union. By becoming one with their god, the maenads see themselves as fawns also, and so much of the poetry of the chorus in the *Bacchae* speaks of frisking like a fawn, or a foal.

Finally, in body, Dionysus shares the significant characteristics of a bull. At his second birth, Dionysus is horned like a bull. In the play, Pentheus becomes confused by the god's presence, and mistakenly ties up a bull in the stables, thinking it is the Stranger. Later, when Pentheus has succumbed to the influence of the god, he sees the Stranger as a bull:

And you, you who seem to be a bull, out there before me,  
The double horns sprouting on your forehead:  
Were you an animal before, the way now you're a bull?<sup>61</sup>

Dionysus reassures Pentheus that he "sees now what you ought to see." The physical strength of the bull gives Dionysus greater power, in addition to the sly qualities of the snake. He is a creature not to be trifled with.

Pentheus is also connected to animal imagery. The chorus curse him as "offspring of the snake (Rosenmeyer)". Here, however, the snake the chorus refers to is the dragon that Cadmus slew. Pentheus is literally its grandson - his father, Echion, being one of the men sprung from the dragon's teeth. This snake, then, differs from the serpents associated with Dionysus, in that it is an unnatural animal, a dragon, a fantastical creature without natural predators. Dionysus and Pentheus therefore mirror each other (one of the many times they do). However, one snake is a part of the Natural order, and the other strives against it.

Finally, the Theban bacchae on the mountain are physically described in the play as something like a flock of birds. Like birds, they act as a group, with seemingly one mind.

The first messenger describes how they "swooped down" and "like a flock of birds, /

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 58.

soared out across the lowlands...". And the second messenger tells how they "ran, flew, like darting doves" to capture Pentheus. Like birds then, they act instinctively as a group, a single unity with many parts. This gorgeous image of the women moving and thinking as one can be extended to the maenads on stage, since it is the influence of Dionysus that brings the women to this state of being.

### **Let the Drums Honour Bacchus (Rhythm is the Life)**

Finally, the drum and the dance represent the non-rational world of Nature that the women bring to the stage. Dionysus in the prologue commands them to beat the drum they brought from Phrygia. The chorus sings:

*And make  
the drums, make  
the  
drums  
roar, let the drums  
honour  
Bacchus...<sup>62</sup>*

In Christian mythology, the creation of order in the universe was symbolised by the creation of Light. In Hindu mythology, the first thing was the Sound. A drumbeat began the universe. What is so powerful about the drum is that it beats like our own heart. The rhythm of the drum echoes the rhythm of our own blood rushing through veins. The impulse that drives us to beat the drum is the same one that causes blood to flow without our conscious effort. In this way, the drum is a symbol of life. The maenads in the Bacchae know this. They revere the drum as they do the god.

The drum in turn impels the dance. The dance is living. It is a response to the life-giving drum, just as our living is a response to the life given us. For the maenads, the dance is a form of worship. If Dionysus represents the non-rational spirit within us, the dance is a way to communicate with it. For in order to dance, we must let go of intellectual

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 16.

control and listen to our bodies. The body understands rhythm instinctively, and so to let go of the mind and surrender to the body is to give oneself over to instinct; to Dionysus.

Music and dance calm the restless spirit:

“Thus the ingenious nanny...shares a power of the gods. Babies when rocked are “enchanted”..., as one might enchant a frenzied bacchant...by a combination of music and dance.”<sup>63</sup>

But it can also irritate, for, “...the power of the dance is a dangerous power. Like other forms of self-surrender, it is easier to begin than to stop.”<sup>64</sup>

This proves true for the Theban maenads in the Bacchae, for once the spirit of release takes them, they run with it. Once the feeding frenzy begins and the peaceful women turn on the cowherds, as in the first messenger’s speech, or turn on their own children, as Agave does, nothing will stop them. Pentheus’ cries cannot penetrate the fog created by Dionysus. Agave’s will has evacuated, and only instinct remains. No longer a rational creature, she does not recognize her son. The dance, and the frenzy, is all.

### **Feminine vs. Masculine**

In the Bacchae, battle lines are drawn between women and men and what they represent. The women who follow Dionysus are seen as instinctual, emotional, mystical, sensual, and Natural. Pentheus is the leader of the men in the play, and represents the rational, authoritarian, patriarchal, “civilized” world of Thebes. In this way, Pentheus and Dionysus are apparently opposites.

What makes this opposition particularly interesting is that their differences are balanced by strong similarities. Dionysus and Pentheus can be seen as opposite sides of a dark mirror. The Stranger is young and unbearded. Comparably, Agave mourns her son whose “cheek is barely feathered.” Although Agave comments on Pentheus’ “well-muscled” arms, he is still a young man, and therefore he and the Stranger are likely to share

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<sup>63</sup> Marcel Détienné, “Dionysus at Large”, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Epidemic, This God (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989) 58.

<sup>64</sup> “Maenadism in the Bacchae”, Harvard Theological Review, (33 1951) 157.

a similar physique as well. The two share an equivalence of position as well. As a young king who has had the responsibilities of kingship placed on him prematurely by his still-living grandfather, Pentheus is the leader of a commanding city. The Stranger is apparently the youthful leader of a powerful cult. These resemblances only help to heighten their differences, and the Stranger becomes a distorted mirror that shows Pentheus what he might have been like. In fact, the two are not as ideologically separated as Pentheus would like to believe.

If Pentheus begins the play as a "masculine" icon and Dionysus is representatively "feminine" then by the end of the play they have reversed roles. Dionysus is revealed as the one having the real power and control; he is the "dominant male." Pentheus is revealed as passive and emotional; a "submissive female". Dionysus disguises his inner power with an outward show of submissiveness, and Pentheus' inner desire to surrender, to relinquish control, is layered underneath his hard-boiled exterior. Thus Dionysus/the Stranger is really a mirror in which Pentheus views his secret desires. This, as much as anything, explains Pentheus' loathing of the Stranger, since what we outwardly despise is often what we inwardly desire, and we attempt to curb in others what we cannot control within ourselves.

## Themes

### **Tongues without Bits (Hubris)**

In the Bacchae, Pentheus sees no end to his own power. He believes he can suppress Dionysus and his cult. Like many leaders, he attempts to quash civil disobedience through military force.

Dionysus has still his votaries or victims, though we call them by other names; and Pentheus was confronted by a problem which other civil authorities have had to face in real life.<sup>65</sup>

What he does not realise is that what he is attempting to control is a power that goes

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<sup>65</sup> "Maenadism in the Bacchae", Harvard Theological Review, (33 1951) 166.

beyond human law. It is the collective eruption of Nature from within.

In the Bacchae, hubris is quite literally the 'going beyond', the explosion of the unlimited across the barricades which a blind civilization has erected in the vain hope of keeping shut out what it does not wish to understand.<sup>66</sup>

As Thomas Rosenmeyer points out in his "Bacchae and Ion: Tragedy and Religion", the "godlikeness" of Pentheus is his deception and downfall. His power having never been reined, he believes it is limitless. Pentheus' danger increases rapidly with each new offence against the god. His first fault is to deny the existence of the god. This is followed by his command to his army to find and apprehend the Stranger (the god in disguise). When confronted with the supposed votary, he threatens to cut the Stranger's hair, and take his thyrsus. The Stranger gives him every chance to back off, and reminds Pentheus that these things belong to the god. Pentheus sticks to his course, and symbolically emasculates the god by cutting his locks and removing his holy symbol. If this weren't enough, he takes the Stranger away to the stables where he will incarcerate him himself; a man daring to bind a god with his own hands. Finally, after the Stranger's mysterious escape, Pentheus prepares to wage war on the bacchae on the mountain. Pentheus has walked proudly into the trap, and invites the revenge foretold in the prologue.

The everyday humility of what the chorus preaches is contrasted drastically with the effrontery of Pentheus. They see the danger in Pentheus' pride, and urge moderation:

Tongues  
without bits;  
defiance  
without law:  
together  
they create  
disaster...<sup>67</sup>

And so, what  
the common man  
thinks, what  
the simple  
man believes, the

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, "Bacchae and Ion: Tragedy and Religion", The Masks of Tragedy (New York: Gordian Press, 1971) 140.

<sup>67</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 25.

most  
humble, that  
I, too,  
will  
take  
as my  
example.<sup>68</sup>

The chorus equally pinpoints the source of Pentheus' misunderstanding when it says, "Knowledge is not wisdom." For Pentheus has misinterpreted his cleverness for true wisdom, and so mistakes his own godlikeness for the true power of a god.

Unlike Sophocles' masterpiece Oedipus whose title character is undermined by his own short temper, determination to find the truth, and a combination of unpredictable circumstances, Pentheus really should have known better. Although he could not have predicted that the Stranger whom he abuses is actually a god, still his days are marked when he denies the existence of Dionysus. Far from the simple sin of *hubris*, this is downright arrogance. Dionysus and Pentheus once again mirror each other; the god is deceptive in his human-likeness, and Pentheus is deceived by his own godlikeness. The king discovers however, with grim reality, "that man is not so close to God as he may suppose."<sup>69</sup>

### Little Birds (Suppression of Desire)

*Euripides, like most Greeks, is a rationalist in that he believes reason, not belief or formula or magic, to be the guide to life; but he sees, too, that we have in us, besides reason, non-rational emotions which are necessary but may run wild, thwarting our reason and bringing calamity.*<sup>70</sup>

In Freudian terms, Pentheus suffers from repression of his deeper impulses. The result is that his desires, when finally released, take on exaggerated proportions. He goes out of his way to suppress any sexual instinct in himself, and therefore projects his sexuality onto

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, "Bacchae and Ion: Tragedy and Religion", The Masks of Tragedy (New York: Gordian Press, 1971) 112.

<sup>70</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 197.

others. He hates the maenads for what he imagines is their sexual/sensual abandon. But what he desires more than anything is to catch them at it. His loathing of Dionysus is part and parcel of the secret desires within him to succumb, to be soft and “feminine.” Had he possessed more self-knowledge, and been flexible enough to accept these impulses within, the god never would have had the power to turn his desires against himself. The Stranger only prompts Pentheus. It is the king himself who has the visions, and initiates the action.

DIONYSUS

Wait! Wouldn't you like to see them on the mountain?

PENTHEUS

See? Yes, I'd give gold to see that.

DIONYSUS

That? Why such a wild craving to see that?

PENTHEUS

I'd hate to see them drunk, if they were drunk.

DIONYSUS

Even if you hate it, though, you'd like to see?

PENTHEUS

I could hide. Under the pines, and watch quietly.<sup>71</sup>

Dionysus gives Pentheus one last chance to escape his destiny, but this is a chance the god knows he will refuse. He lures Pentheus on, tempting him with his own imagination.

DIONYSUS

If you still want to see what you shouldn't see,  
if you desire what shouldn't be desired, come out.<sup>72</sup>

Pentheus fantasises; an imaginary voyeur conjuring the visions he desires to see:

PENTHEUS

Yes, I can see them now, in the bushes,  
little birds, trapped in the toils of love.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> C.K. Williams, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 49-50.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 60.



In the end, Dionysus does not so much destroy Pentheus as unleash him. Where Aphrodite could not create lust in Hippolytus, Dionysus can neither engender an emotion in Pentheus that he does not already feel. Like matter, passions are neither created nor destroyed. Pentheus has tried to create a vacuum inside himself, but his hungers do not vanish. They only become denser from occupying less space. When the pressure can no longer build up, it must explode. When his appetites are finally released the explosion consumes the persona Pentheus has so long contrived, and he is, essentially, already dead.

*To resist Dionysus is to repress the elemental in one's own nature; the punishment is the sudden complete collapse of the inward dykes when the elemental breaks through perforce and civilization vanishes.<sup>74</sup>*

### **Forever out of Nature (Nature vs. Civilization)**

#### **Nature...**

So far we have answered two important questions: who is Dionysus? and who is Dionysus in the Bacchae? There remains a third very important question, which is: what exactly is Dionysus in the Bacchae? What is a god?

Let me begin by saying that I believe in Dionysus. After all, what is a god if not something greater than ourselves that affects us in ways we recognise, but do not fully comprehend? In other words, the gods exist in as much as there are powers within us that go beyond our reasonable ability to control. Nature is one of these powers. Today we recognise Nature as a combination of chemical realities and genetic blueprinting operating within us, determining things that - to our eternal frustration - our conscious, rational mind has no power over. Our Nature controls us. Dionysus - by any other name - still has the ability to short circuit our conscious mind, and what we desire may not always be what we approve.

So what is it to worship the god? To worship Dionysus is simply to acknowledge that this instinct has power over us. To deny the god, is to deny that instinct and the irrational exist in us. This is what Pentheus does, and he is literally torn apart by the consequences.

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<sup>74</sup> "Maenadism in the Bacchae", Harvard Theological Review, (33 1951) 159.

Similarly, those that deny that Nature exists within them, may be torn apart - by madness, by obsession, by perversity, by deviance, by depression, by their own desires.

In the Bacchae then, we have a portrait of this power, this instinct:

What the divinity of Dionysus represents, however, should be clear enough from the play: the incarnate life-force itself, the uncontrollable chaotic eruption of nature in individuals and cities; the thrust of the sap in the tree and the blood in the veins...As such, he is amoral, neither good nor bad, a necessity capable of blessing those who [like the Asian Bacchantes] accept him, and of destroying or maddening those who [like Pentheus] deny him.<sup>75</sup>

The forces that govern human life cannot be denied; nor could the gods of Greece be denied when, and in so far as, they represented real forces operating in the world.<sup>76</sup>

As a force of Nature then, Dionysus is exempt from any moral qualifications. He can be neither good nor evil. THE GOD IS. And being without a moral nature, the god is therefore excused also from such qualities as mercy, or sympathy. Like an earthquake, flood, or a volcanic eruption, Dionysus in his effects can be either constructive or destructive, but this is only a fact, not a moral judgment.

A god, or a force, is the centre of its own universe. Since its prime concern is itself, the pleasure or pain of others is moot. Therefore there is no contradiction when Dionysus drives Agave to frenzy on the mountain, and then continues to punish her with exile and ignomy. Sympathy is a human quality, and human joy or anguish concern Dionysus only in how he is served by it.

Sin (the act of transgressing the will of the god) is therefore not an objective crime, but a subjective one; a personal offence. And the price of sin must be paid. If the punishment is greater than the crime, so much the better, for it ensures that the lesson will be taken to heart by all witnesses. Because Pentheus transgresses against the god, he must die. His mother must suffer the shame and horror of being the willing instrument of his destruction, and then endure exile. His grandfather must be banished as well, and bear being transformed into a snake. Dionysus is the tornado, the whirlwind, and beware anyone in his path, guilty and innocent alike.

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<sup>75</sup> William Arrowsmith, trans. The Bacchae in Euripides V, eds. Grene and Lattimore (Chicago: Phoenix Books - University of Chicago Press, 1959) 149.

<sup>76</sup> R.P. Winnington-Ingram, Euripides and Dionysus (1948. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969) 16.

## Civilization

Cithaeron is the natural home of the Theban women who have deserted their domestic posts to celebrate Dionysus. Women, after all, equal animals and children in civil rights in this culture. With no place in the public sphere, and a severely curtailed existence in the home, it is not surprising that when the Theban women are possessed by Dionysiac frenzy they do not overrun the city, but flee from it. This accounts for the female perspective on the play.

The male perspective is different. The city then stands for humankind's attempt to make headway against the Natural world, and write its own rules for the universe. The attempt is as noble as it is doomed to failure. In Rosenmeyer's essay, "Bacchae and Ion: Tragedy and Religion", the author compares the two plays and concludes that both are dramas of God and Man beyond the scope of religious drama. The former demonstrates Man's capacity for civilization in the face of the indifference of gods, ironically, as a source of humour, comfort and pride. The latter shows Man's attempts at civilization to be short-lived and futile in the face of gods that are naturally uncivil; that are indifferent to the plight of mortals, and that are essentially bestial. Nature enfolds us like a great womb; we are born from it, we strive to separate ourselves from it, and in the end it swallows us up again, leaving almost no trace. As Rosenmeyer puts it:

Between the realm of the beasts from which man is born, and the realm of the gods presided over by the great beast of heaven, civilized existence and human fellowship are a minute enclave, hard-pressed and short-lived and utterly without hope. Social conventions are fictitious, they offend against nature and the natural law. However noble and glorious the human achievement may appear to the enlightened, it makes barely a dent upon the true structure, the real being of the animate world which defies reason and order and progress and engulfs man in its eternal rhythm of animal necessity.<sup>77</sup>

This is a very compelling perspective on the play, which makes clear the poignancy we find in the piece. Ultimately we must sympathise with Pentheus because in the end it is our story as well as his. We all fight our battles in life, trying to make headway against the

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, "Bacchae and Ion: Tragedy and Religion", *The Masks of Tragedy* (New York: Gordian Press, 1971) 151.

future and leave our mark on the world. We all pioneer our own territory, attempting to civilize our world and protect our fragile vision of our own importance in it. However, it never seems to be enough. There is beauty in the attempt - in the mistakes and failures as much as the successes.

In the war between Nature and Nurture, then, Dionysus pits greenery against weaponry when he tells Pentheus that when the bacchae "...lift their ivied wands, / your bronze shields will wilt."<sup>78</sup> In the end, this will be a battle that none of us can win. Time conquers all we create, but Nature remains.

*...The Bacchae is finally a mysterious, almost a haunted, work, stalked by divinity and that daemoniac power of necessity which for Euripides is the careless source of man's tragic destiny and moral dignity.*<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> C.K. Williams, The Bacchae of Euripides (1990. New York: The Noonday Press, 1994) 49.

<sup>79</sup> William Arrowsmith, trans. The Bacchae in Euripides V, eds. Grene and Lattimore (Chicago: Phoenix Books - University of Chicago Press, 1959) 143.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE PRE-PRODUCTION PERIOD

### Dealing with Greek Conventions

#### The Mask

*In plays from the later part of the 5th century, which concentrate more specifically on human responses, more detailed actions affect the use of the mask. The way in which both Sophocles and Euripides deliberately direct attention to the mask suggests that what are so often regarded as the disadvantages of the mask for the actor, are, in practice, quite the opposite.<sup>81</sup>*

The decision to use masks was difficult. I enjoyed working without masks earlier in the shorter 610 directing project version of *Bacchae*. I believe it brought the audience closer to the action, and that masks might have alienated them in the confined space of the Studio Theatre where intimacy is an asset.

However, in the University Theatre, we were working with a much larger space; a larger playing space, larger auditorium, and a larger set. Here I believed the use of masks could help us to create the feel of being part of something larger than life. I felt the masks could bring the audience face to face with gods and forces of nature and universal principles. After all, "the mask was not originally used as a means of personification but for the exaltation of the individual and to reveal the power of the god captured in its very essence."<sup>82</sup>

The grandiose emotions of the play would be better conveyed through the use of masks and physicalization. The characters are all drawn in broad strokes, with swift changes in mood and intention. Pentheus, for instance, must go from power-monger to sensualist in the course of a few pages. Agave, as well, transforms from triumph to terror in just over a page of dialogue. Similarly, Dionysus must become Pentheus' best friend, then his destroyer, then his confessor over the course of an entrance and an exit. The chorus, as well, experience wild changes in emotion. They are peace-loving religious bucolics, ecstatic worshippers, bloodthirsty sadists, and reverent disciples over the course of their

<sup>81</sup> J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1939) 167.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 171.

choral odes.

These strong changes in character and action are easily accommodated through the simplicity of the mask, without the burden of naturalism. Where an unmasked performer might seem schizophrenic, a mask ensures a degree of consistency. The essential quality of the mask provides a stable reference point for the actor and the audience. As Walton points out:

A principal advantage of the mask is that although its function permits only one or a small number of dominant emotions, these emotions, or a reminder of them, are carried over into any situation. Far from being a hindrance to the presentation of emotion, the mask is essential to adequate performance of Aeschylus. Even in an indoor theatre, lack of the mask may damage the dramatic purpose of Sophocles and Euripides. It serves to focus the attention of the audience without distracting them with side issues.<sup>83</sup>

There was also the desire to present the chorus as a homogeneous entity. Traditionally, "chorus masks were made identical to demonstrate group personality, despite the leadership of a single individual,"<sup>84</sup> and this seemed to me to be the simplest and most striking approach. The identical masks would similarly help the actors to see themselves as one organism made of many parts.

Walton makes a claim that "non-speaking actors were to all intents and purposes invisible, since they did not wear masks." This category would include "attendants, soldiers, and other supernumeraries (including children)."<sup>85</sup> In such a case only those actors directly involved with the action would be personified on the stage. Taking this spirit very much to heart, there were some interesting decisions made regarding masks and certain characters.

For example, Pentheus' soldiers probably would not have worn masks in a 5th century B.C. production of The Bacchae, being a presence rather than a character. However, for my purposes, I wanted them to appear as a sort of "anti-chorus", and so we managed a compromise. They were given "faceless" masks that consisted of a helmet with a reflective face shield. These were ostensibly for protection, but symbolically represented their invulnerability and conformity as a group. As non-speaking characters, these masks

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 172.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 171.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 144.

preserved their anonymity and allowed them to “blend into the background” when needed.

However, the second messenger who returns with news of Pentheus’ death is also one of the guards. This messenger is a fully written character and therefore had to appear masked.

Then, at the end of the play, when Pentheus’ remains have been brought on stage, the soldiers re-enter. At this point in the tragedy, I thought it would be strange to see them with their “faceless masks.” After all, the charade is over for them. They are no longer powerful, and they no longer have a “soldier” identity, having lost their leader. Therefore I decided to take a bit of a calculated risk, and had the guards enter without their masks.

With Pentheus’ death, the role of the soldiers is irrevocably altered and there needed to be a way to show this on stage. On a symbolic level, the faceless masks of the soldiers stood for Pentheus’ blindness, and imperviousness. When Pentheus accepted the god into his body, his defences evaporated. Therefore the faceless wall of soldiers had to “evaporate” as well. Removing the masks was a way of doing this. The group is replaced by a group of individuals - mortals who the spirit of the god has left, as the spirit of life has emptied Pentheus.

On another level, the bare-headedness of the soldiers - a sign of defeat, of respect, of submission - showed their acquiescence to the god whose strength and power can only be held in awe, not held in bonds.

Finally, the soldiers mirrored the audience to form a circle around the remaining actors, and reflected our own “pity and fear” in watching the suffering of Cadmus and Agave.

One last mask quandary remained: whether to show Pentheus’ severed head as a human head, or as a mask. In the end I decided that Pentheus’ severed head should appear fully human, and therefore would not be masked. The implication is that while he is alive, Pentheus, through the actor, is an open channel for the communication of the god. When he dies, he returns to merely mortal status, and the channel of communication is closed. He is in fact a non-entity. So Pentheus, having lost everything else while he was still alive, loses the mask in death, and thus shows himself to be that much less than the god, and less even than the living.

## The Chorus

The use of a chorus in Greek tragedy has perpetually perplexed theatre practitioners after the Greeks. It is a convention that has continually raised questions about its presentation. However, there are some things we do know for certain. We know that the choral odes were sung in unison. We know there were specific rhythms associated with certain moods. We know what kinds of instruments were used. We know that the chorus danced. However, what the music and singing sounded like, and what the dances were like, is largely left to speculation and theory.

The approach that I decided to take with this production was to look at what the play required in order to make sense to a modern audience. From a modern perspective, I found that what the odes do beautifully is separate units of action, comment on what has just happened and foreshadow what is about to happen. I had to agree with the originators of the drama that the stylistic shifts into music and movement also allowed the audience time to “soak in” what had just happened on stage.

Equally important was the feeling that when dealing with emotions and characters that are larger than life, the human spirit looks to be uplifted out of ordinary experience. Music and dance are two ways to bring the action out of the realm of the ordinary. A skilled group of performers that sound and act in unison have the potential to give an audience chills.

Therefore it became necessary to look for both a composer and a choreographer to be able to create the kind of chorus that I wanted. In the end I was looking for a chorus that would appeal to all the senses; one that was poetic, athletic, and uncanny.

## The Deus ex Machina

*Euripides liked to produce gods...at the end less to cut the knot than to cut their own throats.*<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 229.



When Dionysus leads Pentheus off to the mountains of Cithaeron, this is the last time we see the god in mortal form. His return marks his appearance as a god on the stage, and his character alters accordingly. No longer personable and enigmatic, he speaks in formal accents of the crimes committed against him. Even in his proclamations of the fate of Agave and Cadmus, the god maintains a cool, aloof distance from the action. This is a different creature than we have seen previously in this play.

This was what the designers and I wanted to accomplish: to make Dionysus change in appearance from mortal to god, while still being recognisably the same entity, and to give him an eclipse-like aura.

The designer and I debated how to accomplish this. We both wanted to demonstrate a drastic supernatural difference between Dionysus the man and Dionysus the god. Our first approach was through costume. To make sure the audience understood this was the same character, just in a different form, Dionysus wore the same shape of mask, but in gold. Similarly, Dionysus' mortal clothing was exchanged for a golden suit. Overall we wanted to give the effect of a golden idol materialised.

The next decision was where to put him on stage. Our first solution was to place him on the top of the palace, therefore reverse-mirroring what we see earlier. At the beginning we see Dionysus emerge from the altar, and Pentheus enter from on top of the palace. At the end, Dionysus has usurped Pentheus' position and stands on the palace, and Pentheus appears in bloodied pieces on the altar. From here, our lighting designer suggested shooting lights from behind and above Dionysus, allowing him to cast long shadows through the auditorium, and showing us primarily a glowing outline of the god. In this way, Dionysus could appear to be a kind of eclipse.

However, another solution was also possible, and this is the one I chose in the end. The designer and I had talked a great deal about making use of the aisles in the house for many of the entrances and exits. The auditorium would represent the way to Cithaeron which was the domain of Dionysus and his bacchantes. However, I had not found an opportunity to use the one aisle in the centre of the house, because there is no direct access from it to the stage. I realised that Dionysus could easily make his surprise entrance at the end of the play from this entrance over the vomitorium.

The advantage here was that Dionysus could emerge from an area where no other character had been before; above and separated from the action on stage, reinforcing the difference between his arrival as a god and as a mortal. Also, it made for a more plausible “materialization.” Since the audience did not expect him to appear there, and their attention was turned to the action on stage, darkness in the auditorium obscured Dionysus’ entrance until the point when the lights chose to point him out. This made for a striking, god-like appearance.

By making his final appearance atop the palace, Dionysus would have demonstrated his conquest of Thebes - a mortal kind of success - and the audience would be spectator to the event. Dionysus himself would remain within the picture frame of the stage. But by placing Dionysus in the auditorium, he asserts himself over Pentheus and his family, without making any claims on the city of Thebes. Also, the audience could not so easily distance themselves from the implications of the action, but were in the middle of it. Dionysus presides over all of us, not just the characters on stage. We were therefore reminded of our own responsibility towards the god. This was meant to be the enactment of a ritual, after all.

### **Mise en Scène**

Euripides himself specified no specific time nor place in which to set the action, save to say, “a palace in Thebes.” Therefore neither the set and costume designer (Sheena Ross) nor I wanted to be limited to a presentation of a picture of 5th century B.C. Athens, where the play would have been presented originally. At the same time, fixing a time period within the action is extremely difficult, and none too relevant. The story represents a myth of one of the early kings of Thebes. This time frame would already be far removed from the spectators of the original production. Historical accuracy was not a design priority in Euripides’ time, and neither should it be in ours. The important element in this story is its universality. The designer and I thus aimed at creating a world that could exist now, but doesn’t.

First we toyed with the idea of setting it in a contemporary Greece, but that seemed too exotic and ultimately irrelevant. Ancient Greece was ruled out almost immediately. It would too easily fulfil audience expectations of what a Greek tragedy ought to look like. It was this and other associated expectations I wanted to avoid. I wanted the audience to see the story, not coloured by what they thought the story would be like. We thought of setting it in Canada (too specific), or the United States. The United States had the quality of military power/paranoia that we identified with Pentheus. However, Pentheus is a king, and the United States has no natural monarchy.

Traditionally, Americans have created their own royalty. John F. Kennedy's tenure as president was known as "Camelot", after the court of legendary British King Arthur. American entertainment idols have also served a human need to worship wealth and power; Clark Gable was known as "the King" during the golden age of Hollywood, and Elvis Presley will always be "the King" to millions of Americans. However, this kind of royalty is very far from Pentheus. Pentheus is a king by Divine Right; Cadmus founded Thebes through the divine help of his unnatural army, and Pentheus, as Cadmus' grandson, inherits the city. Therefore the "royalty" of the Americans, which is almost always self-made, does not provide a suitable proxy. The exception to this is the example of inherited wealth. The Vanderbilts and Lindberghs of the world are the American equivalent of minor nobility. Their money and power is passed on from generation to generation. However, the element of exposure and public responsibility is missing.

In discussing other aspects of the design, particularly costume, it became clear that we were starting to set the production in a place that was very similar to England. It suited our needs in three major aspects. Firstly, England has a strong tradition of monarchy even in the present day. Pentheus' costume was eventually modelled on Prince Charles' more formal military uniforms. Secondly, it is still a major military power, and certainly has a strong history of imperialism/militarism. We hoped this image would inform Pentheus, making his threats to the women more powerful. Thirdly, England has a strong sense of history, extending in time far beyond the "civilising" influence of the Romans. Evidence of pre-Christian culture is always evident in the folk mythology (e.g. stories of "pixies" are related to the native Picts) and in the landscape, through Stonehenge and other similar

sites. This history gave us an equivalent context in which to place the figure of Dionysus, who has derived from older traditions and more primal needs than the convenient and civilised religion of Tiresias.

### **Spectacle: Dealing with the Palace-Miracle.**

*Dionysus escapes unquestionably, and that by wrecking or partly wrecking the building in which he was confined, namely the stables. There is no reason at all to suppose that these were visible to the audience.*<sup>87</sup>

There is an interesting dilemma in The Bacchae. The earthquake, described by the chorus and caused by Dionysus, is supposed to shake the palace and cause Semele's tomb to burst into flames. The question is, presuming no physical alterations to the stage setting, does the earthquake actually occur? Or is it a kind of mass hallucination induced by Dionysus?

This question is only relevant to us now, as 20th century spectators, with our fascination with verisimilitude on the stage, and perhaps more importantly, in the movie house. In a 5th century production of this play, one stage setting would have been used, and there would have been no physical evidence of the earthquake. Does this mean that the earthquake is imaginary? Hardly. All it means is that the audience watching the original production would have believed in the earthquake because that was what the characters on stage believed.

The chorus could safely say that the palace-front was rocking and likely to fall; their excitement would be communicated to the audience through the dance and not by the contrivances of the stage-mechanician. Then this miracle, however great or small, is to be essentially an event in the minds of the actors and audience...<sup>88</sup>

Something similar is demonstrated in Elizabethan theatre. In many of Shakespeare's plays, the characters describe locations and events that are otherwise imperceptible by the

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<sup>87</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 376.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 376.

audience (an imaginary country called Illyria, an island, a tempest, and the approach of Dunsinane forest on the castle of Macbeth, to name a few...). The Elizabethan stage provided a neutral stage setting, and simple props helped to define scenes otherwise. There is every reason to believe the Greek theatre operated in a similar manner.

Therefore, the approach that we took with the earthquake in our production was to assume that it happened, because the chorus and Dionysus told us that it happened. The stage setting was not affected. The only dramatic changes were evidenced in the lighting of the scene. We had more liberty with artificial light than a 5th century production would have had with natural light, and we chose this medium to paint our earthquake. Because light was a flexible and expressionistic medium, it was suitable for creating the mood of panic and the unnatural atmosphere of the earthquake without leaving any lasting effects on the stage. However, for the most part the earthquake was exhibited through the attitude and behaviour of the chorus. Stylised movement helped to illustrate what was going on. The rumbling of the earthquake was imitated by the rapid pounding of the chorus' feet as they watched the palace tumble, for instance. The chaotic violence of the event was shown in the choreographed and mannered movements of the chorus as they were tossed around the stage.

### **Working with a Composer**

I was very fortunate that music student Brigit Knecht agreed to compose the music for this show. I had worked with her before when she had played the violin for an earlier directing project. I knew her primarily as a violinist, but also knew she was a creative individual who was very easy to work with. The Bacchae turned out to be a bit of an experiment for both of us, and I was very happy with the results.

I gave her the following guideline. The aim was to reproduce the spirit of the tragedy, without remaining a slave to a technique which may appear foreign and alienating to a contemporary Calgary audience. The music would have been in a familiar style to the original auditors of the play, and so I wanted the sound of this show to be familiar to its

audience as well. Although the Greeks themselves disapproved of vocal harmonies, in our own culture it is a staple of what we perceive as music. Therefore, I did not wish to exclude the use of harmony in the choral odes.

The choral odes were set to music, sung by the actors and supplemented with percussion (drums, bells, and body drumming). The music itself was reminiscent of the work of Hildegard von Bingen, the mediaeval abbess and philosopher. It was sometimes joyful, sometimes haunting, and at all times reverent. Ms. Knecht was also conscious of the fact that we would in all likelihood be working with very few trained singers (if any) and the music was composed with this in mind, making it accessible to a variety of skill levels. The only high soprano parts were written for the chorus leader and Agave.

Over the course of the rehearsal period, things developed and changed. Variety in the odes became very important. Delightful as the music was, we didn't want to give the audience too much of a good thing. The ear can get tired, and we wanted to ensure that the audience kept listening. To this end, the odes were sometimes sung in unison, sometimes sung/spoken by the chorus leader with humming/vocalization underneath, and sometimes spoken rhythmically by the chorus together or in parts.

One other thing became clear right away. And that was that no matter how well the chorus enunciated, there would be things that the audience would miss. However, I still felt we had a good bargain. The poetry is beautiful, but like Shakespeare, it can come off sounding "precious" if too much care is taken with it. If the audience can hear and understand every single word at the expense of the spirit of the line, then the point of the exercise is lost. So many ideas are repeated in the odes, and I think this is exactly because they are meant to be sung. If one reference is missed, not to worry - another one will be coming up. Also, the tone of the singing must convey meaning as well as the words themselves. In the final analysis, I believe the compromise paid off. Audiences were engaged by the choruses, and I will always prefer an interested audience that misses some of the subtler points over a disinterested audience who hears nothing.

As I had anticipated, the composer was always co-operative and helpful. She was an integral part of the rehearsal process. She worked with the choreographer, the rhythmist, and the chorus for two and a half weeks in teaching the songs and developing rhythms.

She was also very amenable to change, and when some parts of the odes were changed to rhythmic speaking voices, mostly borrowed from the earlier directing project version of Bacchae, she was excited by the possibilities. All in all, it was a highly positive experience, and a great deal of the final success of the show is due to this creative team working together (Ms. Knecht; the choreographer, Ms. Miotti; and the rhythmist, Ms. Elson).

### **Working with a Choreographer/Rhythmist**

After the creation of the music, the next challenge to the chorus was to develop an abstract system of movement that could physicalize the music and lyrics without illustrating them. Walton theorises that in the original Greek productions, "...all movement of actors might have been stylised into a form of mimetic dance, relying on the audience's familiarity with a whole range of expressive gesture."<sup>89</sup> In other words, like ballet, opera, and particularly melodrama, the mood and intentions of the actors should be apparent from their motions.

A choreographer therefore worked closely with the composer to find a way to unite the singing and the movement in a way that would enhance the text. The choreography for the chorus included both synchronised gestures, as well as more individual and/or spontaneous motions. In this way the choreographer (Anita Miotti) and I hoped to capture both the singleness of the chorus as a being, and their individual capacity for ecstasy and frenzy.

For the chorus sections, I had met with Anita Miotti on a regular basis in preparation for rehearsals, far in advance of casting. We discussed how we saw each part of the choral odes - what specific purpose they served, and what was the mood and intention of each part. I gave each section a title as well, to create an overall focus. These discussions proved very useful, in that it was my sense of what tone the chorus should take in each individual section that Ms. Miotti had to translate into a physical image.

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<sup>89</sup> J. Michael Walton, Greek Theatre Practice (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1939) 165.

The actual process of turning these ideas into solid actions went as follows: There were nine sections in the text where the chorus dominated, including the choral odes, the earthquake sequence, and the duet with Agave on her entrance. Each day the group would start on a new section. The earthquake section was eventually developed as part of the regular rehearsal days later on.

At the start of rehearsal, Ms. Knecht would teach the performers the melody and harmony, until they had a strong sense of it. However, Ms. Knecht had written the music without a rhythm in mind, and so it was Nicola Elson's job to develop one for each section of music. As a specialist in African drumming she brought her exceptional skill to bear on the production. The percussion and rhythms brought the music to life and the chorus started to take shape. The cast was later given tapes of the results of this spontaneous musical collaboration so they could listen and practice on their own.

In the next part of the rehearsal, Ms. Miotti, who had learned the music along with the other women and would be performing with them in the show, began to choreograph the movement. She used a mixture of fixed movements and dance improvisation techniques to work up the final combinations for the show. This was a successful method in that it ensured a coherent look to the whole and also drew from the creativity of the cast.

During my breaks from rehearsals upstairs, and at the end of the night, I would go in and see what they had accomplished. During this time I would make sure they were on schedule, check in with the stage manager assigned to them to see what, if anything, needed to be taken care of, and generally kept abreast of new developments. I also felt it was important to stay in close touch with the chorus as it battled its way through this trying two and a half week segregation so that the performers would not feel completely alienated when re-united with the full cast.

Finally I believe that the collaboration between Ms. Knecht, Ms. Elson, and Ms. Miotti was one of the most positive things to come out of the whole process, and I am proud to have been able to give them the opportunity to come together in this way. The product - the choral odes - was a highlight of the production, due to the combined talent, creativity, and dedication of all involved.



## Working with a Dramaturge

The experience of working with a dramaturge for the first time was also a positive one. Jennifer Anderson had expressed interest in doing dramaturgical work for the Bacchae and I was very excited about having this extra resource at my disposal. As this experience was going to be very new to both of us, we met early on to discuss our expectations. Having never worked on a production that made good use of its dramaturge, I understood that there was a broader role to be served, but I had no idea what that was. I knew it had something to do with maintaining the integrity of the playwright's work, but I was not sure how this role was to be implemented. Fortunately Ms. Anderson wasn't sure either, and was contented to be treated as a resource and a confidante.

One of the first tasks she was assigned was to compile a short package of information that would concisely outline some important background information to the Bacchae, such as information about the playwright, a summary of the names and histories of each of the characters, and a glossary of names and pronunciations. The latter became a bone of contention throughout the rehearsal process.

The information on correct pronunciation of proper names was slow in coming for the straightforward reason that there were many conflicting professional opinions. In several cases there were more than one way to pronounce the word correctly. For instance, it was equally acceptable to pronounce the word "bacchae" stressing either the first syllable or the second. Also, there were aesthetics to consider. I have heard the word "maenad" pronounced several different ways: MY-nad, MAY-nad, and MEE-nad. The former is apparently the one nearest to the ancient Greek pronunciation, but I just didn't like the sound of it. Much of the play is poetic speech and so this becomes an important issue. At some point it became necessary to make a decision ("to-MAE-toe", "to-MAH-toe"), and Ms. Anderson and I settled on the second pronunciation.

Things were further complicated by the arrival of a specialist. We were very fortunate in having a Greek scholar specializing in theatre and language come in and sit in on a few rehearsals. Among other things, Ekaterini Nikolarea was able to give us the contemporary Greek pronunciations, which were very interesting in that they were so different from what

we had expected. For instance, Dionysus in contemporary Greek sounds much like this: They-ON-esus. The “d” sound resembles a hard “th”. Similarly, Cadmus sounds like: KATH-moss. And the most surprising of all, “bacchae” which sounds like: VAH-kyeh. These discoveries were intriguing, and I was glad to have the opportunity to expose the actors to them, however, these pronunciations did not end up in our final production. Unfortunately, this came too late in the rehearsal process to ask the actors to change so much of what they were calling themselves and each other. Also, the chorus had learned their songs with a certain pronunciation and rhythm, and it was too disorienting to ask them to relearn these new sounds as well. The one thing we did manage to keep, however, was the word “xenos” (ZAY-noss). Ms. Nikolarea had given us this word, meaning “foreigner”, for the chorus to use as a name to call out to the character of the Stranger. We had wanted to give him a name. As leader of the maenads, they certainly couldn’t call him “stranger”, and “Dionysus” was the name of the god, not the man. To give him an actual name seemed misleading. “Foreigner” said what we wanted it to, without corrupting the text.

Discrepancies in pronunciation continued to show up far into the rehearsal process, and it was Ms. Anderson’s taxing job to correct the actors and try to ensure that the pronunciations were consistent. There were differences often in how the chorus and the other actors pronounced certain names, which came from the segregated stage of rehearsal. In the end, everything seemed to smooth over. There were some things that we allowed, like using both stressed versions of “bacchae”, and some things that always eluded us. Sometimes actors developed mental blocks about certain pronunciations. In one case, the name Aristaeus was constantly pronounced “a-RIS-tee-us” rather than the preferred “a-ris-TEE-us”, but this is minor. The show overall did not suffer for it, and I believe minor inconsistencies were not picked up by the audience.

Ms. Anderson took the research part of dramaturgical work very seriously. She happily tracked down obscure articles and reviews. At every rehearsal I seemed to see her with a different book related to the work at hand. When she had found something that she thought would be interesting or useful to me, she pointed it out. For instance, she discovered a reference to secret names which ancient maenads would use for each other

when they were celebrating their rituals.<sup>90</sup> These “code” names would take the form of crude euphemisms for female sexual anatomy, or sexual acts. This practice fascinated me. Still looking for ways to unite the chorus members and give them the feeling of a secret society amongst themselves, I passed on this piece of information to the women, including Agave. I then instructed them to take on names for themselves, that would be known to each other, but not to the rest of the cast. The names they chose showed great imagination, creativity, and bravery. Unfortunately, I cannot go further into it, except to say that it was a successful technique. The “secret identities” taken on by the chorus members injected them with a sense of fun and playfulness that they sorely needed in the last weeks before opening.

Ms. Anderson was always in rehearsal ready to watch, ready to listen, and I used her as a sounding board quite often. She became a second set of eyes that I could call on to confer with. Especially in the latter stages of rehearsal when everything had already been mapped out she was a useful gauge to help me judge how close I was to my final goal. There is always a period late in the process when it becomes increasingly difficult to look at one’s work with any objectivity at all. By having someone there who had been present from the beginning but who was not so enmeshed in the creative struggle, I was able to refer to her whenever I became lost in my own perspective. I was very thankful to have this “clearer eye” to draw on.

## **The Design Process**

### **Set**

The designer and I felt it was important to show the dynamic presence of both the “male” and “female” worlds of the Bacchae on stage simultaneously. We hoped to show these forces in conflict through the design of the set. Pentheus’ world of civilization and man-made rigidity was represented by his palace; a structure of marble and steel, hard, polished, and solid. Pentheus made his first appearance on the balcony of the palace, thus

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<sup>90</sup> “Maenadism in the Bacchae”, Harvard Theological Review (33 1951) 55.

giving him height and stature.

Flanking the palace were two sets of columns (three on each side). There was a kind of facade atop the palace, set far back, made of four pillars and a lintel. The pillars were meant to echo ancient Greek architecture, as well as being reminiscent of our own time. Public buildings have always seemed to favour Greco-Roman pillars. Libraries, banks and courthouses seem to be particularly fond of them. These are institutions that tend to project an authoritative image, and so does Pentheus.

Representing the “female”, Natural world, the designer provided a large drum downstage centre. The drum is the symbol of the rhythm of life - of the Natural - and was therefore a suitable altar for the chorus. The palace and the drum counterpointed each other nicely. Where one strove to assert itself, the other beat out the incessant rhythm of Necessity. The altar-drum represented service, and servitude, and respect, whereas the palace invoked power, self-importance, and dominance. The palace was tied to the new - the new king and a (relatively) new city. The drum was tied to the old - old traditions that revered and attempted to explain, not exploit, Nature.

The floor was painted to reflect the transition from palace to countryside. Upstage the floor matched the black-marble coldness of the palace. The floor painting became progressively lighter, mossier, browner towards the downstage areas, showing the transition into a more natural environment.

I was also convinced of the importance of stairs in the final design. Stairs are the borderland, the stretching of the male world into the female, and a route of access from the female into the male. They made possible Pentheus’ final descent; his fall from an artificial state of man-made grace into the holy but ultimately levelling grace of Nature. Therefore, the designer’s set design provided two lovely long sets of stairs flanking the palace, which allowed Dionysus to move up and invade the civilised world of Pentheus, and also allowed Pentheus to leave his false throne and descend into the world of Nature below.

## Costumes

The first costume to become really clear in our minds was that of Pentheus. Through his costume we wanted to demonstrate his militarism, his “kingliness”, his rigidity, and his ineffectualness. The model we ultimately took was that of the English Prince Charles in his formal military attire. We wanted Pentheus’ chest to be covered in medals that he couldn’t possibly have earned on the battlefield (since he had never been in battle), and his suit trimmed with braid and other formal, royal, and military insignia. We also added a dress sword as a symbol of violence under the guise of fashion.

Later, when Pentheus changes into his female dress, we agreed that he should wear something long and simple, that would be reminiscent of his mother, since, in logical terms, we must assume Pentheus retrieved the dress from his mother’s wardrobe. Despite the fact that we agreed on this, it is interesting to note that the designer and I had been thinking in opposite terms about Pentheus’ conversion. Therefore the designer’s first sketch showed Pentheus in a simple shift, cut to mid-calf, and wearing high-heeled shoes. When I asked the designer why she had chosen those features in particular, she indicated that they would emphasise Pentheus’ awkwardness in his assumed attire. There had obviously been some miscommunication, because for my purpose I felt Pentheus had to look absolutely comfortable, and even sexy in his women’s wear. The idea is that Pentheus abdicates his personality completely when the spirit of the god enters into him, and so it is not incongruous to see him rigidly uniformed one moment, and then enjoying the sensuality of his new look the next. In psychological terms this merely demonstrates how appealing it is for Pentheus to be able to lay aside his duties and responsibilities and completely succumb to the influence of another. To relinquish control is both desirable, and dangerous; lessons that we learn through seeing Pentheus’ abdication of control, and his doom. Pentheus therefore will have to look at ease, sensual and appealing in his female dress.

Eventually the dress was lengthened and a long slit was added up one side to give the dress a feeling of elegance and sensuality.

Once Pentheus’ uniform had been decided, the designer immediately developed ideas for

Cadmus, the retired king. After toying with the idea of putting him in a Hawaiian shirt and Bermuda shorts, we decided to give him a more formal appearance, keeping with the status of a former King. As Pentheus began to represent a contemporary England-like land, so Cadmus became associated in our minds with the dying breed of the Military Imperialist. He was therefore suited up in a Victorian khaki uniform complete with short pants and pith helmet. As founder of Thebes through violent means, Cadmus does qualify as a kind of rugged individualistic adventurer, and we hoped the uniform would convey this image of Cadmus. We also hoped that in contrast to the slicker image of Pentheus he would seem somewhat ridiculous.

In the end, this costume was perhaps a bit “operatic.” In our delight at dressing Cadmus as an “Imperial Sunset”, we were blind to the more common comic associations with this particular look. However, I did think the end of the play was successful, when Cadmus was smeared with Pentheus’ blood from Agave’s hands, and his comic appearance was at once quite pathetic.

Tiresias was more difficult. The designer explored the stereotypical images of judge (white wig and long black robe), bishop or cardinal, and professor (tasselled hat and hooded long black robe) as possible models for him. However, neither of these ideas struck a true note. Tiresias’ cannot legitimately be judge or professor, since his main function is religious. A Catholic bishop or cardinal dress would also seem to be too specific. The designer also experimented with a monkish/druidic look, which would tie Tiresias in with the older traditions. While initially drawn to this idea, it later occurred to me that this might be too “safe” a route. Also, it would be very important in the play to draw a sharp distinction between the kind of ecstatic experience Dionysus espouses, and Tiresias’ convenient, established, formalised religion. Therefore the designer proposed to take a model that would carry all the common associations of organised religion, whose specific accoutrements would still be largely unfamiliar. To this end, she started experimenting with something very like the religious vestments of the Croatian Orthodox church, which are quite elaborate and made with rich-looking, golden materials. The final touch was a white cane (for the blind) wreathed in ivy (for the god). Cadmus and Tiresias together made quite a striking pair. Their scene together showed them as quite comic

characters, and their costumes produced an interesting effect.

Although it made logical sense to me at the time (and still does) why Tiresias, the false prophet in this case, would be dressed as a representative of organized religion, it was perhaps confusing to the audience. It was, I think, the thing most commented on afterwards. However, I believe I can attribute this confusion more to my lack of clarity as a director with this particular character, than on any choice in the costuming.

For Dionysus we felt he had to be effeminate but sexy. The designer strongly felt that he should visually bridge the more contemporary figures with the more classical appearance of the chorus. Finally she suggested a short chiton (to suggest the Greek) that would be of modern material and tie-died (to suggest something more contemporary and alternative). However, the process of tie-dying is a more familiar look of the 1960's and '70's, and we were looking for a contemporary counter-cultural appearance. Although the chiton itself is an attractive look, we ultimately felt it was not nearly dangerous enough. Dionysus has to appear as a threat to Pentheus. He should be frightening and intriguing at the same time, and be clearly opposite to what Pentheus represents. The designer therefore began to look in fetish stores and magazines for inspiration. Leather of some sort would, after all, be a reflection of Dionysus' bull/animal image. Body piercing, for the same reason, was considered.

The designer eventually came back with a sketch of Dionysus in black leather pants, with silver chains, and a red studded leather codpiece. The codpiece was very intriguing to me, since it seemed both archaic and modern, and was very overtly sexual, and therefore somewhat "dangerous." The pants, however, seemed too physically constrictive, and unnecessary, since the codpiece really seemed to say what we wanted to say. Also, the designer had added a kind of leather harness for Dionysus. This gave a sadomasochistic overtone, as well as reflecting the bull-harness, and therefore invoking the animal in the god. I liked this very much.

The primary problem for this costume in the end became the question of nudity. An actor appearing in a codpiece alone, would be mostly naked. I did not see this as a problem at first, but it soon became clear that this decision would have to be political rather than artistic. A compromise was reached, in that Dionysus would wear a skin coloured

bodysuit like the bacchantes, and the codpiece would go over it.

For Dionysus' reappearance as the god in the latter part of the play, it was decided that he would wear the same mask, only painted gold, and wear a golden bodysuit, breastplate and gauntlets that would give him the appearance of a golden idol. Gold has a richness to it that is attractive, however, it is also a metal, which is hard and cold (despite the fact that gold is considered one of the softest and warmest of the metals). This would neatly reflect Dionysus' transition from impassioned mortal to impassive god.

Next, we had to find a way to distinguish the two messengers. The first one is a shepherd boy, who relates the behaviour of the Theban maenads on the mountain. Being part of the natural world on the hills of Cithaeron, we wanted to avoid a "civilised" look, and therefore ruled out anything too contemporary. He therefore became quite rustic in appearance, wearing earthy coloured rags.

For the second messenger, however, who was clearly a member of Pentheus' guards, we decided on a sort of quick disguise that could have been pulled over his uniform. The designer suggested a militaristic camouflage poncho, with some branches decorating the helmet, making a somewhat ridiculous impression suitable to one who is used to the city and is trying to become inconspicuous in the country. This messenger's artificiality would make a significant contrast to the chorus' more spontaneous affinity with nature.

I was ultimately very happy with the first messenger's costume. However, if I were to do it over again, I would leave the second messenger simply in his uniform. I think it would have been clearer to the audience who he was. The second messenger's costume was perhaps a bit too much "fun" for the designer and I, and we might have left well enough alone.

The chorus, I felt, could be more classical in appearance than the other characters for two main reasons. Firstly, they are foreigners, and therefore should look markedly different from the Thebans, in order to demonstrate visually their "philosophical" differences. Secondly, they serve as a bridge between the audience and the actors; they are in two worlds at the same time, which we can underscore by showing them belonging to two time-frames at the same time.

The costumes for the chorus therefore had to be flexible enough for the dancers to work



in, and visually had to unify their appearance to show the chorus as a specific close-knit group, very separate from the other characters.

Flesh coloured bodysuits were eventually designed for the women to wear. These would prevent the performers from being self-conscious. Otherwise the costume consisted of swaths of diaphanous material which would allow for freedom of movement and comfort, as well as giving a softer, “flowing” look to the bacchantes. This would also put them in strong contrast to the rigidly uniformed men. The bodysuits would be painted to give the appearance of body tattoos. Reminiscent of both ancient traditions and contemporary ones, the tattoos would have religious as well as counter-cultural overtones. The body painting/tattoos were also meant to help obscure the material of the bodysuit, creating a sensual illusion. Finally, it was decided that the bacchantes would be supplied with (artificial) fawnskins. The fawnskins tied in with important ideas surrounding the bacchantes. They echoed images of nature: deer and hunters, and an inner bestiality.

In the end result, I found the bodysuits and “tattoos” tremendously unconvincing, and the fawnskins nearly invisible. Ultimately the conception rather than the execution pleased me much more.

Finally, Agave had to make a stunning appearance. To emphasise the brutality of what she had done, and also to wake the audience up a bit, both the designer and I believed that she should look as gruesome as possible. Originally, the designer had designed a blue shredded outfit, quite similar to the costumes of the chorus. She chose blue to tie Agave in with Pentheus, and a bodysuit to show her connection to the chorus. However, there were two problems with this. One was, there was enough textual support to show Agave’s connection with Pentheus, and it was more important to me that she carve a bloody figure down the aisle to the stage. I wanted to see her hot-bloodedness, fresh from the hunt, and fresh from the kill. I wanted to see her physically ooze passion and shame. I also wanted to see some indication of her position. She had to be differentiated from the chorus because she is not actually one of Dionysus’ followers; she is the highest-ranking Theban woman, driven to madness by the god.

A compromise was quickly reached. The designer suggested Agave wear a long wig matted with blood, and a simple Himation in diaphanous layers of red and purple, that

would look both regal and disgusting. The effect was that of dripping gore and I absolutely adored it.

## Lighting

*A good Greek play moves almost always in a curve of steadily increasing tension - increasing up to the last scene but one and then, as a rule, sinking into a note of solemn calm.*<sup>91</sup>

It seemed sensible in my study of the Bacchae to suppose that the play might occur in a time frame of less than twenty-four hours. The action in the play follows closely, one event upon another, in a relentless circle:

The whole plot moves with unwonted speed and directness, and is so well constructed and balanced that it is made to turn visibly at this one point [Pentheus' decision not to fight the maenads]. It is an organic unity, a complete contrast to the plots of all the surviving tragedies later than the Hippolytus.<sup>92</sup>

Using this as a general principle, it became Brian Kirby and Kim Stewart's challenge to give our theatrical event the appearance of beginning at dawn, and ending at midnight. To do this, we marked out significant scenes in the text, and attached a time to them. For instance, the guards pre-show patrol would be in a blue, pre-dawn haze. The entrance of the chorus would mark the dawn, and colours would slowly fade from blue to gold. The showdown between Pentheus and the captured Stranger would take place at "high noon", and Pentheus decision to enter the palace and change into women's clothes rather than wage war would mark the descent of the day. Finally, Agave's entrance would signify the beginning of sunset, which would intensify through to the end of the play. Dionysus' reappearance as a god would break these normal bounds and appear as a kind of eclipse, and the play would end in twilight, fading rapidly to darkness.

Straightforward as this sounds, there were still important questions to answer. One of our first dilemmas was in how to handle the house lighting. Does the play go from dawn

<sup>91</sup> Gilbert Murray, Euripides and His Age (1946. 2nd ed. London:Oxford UP, 1955) 136.

<sup>92</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy. (3rd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1961) 372.

to dusk, or does the whole theatrical event do so? Since I strongly believed in turning this into an event, not just a voyeuristic exercise, the house lights remained up during the course of the performance, only going out completely at the end.

The next important question was how to handle the earthquake sequence. Lighting was the one medium flexible enough to give whatever impression we wanted, without any lasting consequences. The earthquake could go as quickly as it came. In our discussions, Mr. Kirby, Ms. Stewart and I had settled on an eclipse metaphor in describing Dionysus, and here was an opportunity to foreshadow the eclipse at the end, when the stage would lie in the shadow of Dionysus. We also agreed that the earthquake should have some supernatural feel about it, like the atmosphere before a hurricane. The final earthquake sequence was very satisfactory, I felt. The lights changed from the glow of late morning sunshine to a dark greenish cast. Shifting blotches of light gave an impression of more action on the stage than there really was, and in combination with the agitated movements of the chorus it was really quite effective. With the rolling of the drum, a dark cloud seemed to roll over the stage and plunge the action into preternatural darkness, and then roll away again, leaving the area bathed again in sunlight.

The final dilemma was how to light Dionysus for his final entrance as the god. The designers and I wanted something spectacular, and since we weren't dropping Dionysus out of the sky in a golden car, lighting would have to give us our *deus ex machina*. The image of the eclipse was our main guideline. For this effect, Mr. Kirby and Ms. Stewart provided a strong, harsh white backlight behind Dionysus, perched at the top of the vomitorium. From here Dionysus cast a long, dark shadow over the palace and the figures cowering in front of it. The steely shine of the palace doors helped to reflect the light and make the effect even brighter. This shadow became the last thing visible on the stage, and left a powerful after-image in the mind of the viewer.

There were other smaller questions to be answered. One of these involved the colour of the light inside the palace. When the palace doors swung open, the interior was dimly visible. Ms. Stewart then suggested that something should be emanating out. We decided on a reddish glow, to contrast the sterility of the other palace colours. Symbolically speaking, it worked for me. If the palace is a metaphor for Pentheus himself, then the

cold, hard exterior of the building should camouflage the fire inside, just as Pentheus' haughty intellectualism masks an inner burning within the man. The final effect of the red glow radiating from the sterile palace gave an interesting effect, whether or not it was interpreted by the audience.

Another issue affected by lighting was the onset of what we termed the, "orgy scene", where the maenads on stage enact what Pentheus wishes to see. The whole scene had a dreamlike essence to it, and since the Stranger was essentially casting a spell over Pentheus, we decided that the lighting could sway slightly from its regulated course. We had decided this part of the play would take place at roughly two o' clock in the afternoon. Nevertheless we varied the lighting a bit to give it a slightly hallucinogenic feel. The designers lowered the light levels and brought up the leafy gobos, giving the lower part of the palace a greenish, forest-like cast. The result was subtle enough to be effective, yet not distracting.

Mr. Kirby and Ms. Stewart were extremely thorough in questioning me about my opinion on everything. I appreciated their thoughtfulness at all times, and I am indebted to them for their expertise in giving me a beautiful twenty-four hour day, in under two hours of stage time.

## **The Audition Process**

I wanted to go into the auditions having a clear idea of what I wanted, while at the same time keeping an open mind. After all, casting would depend on what was available to us. I knew I would need certain things from all the actors. I was going to need strong expressive voices and bodies from everyone if the mask work was going to be successful.

I also needed some specific qualities for certain characters. For instance, Dionysus was perhaps the most important role to cast well. The actor playing him needed to have power and subtlety, and a sensual animalistic physicality. The image of a snake, or a cat, or a bull came to mind. If possible, Dionysus and Pentheus should be of a similar build in order to point up the narcissistic homo-eroticism between the god and the man. The actor playing Pentheus needed to be able to play the violence and repression of the young King, as well

as revel in his sensual transformation. Cadmus had to have a weight, or a seriousness about him that would lend him age and help him look ridiculous in his first appearance, and pathetic in his second. The actor portraying Tiresias had to contrast visually to Cadmus for their first comic entrance, and had to have a distinctive physicality in portraying the blind prophet. Since Pentheus is a young man, Agave could be played as a forty year old woman. However she had to have a very strong soprano singing voice in order to sing the duet with the chorus on her entrance. Likewise the chorus leader had to have a good singing voice. Finally, the first messenger had to have a comic flair to play the country bumpkin, and the second messenger had to have a certain inner strength and intensity. The chorus was another matter. Here we needed twelve women who would all be capable in singing, dancing, and drumming.

We had a lot to accomplish in the auditions in a short period of time. Time at the preliminary auditions had to be divided between Ms. Miotti, Ms. Knecht, Ms. Elson and myself. We arranged things in the following way: we asked people to sign up for 50 minute time slots in groups of 8, leaving 10 minutes between groups. For the first 15 minutes Ms. Miotti would work with the group doing dance improvisation exercises. In this way, she could look for dancers that moved well and had an interesting quality to them, and I could watch how the actors expressed themselves physically.

Ms. Knecht and Ms. Elson had the next 15 minute block of time. Ms. Knecht did some simple exercises on the piano with the women to check for range and pitch, while I gave the gentlemen pieces to read from the play and sent them outside to look them over. When Ms. Knecht was done with the auditionees she sent them over to Ms. Elson who got them to do some simple improvisational drumming on the floor to see how they were with rhythm.

Finally, I sent the women out with pieces to read. For those who seemed to have a strong presence and a good soprano singing voice, I gave a short monologue of Agave's. For the others, I put them in groups of four with a piece of text from the chorus, and asked them to come up with a short "ritual." The purpose of this was to see how people worked creatively in a group, as well as hear their speaking voices.

With the monologue bits I was looking for an indication of who might be good for a

particular part, without necessarily casting it on the spot. In the preliminary auditions we were looking for possibilities rather than making concrete decisions. I made sure to spend a few minutes with each person, getting them to try different approaches, and sometimes giving them different animal images to work with.

Between groups, the four of us would compare notes on who we found interesting, and in a very short time at the end of the evening we had a call-back list that gave us at least two solid options for each role.

### **Call-Backs**

The call-backs were perhaps more hectic than the preliminary round. Ms. Miotti and Ms. Knecht and Ms. Elson worked with the chorus call-back group first, while I sat in. The exercises were more complex this time, and Ms. Knecht even split the group into two and tried simple harmonies. Now that we had a group that could move and sing, we had to discern further and hear how certain voices sounded together, and how certain people moved together. To be equitable, Ms. Miotti, Ms. Knecht, and Ms. Elson could each pick their top four favourites, while the others had the power to veto. Everyone was sensitive to each other's needs, and we wound up very quickly with a well balanced group of twelve. Finally the chorus leader (Melanie Windle) was picked out of the group as the person with the best singing and speaking voice, and a strong presence.

For the next part of the call-backs I asked the actors auditioning for named characters to team up to read scenes together. There were two Pentheus/Dionysus/Guard #1 combinations, and a few Tiresias/Cadmus combinations. One group, consisting of Steve Massicotte, Wade Laing, and Chris Cully, made an impression right away. They were given the scene where Dionysus is presented in chains, by the First Guard, to Pentheus. Sparks began to fly immediately. There was a glorious tension between Massicotte's Pentheus and Laing's Dionysus. Both actors were slightly built, and roughly the same height. Where Laing's Dionysus was serpentine and sensual, Massicotte's Pentheus was rigid and disdainful. They made a lovely contrast. Meanwhile, Cully distinguished

himself as the First Guard, not only giving a sensitive reading, but interacting silently with the other actors. Cully's guard became essential in the small scene.

Michael Baird very quickly became our choice for the role of Cadmus. He had a strong voice, but more importantly, he was a physically imposing figure. His physique and vocal quality were suited to playing an older character, and it was essential that Cadmus be credible as the grandfather of Pentheus.

For the messengers, I had the two actors up for the same part improvise a scene together, dividing the lines of the monologue between themselves. In this way I could see how creatively they could think on their feet, and compare them to each other. I was delighted with everyone's efforts. Mark Gatha stood out for the part of the first messenger because of his affable, relaxed stage presence, and athletic demeanor. For the second messenger, Greg Schneider made a strong impression because of his dramatic intensity and strong stage presence.

Reyna Giroux stood out for the role of Agave for two reasons, both concerning her voice. She had a strong soprano singing voice, and so would be able to make a striking entrance singing opposite the chorus. Her speaking voice was excellent as well, and I felt she could successfully convey the intensity of emotion required of Agave, encompassing the extremes of mad ecstasy and grief. Since the cast overall was young, I was content to imagine Agave as a mother in her forties, and I felt Ms. Giroux would make a striking and agile Agave.

There were a few actors required for non-speaking guard roles as well. For these I chose people who had shown considerable interest and enthusiasm at the auditions. Dom Poulin and Kelly Abrams made a good impression at the auditions, and were of similar height and build, which I thought would help to make the guards seem more uniform. Curt McKinstry read excellently for several roles but was not as well suited to any one part, and so he was given the non-speaking role of the Captain of the Guards. His height and stern attitude helped to define the part. His professionalism, which became quickly evident in rehearsals, was also a positive influence on all those around him.

Choosing actors for all the parts fell quickly into place, except that of Tiresias, which became the hardest role to cast. Perhaps it was because I was looking at a particularly

young cast, and I knew we wouldn't get an old man to play the part, or perhaps it was because I didn't have a clear enough idea of how he would be played that it became difficult to decide. What I wanted was a physically decrepit old man ; frail and cloudy-eyed. That was an impossible aim given the acting pool available. Young actors who tried to play the character in this way were terribly unconvincing, and in the end, I looked at what kinds of Tiresias were available to me, rather than trying to mould the actors into a particular kind of Tiresias. I knew our Tiresias had to appear somewhat foolish, but also had to have charm, and so we finally picked an actor (Shaker Paleja) who could give us these qualities. Quite opposite to what I had originally been looking for, Mr. Paleja was a robust Tiresias and his original approach intrigued me.

With the casting complete, we were now ready to tackle rehearsals for the Bacchae.



## CHAPTER FOUR: THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

### First Reading

For the first reading, I wanted to set an atmosphere of mystery and ritual, and let people get to know each other a little bit, and also hear the play for the first time. We were able to have the first meeting of the group in the Reeve Primary, which was to be our rehearsal hall. I tried to create some atmosphere by bringing in flowers, candles, grapes and incense. It was a gesture that was meant as a metaphor for what I hoped the production would eventually be: a feast for the senses.

I introduced myself first, and talked a bit about what an opportunity it was to be bringing this piece to life, and about the personal importance I felt surrounding it. This was our opportunity to express theatre as religion, and vice versa. Then it was Ms. Miotti, Ms. Knecht, Ms. Elson, Mr. Kirby and Ms. Ross's turn to present themselves and what they were hoping to accomplish. Then everyone individually introduced themselves to the group, with a little bit of personal information just to break the ice.

Finally, sitting relaxed and comfortable on the ground, it was time to listen to the play. For the purpose of this first read, we had the chorus and the non-speaking guards read the choral odes individually, sentence by sentence. Ultimately, I wanted the actors to start feeling a sense of community, and have the chance to absorb the words and the poetry, and the simplicity of the story. A short discussion followed the reading, and I was generally pleased to see that everyone was on the same wavelength. In a way, I wished the discussion would have gone on longer, however I had to realise that this was a first read, not a literary debate, and people were just becoming familiar with the play. More questions would come later, I was sure.

The evening ended on an upbeat note, as Ms. Ross showed the cast the model of the set, and the costume sketches. There was energy and excitement in the air and we were ready to proceed.

## **Formal Rehearsals**

For the first two and a half weeks the chorus rehearsed separately from the other actors. This allowed the chorus to learn the music, movement and rhythm with some degree of assurance before being integrated into the action. Meanwhile, I could work with the other actors on mask, a bit of movement, and text before getting into blocking specific scenes. The guards, also, needed to develop a rhythmic routine that they could perform during pre-show as part of their "patrol." With different groups of performers working together on different things, we would often have up to four rehearsals going on simultaneously. Somehow, I had to be a part of all of these different rehearsals. It all worked out of course, but it was often very hectic, and I often felt as if I was neglecting one or another group at any given time. Planning and organisation helped a great deal. I had a very specific idea of what I wanted to accomplish from day to day, and this helped to keep us on our very narrow track.

The first step was to create a workable rehearsal schedule. I divided the play into twenty-two rehearsal blocks (see Appendix 2). More often than not, this meant the play was broken into "french" scenes, but sometimes smaller sections would be necessary. For instance, Pentheus' first scene consists of a very long address. In the first part of his speech he is unaware of the presence of Cadmus and Tiresias. His intention in the scene changes when he notices his grandfather and the old prophet. Therefore Pentheus' speech up until the point he notices the others constitutes one sub-section of the scene. This kind of close division of scenes allowed us to focus on one strong through-line at a time.

Normally, I would have liked to take three separate rehearsals for each rehearsal block: one to explore the text with the actors sitting down, one to work with the actors on their feet and work out blocking, and a third to refine blocking with the actors off-book. However, time constraints and the added challenge of learning to work with the mask meant that I would have to combine steps one and two of the rehearsal process, and explore the text and start to get the actors on their feet during the course of one rehearsal period. The actors would then have at least two rehearsal periods for each scene before the addition of the chorus in two and a half weeks.

I started slowly with the actors. The first few rehearsals were taken up with workshops. We did several different exercises together with the intention of heightening body awareness and expression, and to help the actors identify different physical/emotional responses in themselves. The actors were also introduced to their rehearsal masks. These exercises are detailed in the next section. Overall, I wonder how much these exercises helped, since we did not have the time to go into any depth but only skimmed the surface.

Next we began to investigate the text. In the first rehearsal of a rehearsal block, the cast would read through the scene for the sake of clarity, and listening to the words. The second time through the actors were asked to read their line, and then paraphrase the same line into their own words. By this I was hoping the actors would start to personalise the lines, and identify with them. A discussion of the scene, and then a further reading would ensue, with the aim of clarifying the actor's intentions in the scene. This process would take roughly an hour.

The next step was to get the actors working on their feet. With an understanding of the basic intention of the scene, they put on their masks and took time to become comfortable with them, before encountering each other and enacting the scene in a non-verbal way. For this stage, they could use inarticulate sounds, or individual words, but were to stay away from speaking lines to each other.

This method seemed most successful in working with the actors portraying Dionysus and Pentheus together (Wade Laing and Stephen Massicotte respectively). Some of the most powerful moments these actors had together were in this stage of the process, and it became a bit of a struggle to find these moments back again once they were speaking the lines. In particular, the encounter when Pentheus is questioning the Stranger after having him brought in bound was a very powerful moment in the process. The actors had perfectly physicalized the dynamic conflict between these two figures, and the tension within Pentheus, between fascination and repulsion, was absolutely compelling. This was one moment that never regained its power once we reintroduced the text, and I am at a loss to explain why. Perhaps the lines became suddenly intimidating, or clouded the actors from their intentions.

For me, the rehearsal process always had the feeling of a delicate balancing act. I

wanted the actors to be clear on what they were saying and doing to each other before they had to deal with the extra challenge of the mask, but at the same time I didn't want them to be too set before they explored the scene in mask. I didn't have them spend all their time in the mask as I would have liked for the simple reason that they weren't using the actual performance masks, but only rehearsal ones. This was a big concern and I never really moved past it.

The twenty-seventh of September was the momentous day we brought the two groups together in rehearsal. This first "show and tell" run was inspiring and fun. It reminded me a little of introducing two animals to each other for the first time. Both the chorus and the speaking actors were excited and full of nervous anxiety. They all wanted to see what everyone else had been up to, and the cast was very supportive of each other's efforts.

The dynamic of rehearsals changed from here on in. On the positive side, we were starting to piece the play together again, rather like a large quilt. Each of the individual pieces had been roughly finished, and we could see how we were making a whole that had quite a different character from its component parts. On the negative side, this is where the rehearsals became a bit unbalanced. With making such a large stage picture, it was difficult dedicating time to polishing one thing, without leaving someone feeling left out.

From here we worked on the play in quarters, integrating the chorus and action together. Each day we would go on to the next quarter with the cast off-book for the first time. Once we had worked through the entire thing, we progressed to concentrating on one half of the show in one day, and the second half of the show the next day. Then we had our second full run to see how things were fitting together, and what parts were weaker than others. We had another two rehearsals where we could work on the play in halves; two days where we plodded through stop-and-start runs (running the play in sequence and stopping when necessary to fine-tune something); and finally on the eleventh of October we were ready for a cue-to-cue. On the twelfth of October we had our first technical dress rehearsal, and the actors were at long last introduced to the masks they would be wearing. From here on in, time had to be devoted equally between the technicians and the actors, and refining the production as a whole up until opening night on the eighteenth of October, when I would have to relinquish control once and for all.

## Approaching the Mask

It was inevitable that we come to working with the mask. If there was any time that I felt I was at a complete loss, it was here. It was not that I did not know which way to approach the subject, it was simply that we were without the proper tools for so long that I started to wonder if it was pointless. Dealing with mask work without masks is rather like studying mathematics without using numbers, and instead using things that resemble numbers. In other words, it was very difficult to know where to begin.

Mask work involves a certain level of mysticism if it is to work. The first step is usually to form a bond with the mask; to look at it, study it, feel it, connect with it and understand it from the tips of your fingers inward to the very seat of understanding with what might be called the soul. This can be quite a process of its own.

The second stage is to wear the mask and get to know it from the inside out. To live from inside the mask. It is important to remain relaxed in order to be ready to respond to any of a million impulses the mask might send the actor. How does one recognise these impulses when one is inside the mask? The answer is through mirror work. The actor must see the mask in the mirror as a living thing, as another animal, and observe its activities. This can be another time-consuming activity, but it is necessary to have patience when getting acquainted with a new mask.

The most crucial thing in mirror work, and any work with the mask, is to *listen* to the mask. The actor is not listening for sounds, but for impulses. It is always apparent when an actor is imposing actions on the mask instead of responding to the messages he or she receives. One has to trust the mask, and be able to relinquish control, or the exercise is unsuccessful. One *feels* that it is not right, by looking at it, but may be at a loss to pinpoint what exactly is the problem, other than to say that there is tension between the performer and the mask. I can say from personal experience that one knows from inside when one is not listening to the mask. Suddenly you, the actor, see your classmates through the hollow eyes, and you say to yourself, "I have a piece of wood on my face, and my God, is it sweaty in here". When it *is* working, there is no "T" (the performer) to think

of these things. Everything is listening and responding.

If working with half masks (as we were), the first object in mirror work is to fit one's face into the mask. This means looking in the mirror, and seeing how one's mouth fits into the face staring back. The actor plays with stretching the mouth in different ways, smiling, opening the mouth wide, frowning, and just experimenting and playing, until it becomes apparent *what the mask requires*. If the actor is listening, the actor will know when the technique is succeeding. The same process applies to the eyes.

The next stage is to extend that physicality into the rest of the body; into the neck, shoulders, chest, arms, abdomen, pelvis, legs, hands, feet. If the actor starts in a sitting position then learning to stand becomes a major step. When the body "fits" the mask, the actor can see it in the mirror.

At the same time, the actor can start to work on inarticulate sounds. What does the mask want to say? This is another lengthy stage, as the actor must find the mask's voice before learning to speak. The actor begins with inarticulate sounds; sighing, laughing, coughing, groaning, crying, etc. Eventually, after experimentation, when the actor feels that the voice is becoming rooted, one can begin speaking - one word. "Yes," or, "no," are good words to start with. The actor sees the mask in the mirror becoming a fully rounded character, and imagines different situations in which to respond with that one word. The actor plays with different scenarios, speaking with different people, and experiencing a variety of emotions. In this way, the actor slowly starts to define the boundaries of the mask. What emotions is the mask more comfortable with? What happens if the actor feels an opposite emotion? How does the mask feel about his or herself? How does this character carry him or herself? The more questions the actor asks, and the more he or she tests the mask, and listens to the response, the more full the character will become.

The mask and the actor inside it begin to develop a sense of self. When the masked actor feels comfortable with his or her reflection, and can take a walk away from the mirror and back again with confidence, it is time to meet others. This is another period of testing boundaries, as characters have to deal with unpredictable stimuli. This is a wonderful time when one can be surprised by one's own actions, since they are not dictated by the actor, but by the demands of the mask on the actor.

Eventually, the actor has identified sufficiently with the mask so that they become one entity. It is a very highly personal path. Although two people may explore the same mask, and the mask will always dictate certain unshakeable qualities and attitudes, nevertheless each actor makes the character his or her own.

However, here was my dilemma. Each character in our production of the Bacchae was going to be masked and the process of becoming a masked character is long, intimate, and requires patience. We had five and a half weeks to rehearse our production, and the masks were not going to be ready until the third week (and that was if we were lucky). As it happened, we were not lucky, and didn't receive the final masks until the technical dress rehearsal. It was a conundrum that would give me more stress than any other single element of this production. I handled it as best I could at the time, but if I were to do it over again I would simply insist that the masks were ready for the first day of rehearsal, or not use them at all. What I did instead, was compromise, and perhaps the quality of the show was compromised in turn. This is what happened: the designer, in the interim until the final masks would be ready, provided us with "rehearsal masks", which were simply any masks that we could find in stock that had any connection at all with what we hoped the final ones would look like. The rehearsal masks for Cadmus, Pentheus and Dionysus were approximate. The masks for Tiresias, the messengers, Agave, and the chorus bore little or no resemblance to their final counterparts. In the cases of Agave and the chorus, their final masks were much superior to the rehearsal ones, and much of their character took shape once they were introduced.

I tried to lead the characters through the path of discovery in rehearsal with their masks, however, I could never fully commit to it, and couldn't allow them to commit as much as they should either. Nevertheless, most everyone did form strong emotional connections to their masks (saving the first messenger and the chorus), and were all thrown for a loop when the final ones arrived. The result was that some characters improved, some lost ground temporarily but recovered, some never quite found their feet again, and some never found their feet at all. If the masks worked at all in the final production, it is due entirely to the fortitude, and infinite capacity of the cast to trust in the process. If there were some masked characters that seemed awkward, the actors cannot be fully responsible when

working under the contrary conditions created by the tension between the situation and myself.

### **Specific Rehearsal Exercises**

For the first few rehearsals I wanted to introduce to the actors a general framework for the kind of work I was going to be expecting of them, and to some exercises that I hoped they might find useful or enlightening in their own exploration of the play.

#### **Laban technique**

In the first rehearsal I started a little physical work with the actors to try to get them used to the idea of using their bodies to communicate, since their faces would be obscured by masks. I had a very young cast overall, and outside of any dance classes they may have taken, were not exposed to a great deal of movement. What would have been ideal would be to have them all study mask and movement for the theatre for a year before starting work on this play, but of course one is never under ideal circumstances, so we made the best of it.

I introduced the actors to Laban's dimensional and diagonal scales. These are essentially pathways of movement for the body. The dimensional scale explores the planar aspects of movement as the body travels up and forward, down and back, to the left side, to the right side, up and backward, and down and forward. The body is rooted and stable throughout these pathways. The diagonal scale puts the body in constant tension of opposing pulls of gravity, and the body is therefore constantly unbalanced. The pathways for the diagonal scale are: right-high-forward, left-deep-backward, left-high-forward, right-deep-backward, left-high-backward, right-deep-forward, right-high-backward, left-deep-forward. In other words, if the space around one was marked out by how far one could reach in any direction, it would form a rough cube. The dimensional scale explores the front and back and sides of this cube directly. The diagonal scale reaches into all the corners.



The purpose of this exercise was to emphasise strength, flexibility, and concentration. The pathways of these scales are meant to flow naturally one into the next, without end. There is never a destination, only a new direction. Like Tai-Chi, it is a philosophy of the body, only this is particularly suited to the actor in that it describes a full range of possible movement. These moving scales should be to the body what singing scales are to the voice.

After practising the scales with the group, and having them individually discover different combinations of pathways and how they could possibly be applied to everyday movements, I had them divide into pairs and work out scenarios where they used these dimensional and diagonal pathways to interact with each other in an exaggerated but plausible way. The results were very interesting. The actors' storytelling abilities were not hindered by being able to express themselves only through certain prescribed kinds of movement. They were inventive in their situations and routines, and clear in their presentation. I felt sure that once they began working with the masks, the body would continue to be an important conduit of expression.

Looking back now, I see one important part of this exercise that I omitted, and that was to have the actors explore different emotional states through use of these body scales. That would have been perhaps more telling and useful for the actors. My only excuse for not going farther with this is the same as it is for everything else: lack of time. I never did do everything with this cast that I would have liked to have done, and it plagues me still.

Finally, I did introduce another Laban technique to two of the actors who seemed in the most need of it. Cadmus (Michael Baird) and Agave (Reyna Giroux) both had initial difficulty finding the range and power in the emotions that they needed to portray. For Cadmus the problem was emotional variety. For Agave, she had difficulty committing to the passionate emotions she must express. For both, Laban's effort actions<sup>93</sup> seemed to be useful. With this part of the technique, the actors investigated the following physical states, which are tempered by direction, time, and weight:

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<sup>93</sup> Jean Newlove, Laban for Actors and Dancers (NY: Routledge, 1955) 78.

Pressing: Direct, Sustained, Strong  
 Flicking: Flexible, Sudden, Light  
 Wringing: Flexible, Sustained, Strong  
 Dabbing: Direct, Sudden, Light  
 Slashing: Sudden, Strong, Flexible  
 Gliding: Sustained, Light, Direct  
 Punching: Direct, Sudden, Strong  
 Floating: Flexible, Sustained, Light

The actors then explored the text while moving through one or more of these effort actions. By concentrating on the physical, the essence of the action came through spontaneously through the voice and eventually was retained even when the physical action is discontinued.

This worked for the actors playing Cadmus and Agave for different reasons. For Cadmus, who had obviously relied primarily on his voice to carry him as an actor, it rooted him, and started to connect his voice and body. It also gave him various options to explore in terms of vocal delivery. The concentration on the physical distracted him from over-intellectualizing his choices and made his intentions clearer. For the actress playing Agave, who had been self-conscious in fully committing to the powerful emotions of her role, the physical action similarly prevented her from focussing too much on herself, and allowed her to respond more freely. For each, strong contrasts of action helped to give movement to their lengthy monologues. For instance, the contrast between pressing, punching, and floating worked for Cadmus. The action of wringing was a useful tool for Agave in particular in that it helped her externalise and project her agony when mourning for her murdered son.

I tried to introduce a new technique only when it seemed appropriate or helpful to the actor, when we had reached an impasse. Therefore Cadmus, and Agave were the only ones that I took this very far with.

## **Animal Partners**

Another approach that I tried with some of the actors was to explore their masked characters as animals. With some types of masks, animal imagery is very strong and can help the actor find posture and body rhythm quickly. For our purposes I was trying to build a solid physical foundation for the actors so that the stress of having new masks given to them shortly before performance would have as minimal an impact as possible. This was done in conjunction with mask work, and was useful in some cases and not in others.

The actor playing Dionysus consistently kept his animal images with him throughout the process and performance, and it was highly successful. His serpentine movements were cunning and sensual and provided a sharp contrast to the other male characters on stage. When invoking a bull image he was strong, solid and commanding. By fully utilising these two animal images in his performance, Dionysus was by turns sly and direct in his intentions, was always connected in voice and body, and maintained an inner strength that resonated to the back of the theatre.

For the actor playing Agave working with an animal image was also helpful. The first time we did the exercise, she appeared very small and tame, timid and hesitant. This did not seem like the animal that would enter the stage with a man's head on a stick. I asked her what her animal was, and she replied that it was a house cat. When we promoted the tabby to a larger predator, her physicalization improved. By opening night she had come quite a distance, and it was with macabre pleasure that I watched a bloodthirsty lioness that now panted and paced the stage fresh from the kill.

For the actor playing Tiresias, whose white cane I had wanted to be a physical extension of himself, I encouraged the idea of a gourami; a tropical fish whose long front feelers compensated for the weakness of its eyes. The gourami "sees" with its feelers, and so I wanted Tiresias to use his cane to "see" around him. Unfortunately this image never really helped the actor. He had tried to "see" with his cane, and during some rehearsals he went blindfolded, but nevertheless the action of the cane never seemed natural.

## Other Exercises

The actors portraying Cadmus and Agave were both relatively young - one was a first year, the other a second year student - and shared a mutual shyness. I had them connect physically as often as I could to try and break the polite barrier that had grown up between them. When I started working with them on their scene together, I had them read the piece to each other, making constant eye contact, holding hands and squeezing while they spoke. I was hoping to develop a feeling of intimacy between them, and closeness. By speaking the lines to each other in a relaxed and intimate manner, I believed they would begin to make a personal connection to the text and to each other. This worked more for Agave than for Cadmus.

This exercise was also meant to attempt to break Cadmus' bad habit of speaking in an unnaturally heightened voice. He had developed an artificial accent somewhere that I don't think he was even aware of, and I wanted to try to break him free of it. Reading the lines to each other in this fashion was useful to a point, but the actor never really allowed himself the freedom to respond as genuinely as he was capable of. However, by performance he had come a long way, and was genuinely listening to his partner.

At one point late in the process it became clear that Cadmus and Agave were having difficulty responding physically to each other. As father and daughter under such emotionally stressful circumstances I felt there needed to be a physical as well as mental bond between them. From the beginning I had had them rehearse their scenes with some element of physicality, whether it was merely holding hands, or actually pushing each other around the stage. However a hug between them had always looked forced and awkward.

For one rehearsal, I took them and a stage manager to a studio that was very dark. I had them start off in opposite parts of the room and try to find each other under the disorienting condition of darkness. I hoped this would physicalize the feeling of desperation and fear in the two characters, and give them a sense of solidarity in physical contact, if only holding hands. Again, this was only partially successful. They were still relating primarily vocally to each other and still reluctant to express any kind of physical contact. Finally, despite everything, the only thing to be done was to get them used to hugging each other, and

encourage them to be decisive about it rather than hesitant. Things came together best after tech. dress, when Agave could wipe her blood soaked hands and arms on her father's uniform. For some wonderful reason the sensual nature of the blood encouraged her to be more tactile, and she seemed to enjoy the grotesqueness of it.

### **Working with the Chorus**

It became increasingly clear over the course of rehearsals how much the drama of the play relied on the tension and interaction between the chorus and the actors. In many tragedies, the chorus is made up of observers; old men, women, children, who have no power to change the action. Here the chorus represents the element in society being directly repressed, and is consequently a much more active participant. In our production the bacchantes pointed Tiresias towards the palace, responded vocally to the decrees of Pentheus, threatened the guards, aided the Stranger in his seduction of Pentheus, and mourned with Agave, among other things. The immediacy that this brought to the action made the chorus a matchless presence on stage.

The development of this unit was complex and involved the skills of many people. When Ms. Knecht, Ms. Miotti, and Ms. Elson had finished their two and half week "boot camp" with the chorus members and they were turned over to me to integrate into the rest of the action, a good part of their group character had been established. However, this seemed to extend into the choral odes alone, and it was then left to me to encourage them to breathe this spirit into the rest of their time on stage.

Despite the fact that they had done extensive and taxing physical work, when the chorus members weren't singing and dancing, they were physically self-conscious. This was something that needed to be conquered if they were going to represent earthy, intense, sexual and sensual creatures - maenads - on stage.

The first stage was to alter their inarticulate vocalisations from high, thin sounds to deep and throaty ones. They were encouraged, when making inarticulate responses to the action on stage, to root the sound in the gut, and to use growling, purring, cooing, panting animal noises as a guideline. These sounds eventually became part of the soundscape on stage

underscoring the action at certain key points (the messenger speeches in particular), and were, I think, very effective.

We further experimented with creating a physical identity for the maenads, by giving them specific guidelines for sitting and standing. Like proper girls, they had been in the habit of sitting with feet together and to the side. They had a tendency to look “pretty”. To break them of this, Ms. Miotti and I worked together to get them to try to squat at all times with feet apart, and to not think about sitting “pretty”. The squat in particular was a useful position for the performers. The squat is an attitude favoured by women in many native cultures, and can be a comfortable resting position. For the chorus members it kept them in a position of absolute readiness for action, and visually gave them the appearance of being very rooted to the earth.

Similarly, when they were standing or lying on the ground, they were encouraged to “embrace the ugly”. In other words, at no time should they point their toes, or be concerned about splayed knees, or be shy about holding or scratching any part of their own anatomy. In our society we are very much concerned with how we look to others, and these characters were an opportunity for the performers to be as free as they wanted from these restrictions. Animals feel no shame in their bodies, and there is a refreshing and delightful quality in, for instance, a cat licking between its splayed toes. Because the maenads in this show demonstrate such a strong connection with Nature (as opposed to the civilised world of man) I felt that they should enjoy the freedom of animals in the ability to enjoy itching, scratching, licking and clawing. Thankfully, with this advice, they were all revelling in their own earthy physicality.

Our visiting specialist, Ekaterini Nikolarea, was also very helpful here. During one rehearsal where she had been watching the chorus rehearse one of their dances, she volunteered to teach the women how to do a Greek belly dance. We were all soon struck dumb by the power of this woman’s spiritual connection to her own body. The moves themselves were simple enough, and the women picked them up easily. But what was so striking was the passion that Ms. Nikolarea put into it, as opposed to the intellectual approach of the others.

By intellectual, I mean that the women were moving their bodies with their minds, not

with their hearts. The body has a rhythm and a logic all its own; a biological imperative that we try to deny with our minds. Imagine the contrast in the rehearsal hall: on one side we see twelve beautiful young girls performing a dance with technical precision who appear chaste as angels. On the other side we see a woman in her thirties, wearing glasses and a conservative blue suit with modest skirt and white sneakers, performing the same steps but with something more; she is thoroughly sensual, listening to an internal rhythm that leads her forward in the dance. She is mesmerising. She is in contact with Dionysus.

Ms. Nikolarea tried to teach the chorus members to feel this inner connection. However, it has more to do with listening than learning. One must trust oneself in order to be this uninhibited, and vulnerable. To listen the body is to reveal everything - from the inside. Over the course of the six weeks of this rehearsal process the women in the chorus grew more and more to trust themselves, and the addition of the final masks helped them to throw off their inhibitions further and listen to this inner spirit.

One example of where this kind of physicality really made a graphic impression, was in the section we affectionately titled "the orgy". This occurred in the scene where the Stranger entices Pentheus to dress in women's clothes and spy on the maenads, rather than war with them. The message I wanted to get across was that the bacchantes on stage were helping the Stranger to make material Pentheus' secret desires. They were to tantalise Pentheus with what he hoped to see when he went out on the mountain, in order to make him more pliable to the Stranger's demands. In order to do this Pentheus and the Stranger remained on top of the palace, while the maenads remained below. The guards had been sent down by Pentheus to form a line across the stage as a kind of barricade against the women, holding their night-sticks defensively in front of them. As the Stranger asks the fateful question, "wouldn't you like to see them on the mountain?" the drums start a slow, soft rhythm. The bacchantes approach the guards, sliding up to them on the floor, caressing them, touching them, and disarming them gently. From here the women perform a slow seduction of the guards, to which they succumb, presenting a perfect picture of what Pentheus most wants to see.

The problematic part of this bit of action was that the maenads must take the initiative and appear both sensual, sexual, strong and very much in control. The first few times we

experimented with this scene, everyone was “very brave about it all”. However, what we required was not bravery but genuine sensuality and a commitment to the action on stage. The cast was slithering around marvelously, but it lacked passion and strength. It also lacked a sense of the animal, the internal rhythm that is unselfconscious of its appearance. In other words, it was all far too pretty.

It took a while but the actors, with some encouragement and coaxing, eventually came to trust themselves and each other enough that they could make the scene technically specific, but also compelling. They knew where they had to be at every moment of the scene, and how they had to get there. At the same time, they were free to be “ugly” about it. Although they did not achieve the same level of commitment for every performance, when it did work, the final tangle of bent knees and curled toes, flexed feet and writhing bodies gave a wonderful sensual impression, rather like a sexy human version of a colony of earthworms.

All the actors in this scene performed with the utmost professionalism and patience. It was a difficult thing to ask them to do, but they responded with trust, and I thank them for it now.

The character of the chorus finally gelled completely when they received their performance masks at the technical dress rehearsal. It was remarkable to see the difference. The chorus had been continually prompted to “embrace the ugly”, nevertheless they had often given the impression in a group of being too soft, and shy, and feminine. A significant amount of rehearsal time was given over to trying to roughen them. They had been given rehearsal masks but these were quite neutral in appearance and bore no resemblance to the final masks. Then something quite remarkable happened. On the day of the technical rehearsal, the chorus members met their final masks for the first time.

It was like magic. This is what I saw: the dancers looked in the mirror, only they did not see themselves. They saw an alien creature, foreign and exotic, and not quite human. When one feels a strong connection to the mask it takes one out of one’s own body. It seems that the mask is in control, and all one can do is follow the promptings of the face that appears in the mirror. Walton says of this, “...the dancer may feel that he acquires



some of the power of the mask itself.”<sup>94</sup> I believe this experience effected a transformation in the chorus members. Once they appeared on stage, everything fell into place. They could see others around them reflecting the same face, and they became a unity; single in mind and intention. It is almost impossible to describe the change that occurred, in only an hour’s time. They were truly one mind made of twelve bodies. And they were suddenly sensual and strong; intimidating even in their gentlest moments. They sang, danced, hummed, sighed, prowled, stroked, clawed, laughed, leaped, pounced, slithered, purred, panted, bellowed and flocked. They were bacchantes. And they gave me chills.

### **The Messenger Speeches**

The second most satisfying part of this production for me, other than proving that the chorus could be interesting, was proving that the messenger speeches were interesting as well. The messenger speech in a Greek tragedy on the surface appears to be nothing but an expository essay on what has happened offstage. But there are two important things missing when reading the messenger speech on the page. One is the human voice, which can paint a picture of things more fabulous or horrible than anything one could try to recreate on the stage. The second is the presence of the chorus, who responds to the words of the messenger. Walton sets forth that the messenger speech is actually a relic from the earliest forms of tragedy, when there was only one actor, who interacted with the chorus. In order for this to be dramatic, “the messenger speech would then involve the development of a former physical response on the part of the chorus into an emotional response; not an extension of the story but a reaction to it.”<sup>95</sup>

I took this statement as my guiding principle when working with the messenger speeches. What seems a monologue then becomes a dialogue between the actor and chorus. Here is how this affected the two messenger speeches in the Bacchae.

The first messenger we meet is a shepherd from the mountain of Cithaeron, who tells Pentheus of the maenads’ activities on the mountain. He describes their peaceful play, their

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<sup>94</sup> J. Michael Walton, Greek Theatre Practice (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1939) 170.

<sup>95</sup> J. Michael Walton, Greek Theatre Practice (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1939) 137.

ecstatic dancing brought on by the sound of the drum, and how they turn on the shepherds and cowherds who dare to try and capture them. They destroy a flock of cattle, and then descend on two small villages.

The actor playing the first messenger (Mark Gatha) entered from the back of the house and ran down the aisle to the stage. Since we had geographically placed Cithaeron out towards the auditorium in our minds, this seemed a logical place for him to arrive from. As he started to tell his story, the maenads on stage took interest and scattered around the messenger. They reacted to the story - not exactly acting out what the messenger relates - but being moved by it. The pastoral scene inspired a sense of playfulness and calm in the chorus, and they lay on their backs as if enjoying a fine summer morning. The mood changed as the messenger began to describe the dancing. Some chorus members began to drum softly and the sound of the drum began to draw the others into that hypnotic state that characterizes ecstatic worship. They began to move rhythmically to the beat of the drum, to their own pace. However when the messenger described how the maenads on the mountain swooped like a flock of birds, the chorus members all rolled over together, as if inspired at the same moment. As the messenger described the horrors of the women tearing apart the cattle, the women on stage were caught up in the sound of the drum and the voice together, and crawl, pulsing, together to surround the messenger in a circle. When the messenger hit a certain important word or moment in the story the drum stopped suddenly, and the women froze, suspended by the silence for a moment, and then all continued. At the end of his story the messenger ran out of the theatre, pursued by the maenads on stage. The effect, I hope, was simply that the women wanted to play with him, but that they were so worked up that the messenger would as likely play with a dozen tigers.

This scene did exactly what I wanted it to. The messenger's story was aided by the chorus on stage in that it provided a drive and a focus for the messenger, and demonstrated the essential nature of the maenads; peaceful and gentle for the most part, but easily tripped into frenzy by the effect of the drum - the god's rhythm. I believe this visual layering gave the scene a multi-dimensional depth. It appealed to the senses, as well as getting the information across.

For the second messenger speech (portrayed by Greg Schneider), the chorus was already in a very agitated state when the messenger arrived. The guard who had followed Pentheus to the mountain on his spying mission came back to report his ghastly death. He interrupted the chorus who had been singing and rhythmically speaking the invocation of Pentheus' death. They were caught in their own spell when the guard arrived with "Oh house, oh famous house." The effect of an interrupted moment was achieved by having the chorus freeze and turn to him when he spoke. Compared to their frenzied behaviour just moments before, they were relatively calm when they sang to him "What news from the bacchae?" The sound of the women suddenly singing together against the hard words of the guard gave what I hoped would be a supernatural effect. When he started to tell his story, the maenads crowded around him, seeming to prop him up. At first they listened, facing forward as if watching the scene that the guard described. For a while the only sound was the messenger's voice, and the soft panting of the women. Then as Pentheus approached his own inevitable death, the drums started again. The chorus responded with their bodies. They pawed at the guard as if trying to pull more information from his clothing. They caressed and clawed him. This made a striking visual image and once again enhanced the dangerous aspect of the women. Finally as the frenzy built, they broke from him as if he had disappeared and were caught in their own dance. The guard announced his plan to leave Thebes, and it was visually clear why. With his last piece of advice to the audience, "to know your human limits, to revere the gods, is the noblest and I think the wisest course that mortal men can follow," everything on stage froze. I hoped the effect would be as if time had stopped and this drop of wisdom was the only thing that rang out. A second later the frenzy resumed and the guard fled the stage. What I liked about the final effect of this scene was that it maintained the urgency of the action, leading up to Agave's entrance with Pentheus' head, which I felt was the point at which everything started to wind down.

The messenger speeches were two of my favourite scenes (apart from the odes), and I hope provided a compelling and dynamic picture, while physicalizing the relationship of the messengers to their audience.

## **Working with the Guards**

For the guards, I wanted them to have a pre-dawn patrol in the pre-show minutes before the start of the play. I felt this would set the tone for the show, and for Thebes as a police state. I also wanted to make maximum use of the actors at my disposal. To this end, I double cast the roles of Messengers #1 and #2, Tiresias, and Agave, and cast four more actors to play Guard #1 (Chris Cully - who speaks to Pentheus about the capture of the Stranger), a guard captain (Curt McKinstry), and two non-speaking guards (Kelly Abrams and Dom Poulin). Originally I had double-cast the actor playing Cadmus as a guard, but health prevented him from remaining one. This gave us an army of eight to work against the chorus numbering twelve.

Working with the actors playing the guards was always pleasant. Even the guard captain, who had no actual lines, was always eager and enthusiastic about the work. This was where it really paid off in the auditions to look for performers who could approach things creatively and imaginatively.

When it was time to deal with the pre-dawn patrol, I told the actors what I wanted: a rhythmic, demonstration that would read as militaristic and also introduce people to the spirit of this production. In other words, repetition and ritual would be important, as well as a sense of the rhythm of the body telling a story. They were to provide a strong contrast to the kind of movement exhibited by the women. In terms of the Laban work we did early on, they were to think of working along a dimensional scale; stable, linear, side to side or front to back, with little if no diagonal or twisting motions. They were prompted to use their voices and their bodies to make sound. The captain of the guard was given a whistle to signify his leadership. With these guidelines, I sent them into another part of the rehearsal hall to develop it among themselves while I worked with some of the other actors. When they were called back in, the routine they had come up with was quite wonderful.

With an admirable sense of the task at hand and the ability to work collaboratively, they had developed a patrol that was rigid, rhythmic, and dynamic, that showed a remarkable sense of character and unity. It all had the look and sound of a cross between a military manoeuvre and modern dance.

The patrol started with the sound of a sharp whistle, followed by the guards exploding out from inside the palace. They took up positions around the perimeter of the stage and at the top of the palace. The captain of the guard barked inarticulate orders, and the guards responded with strong, inarticulate sounds. One guard initiated the patrol and stomped steadily in one direction, and then in the opposite. At each turn, another guard would come in step until all of them were in synch, marching back and forth. On the captain's whistle, they would come into they would stop and prepare for a short drill. Each guard had their own aggressive gesture and sound in response to the captain's bark. When one guard failed to respond, the others gave a momentary shiver. The captain approached and struck down the guard who had been remiss. On reissuing the inarticulate command, the guard would finally respond. This little detail gave a wonderful sense of relationship between the captain and his crew, and the slight responses of the guards and the way they coloured their uniform actions gave them a distinct sense of personality.

At this point I was quite impressed. They continued to perfect their synchronicity as we rehearsed. During one run, my supervisor mentioned that he wished there could be a little more variety. Taking this cue, I immediately returned to my talented group and asked them to expand their routine further, striving toward rhythmic variety. Without delay, they were given some space and some time on their own and within an hour they had added a neat new wrinkle to their routine. On the whistle of their commander, they took up another set of positions around the set. Each then began their own personal rhythm, one at a time. One marched regularly on the spot, one in double-time, others in varied patterns. They had created percussion with their bodies. It was thoroughly distinct from the percussion of the chorus and was marvelously hard-edged and at the same time, dance-like.

I have never worked so little with a group of actors, to receive such impressive results.

In other places in the production the guards were used as a percussive medium. Whether it was slapping their night-sticks in time, or laughing or calling in unison, or stomping, they were an absorbing unit to watch, and really did become a non-speaking, aggressively masculine counterpart to the other chorus of women on stage. The tension between these two choruses helped, I believe, to heighten the tension between Dionysus and Pentheus on stage.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE PRODUCTION IN REVIEW

In looking back on the production as a whole, with the perspective that time gives, I am confronted by a variety of mixed feelings. After all, in a number of ways, I set out what I wanted to accomplish: I produced a work of Greek tragedy with a student cast, in six weeks alone, that was true to the essence of the text as I saw it, which was not dull or painfully academic. I wanted to produce a piece of theatre that both connoisseurs and initiates could appreciate; something that was innately theatrical and not merely a film put on stage. I wanted to bring the chorus back to life by having them sing and dance and speak rhythmically to prove that this was a stylised work, not a naturalistic one. I wanted first year drama students who dreaded reading Greek classics in school to discover that these plays are actually very interesting; that they are full of passion and power. I wanted ritual, masks, movement, music, poetry and spectacle. I wanted to put the “theatre” back into “theatrical”. I wanted a lot of things...

I wanted EVERYTHING and what I got back was A LOT, including the experience of trying to pull it off.

Some specific things:

Overall I was quite happy with the effects of the lighting. The “dawn to dusk” metaphor was very useful. If there was one thing I was not entirely sure of, perhaps it was the practise of keeping the house lights up during the performance. Unfortunately we weren’t actually on a hillside in the open air, and nothing was going to reproduce that feel from inside a concrete theatre - no matter how well lit. I am not sure if keeping the house lights up helped to make the audience aware of itself as an audience and therefore part of the performance, or not. However, I do think it was a worthwhile experiment.

I really believe that not having the proper masks for rehearsals, comes near to defeating the purpose of having masks at all. What I have learned is that if one believes in something intuitively, there is probably a sensible reason for it. I should have trusted my own instincts, and had the strength not to have backed down on the issue of masks.

I was disappointed in the breakdown in communication that occurred between the costume designer and myself. It is important to remember that even when two people seem to agree, by virtue of each person being an individual, they are destined to see things from their own unique perspective. Thus, even though I thought that the designer and I were fully agreed on a number of

things, it seems in fact we were quite at odds without knowing it. As a prime example, we agreed on the design for Tiresias. Having seen the sketch, I made certain assumptions about the construction of the garment, just as Ms. Ross had made other assumptions about the handling of the character on stage. I thought that because the designer had seen the actor moving about vigorously on stage, Ms. Ross would accommodate the costume to his actions. When the costume bared more flesh than anticipated, the designer believed that it was the fault of the actor not to accommodate his actions to fit the costume. It is an understandable misunderstanding. Although I don't believe that a designer and director have to be at cross purposes, nevertheless each have their own agendas, and a clash is very possible if there is not clear communication at every moment. Ms. Ross and I experienced a variety of these misunderstandings, and I was certainly remiss in not taking a closer supervisory role at every stage of the procedure.

I also question the practice of having two MFA candidates work on the same show. I thought it was an excellent idea to begin with, but looking back, I wonder if we both did not have too much at stake to work effectively with each other, and were more inflexible than we might have been otherwise.

Although I will stand by my decision to have the guards appear unmasked at the end of the show, and the decision also to have Pentheus' decapitated head appear unmasked, there are other decisions that I made that I do not feel the same passion for. Pentheus' bloody body parts, for example, never really gave the effect I wanted. The foam used to make the body made it seem too light, and although I wanted the pieces painfully bloody and gruesome, the red mass didn't really read from in the audience. In retrospect I would have like to have had something not quite as specific (as identifiable body parts), but more grotesque. Perhaps a pile of something hot, and heavy, wet and visibly steaming under a white sheet. After all, the more grizzly the impression given by the body bits, the more repulsion mixed with sympathy (in other words, awe) do we, as an audience, feel towards Agave. However, this is a stylistic criticism. There are more personal criticisms to come.

In retrospect, I wish that I had spent more time with the actors. After two and a half weeks the chorus was introduced into formal rehearsals, and as a result, the whole pattern of rehearsal changed. Where rehearsals had been intimate, now they were crowded. And where before I was spending more individual, exclusive time with the actors, now I had to concern myself with

endless amounts of blocking; integrating the chorus into scenes that until now had been very private. I believe the actors may have felt a bit invaded by the chorus, and perhaps a little neglected. I perceived that some of the actors felt a sense of betrayal, or abandonment. Whether it was an actual perception or something I projected onto the actors out of my own guilt, I will never wholly know. I suspect it was a combination of the two.

Nevertheless, that there was real tension between the actors and the chorus is certain. This had good and bad repercussions on the play. The guards and the speaking actors stayed together (with the exception of Agave), as did the chorus members. Like her character, the actress playing Agave seemed to hover between two worlds, not fitting wholly with either. This helped the performers to feel allegiance with their respective groups on stage and experience the sense of alienation and fear they must have for each other. However, it also created a dangerous situation where the line between performer and character on stage became increasingly grey.

The evidence of this appeared on stage during the performance on the first Friday in the run. There had been considerable tension between the actor playing the second messenger, and the chorus. However, this had always been an undercurrent outside of rehearsals, and nothing would have led me to anticipate the kind of behaviour that emerged on this particular night. The chorus members had always clawed and caressed the messenger during his speech. It was a chilling effect. However, whatever animosity there existed between the performers began to erupt during the scene. The intensity of the chorus' actions increased; they began to pull at the messenger's clothing, and even to rip it. The messenger responded in kind, trying to swat the chorus members away. They reacted as their characters would, and began pulling harder. A battle started up between the two factions. Eventually, the messenger felt threatened enough that he broke away from the blocking entirely and finished his speech from the top of the palace. The chorus members below looked on in bewilderment. The rest of the play progressed normally.

Although at first this may seem like an insignificant occurrence, it is in fact highly irregular for an actor to take this kind of initiative and break the established blocking to this extent. It is significant in that he felt compelled to this action by the perceived malice of the chorus members on stage. Also significant was the fact that this was the first evening in the run that I was unable to attend.

After the performance, the horrified stage manager called a general meeting. A heated dispute



occurred. Chaos erupted when the choreographer, who had a past history of tension with the actor playing the second messenger, physically attacked him. They had to be broken apart and the meeting fell to ruins. There was a general sense of confusion in the air. No one could sufficiently explain events. Later in the evening and the next day, when I talked to some of the actors involved, they were still at a loss to give reasons for the outbreak on or off stage. People were genuinely upset about the turn of events, and did not expect them to reoccur.

Before the next evening's performance the producer, G. Brian Smith, gave a pep talk to the actors. Everyone had calmed down considerably and it seemed remarkable that there had been any unpleasantness at all. Sheepish, might be a word to describe the feeling in the air. The performance that followed was exceptional. Everyone seemed refreshed and committed.

There are two ways to look at the events of Friday evening. One is rational and practical (like Pentheus), and one is more imaginative (like Dionysus). Each are valid, depending on your viewpoint. The first is that there was tension between the chorus members and the second messenger that ran far deeper than either party let on. Subconsciously the actors might have felt a greater degree of liberty knowing their director (watch guard) was absent for the first time. The scene between the second messenger and the chorus was an ideal vent for the animosity that the two parties felt for each other, and real emotions superseded common sense for the moment. This is an entirely likely explanation.

On the other hand, the more mystical solution is that in our struggle to bring religion and a sense of awe back into the theatre, we may have actually invoked the spirit of the god Dionysus. Let me explain further. As I said earlier in the introduction, I believe Dionysus is real. I believe he is that spirit within us that is tied to the natural, the instinctive, the non-rational, the ecstatic. I believe he moves us when we listen to the rhythm; in the music of the drums, or in the traffic outside the window, or in our bodies, or in our souls. I think the chorus members on stage that night were listening to this inner rhythm so closely that it became intimidating to the other actor on stage. When chorus members were questioned about their activity on stage, they remembered nothing unusual until the moment that the actor broke away from them. From the messenger's perspective, he seemed to feel that the performers in the chorus were not listening as actors. He recalled seeing blank faces; a mindless unity. This upset him as he didn't feel part of a reciprocal action on stage. To me, this faintly exhibits qualities of an ecstatic trance.

It is impossible to know from the minds of the people involved what really motivated them that evening. I would like to think that the spirit of Dionysus had something to do with it. It was somewhat comforting to know that after that evening's performance the audience did not notice anything was amiss. A friend who had seen that particular show had singled out that scene as a very powerful moment. He had no idea anything had gone wrong.

I have thought about what I could have done to preempt the now obvious discord between the actors and the chorus. I know that I had wanted at least one rehearsal a week for the first two weeks to be devoted to a kind of "show and tell" for the actors and chorus to show off what they had been working on. This would have helped the performers to get a feel of how these two very different pieces of performance would fit in together. More importantly, it might have ensured that the speaking actors and the chorus members were not entirely alien to each other. However, at the time I didn't believe the schedule could accommodate it. As it was, I had exactly enough time to work through each of the speaking sections twice before the introduction of the chorus. Similarly, the chorus had exactly enough time to learn their songs and choreography, with nothing to spare. If I had it to do over again I would make a stronger effort to bring the two groups together more often, if only through a mutual warm-up before splitting into our respective rehearsals.

As for not spending enough time with the actors, I would have liked to have spent a full year working intensely with the actors in a "theatre laboratory" environment. Having the actors do some research themselves and share information with each other is one way to ensure a personal connection with the material. Also, an opportunity to delve intensively into expression through movement, speaking poetry, and mask work could have only increased the actors' comfort level and frankly, enjoyment in working in this genre, without the immediate pressure of performance, but certainly with this end in mind. In this way the entire cast could have had the time and opportunity to develop a fuller understanding of the style and period before even approaching the specific material of the Bacchae. The background and experimental work would have helped provide a solid intellectual, emotional, and physical basis for beginning work on the performance, and would incidentally allowed for the performance masks to be finished in time for the actors to begin working with them. I have personally seen the theatre laboratory environment work in other places for a variety of genres, including Restoration, Brecht, Melodrama, Commedia del'arte, and Greek Tragedy. And I would recommend this kind of approach to others for future ventures into

stylised forms of drama.

To look back one last time, I would have to say that the production of the Bacchae was a positive and challenging experience. For every criticism that I can level at myself, I can see an equal amount of wonderful things that came out of it. That we were able to produce this play in six weeks, and have it achieve the success and public appeal that it did, is already quite an achievement, in my opinion. That I could have gone farther with it, there is no doubt. But that we were able to expose young theatre practitioners to a unique and intense style of drama that they will rarely, if ever, be fortunate enough to be a part of again, was a thrill. Equally thrilling for me was demonstrating that Greek tragedy was still a vibrant, living genre that a contemporary audience could identify with, and be moved by. The stylistic challenge of bringing together masks, drums, singing, movement, poetry and plot in a way that is accessible and faithful to the spirit of tragedy was not only a worthwhile exercise but, I think, made for a winning evening of entertainment.

Despite flaws, I am proud of the experience of the Bacchae. In a society where we have collectively lost faith in following religion, studying philosophy or using science as ways to understand ourselves and our universe, I personally found a renewed energy - I will go so far as to call it spirituality - in bringing people together toward a common tender goal. In creating an ephemeral work of art, I found faith, awe, strength and devotion still exist. I found it in the people who gave so much of themselves to make this possible, and I found it in myself. If theatre must be my form of worship, then the Bacchae was my communion. I gave it freely then, and I give it again to you, now.

## APPENDIX 1

### SCENE BREAKDOWN

#### SECTION 1A: ENTER DIONYSUS

page 3-5

to "Dionysus calls to the chorus"

##### **DIONYSUS**

*Dionysus introduces himself and his purpose in incarnating himself as a mortal.*

#### SECTION 1B: ENTER THE CHORUS

page 5

to "Enter Chorus. Exit Dionysus."

##### **DIONYSUS**

*Dionysus summons the chorus - his followers, his warriors.*

#### SECTION 2: WORSHIPPERS OF DIONYSUS

page 5-17

choral song

##### **CHORUS**

*The chorus introduces themselves, and the religion of Dionysus.*

#### SECTION 3A: OLD FRIENDS (ENTER TIRESIAS)

page 17

from "Enter Tiresias" to "Enter Cadmus."

##### **TIRESIAS, CHORUS**

*Tiresias comes to call on his old friend Cadmus, taking him out to celebrate in honour of Dionysus.*

#### SECTION 3B: OLD FRIENDS (ENTER CADMUS)

page 17-19

to "Enter Pentheus."

##### **TIRESIAS, CADMUS, CHORUS**

*Horseplay between the two old men as they prepare to honour the god.*

#### SECTION 4A: DISSIN' GODS (ENTER PENTHEUS)

page 19

to "He sees Cadmus and Tiresias."

##### **PENTHEUS, TIRESIAS, CADMUS, GUARDS, CHORUS**

*Pentheus expresses distaste for the new religion, denies the godhead of Dionysus, and claims his sister Semele lied about her affair with Zeus.*

#### SECTION 4B: DISSIN' THE ELDERS

page 19-24

to "Exit Pentheus to the Palace. Exit Cadmus and Tiresias to Cithaeron."

##### **PENTHEUS, TIRESIAS, CADMUS, CHORUS LEADER, GUARDS, CHORUS**

*Tiresias and Cadmus argue in favour of the god: Tiresias, on the basis that Dionysus is the god of wine, which eases human suffering, and Cadmus, because a pious lie only adds glory to the family. Pentheus rejects both these arguments, and orders his guards to overturn Tiresias' altar, and search and retrieve the mysterious stranger who leads the Dionysian worshippers.*

**SECTION 5: THE WAY**

page 24-30

choral song

**CHORUS***The chorus sings the glories of wine, and instructs on the way to lead a Good Life.***SECTION 6: DIONYSUS BOUND**

page 30-34

to "The guards lead Dionysus off. Pentheus follows."

**DIONYSUS, PENTHEUS, GUARDS, CHORUS***The guards bring on the captured Dionysus, whom Pentheus interrogates. Frustrated with his enigmatic responses, Pentheus offends the god in three ways: by cutting his hair, removing his thyrsus, and sending him to be bound in the stables.***SECTION 7: BE WITH US**

page 34-38

choral song

**CHORUS***The chorus is outraged by Pentheus irreverent behaviour and calls the gods to witness.***SECTION 8: EARTHQUAKE!**

page 38-41

to "Enter Dionysus."

**VOICE OF DIONYSUS, CHORUS***The chorus trembles as Dionysus answers their prayer and shakes the Palace.***SECTION 9: ESCAPE**

page 41-42

to "Enter Pentheus and guards."

**DIONYSUS, CHORUS LEADER, CHORUS***Dionysus takes great pleasure in recounting to the chorus how he confounded Pentheus and escaped.***SECTION 10: INTERROGATION**

page 42-43

to "Enter Messenger."

**DIONYSUS, PENTHEUS, GUARDS***Pentheus and Dionysus confront each other briefly. Dionysus continues to rub Pentheus the wrong way.***SECTION 11: PASTORAL SCENE WITH MAENADS**

page 43-48

to "Exit Messenger."

**1ST MESSENGER, PENTHEUS, DIONYSUS, CHORUS***A rustic cowherd comes to tell Pentheus of the adventures of the Maenads on the mountain - the Theban women driven mad by Dionysus. They sleep, play the flute, suckle baby animals, but when provoked, they turn on a herd of cows and tear the animals to shreds.***SECTION 12A: LIKE A FIRE**

page 48-51

to "Exit Pentheus into the Palace."

**CHORUS LEADER, PENTHEUS, DIONYSUS, GUARDS, CHORUS**

*Pentheus threatens to wage war on the Bacchantes. Dionysus entices Pentheus to spy on them instead, and convinces him to go to the mountain disguised as a woman.*

#### **SECTION 12B: INTO THE NET**

page 51-52

to "Exit Dionysus into the Palace."

**DIONYSUS, CHORUS**

*Dionysus brags to the women about his success, and glories in his power.*

#### **SECTION THIRTEEN: IN BACCHUS**

page 52-58

**choral song**

**CHORUS**

*The chorus alternately longs for Bacchus, revels in the hunt, and explores Wisdom.*

#### **SECTION 14A: LITTLE BIRDS...**

page 58-61

to "Exit Pentheus to Cithaeron."

**DIONYSUS, PENTHEUS, GUARDS, CHORUS**

*Dionysus brings on Pentheus in his dress and waits on him. Pentheus enjoys his new status.*

#### **SECTION 14B: LISTEN TO ME!**

page 61

to "Exit Dionysus."

**DIONYSUS, CHORUS**

*Dionysus announces his victory.*

#### **SECTION 15: TO THE MOUNTAIN**

page 61-66

**choral song**

**CHORUS**

*In a frenzied dance, the chorus pray for and envision the destruction of Pentheus.*

#### **SECTION 16: SLAUGHTER**

page 66-71

to "Exit Messenger."

**2ND MESSENGER, CHORUS**

*A second messenger enters and gives the gruesome account of Pentheus' slaughter by his mother and the pack of raging Bacchantes, to the delight of the chorus.*

#### **SECTION 17: EXULT!**

page 71-72

to "Enter Agave."

**choral song**

**CHORUS**

*The chorus exult in the misery of Pentheus and Agave.*

#### **SECTION 18: AGAVE THE BLESSED**

page 72-76

duet with Agave

**AGAVE, CHORUS LEADER, CHORUS**

*Agave invites the chorus to feast with her, bearing the head of Pentheus, which she perceives as the head of a lion. The chorus responds with horror and pity.*

**SECTION 19: TROPHY**

page 76-77

to "Enter Cadmus, with attendants..."

**CHORUS LEADER, AGAVE***Agave proudly displays her trophy, and calls to her father and her son to share in her triumph.***SECTION 20A: REVELATION**

page 77-82

to "She kneels to the body of Pentheus."

**CADMUS, AGAVE, CHORUS LEADER, GUARDS, CHORUS***Cadmus brings Agave back to reality, and shows her the bloody remains of Pentheus, which have been partially reassembled.***SECTION 20B: LAST RITES**

page 81-82

to "Dionysus appears, as himself, above."

**AGAVE, CADMUS, GUARDS, CHORUS***Agave tends to her son, and mourns her crime.***SECTION 21: DIONYSUS THE GOD**

page 82-86

to "Exit Agave."

**DIONYSUS, CADMUS, AGAVE, GUARDS, CHORUS***Dionysus appears in his true form, and doles out punishments, exiling Agave and her father.***SECTION 22: THE DIVINE**

page 86-87

**choral song****CHORUS, DIONYSUS***The chorus reverently closes the circle: "the gods work in mysterious ways."*

**APPENDIX 2****CAST LIST**

Dionysus	Wade Laing
Pentheus	Stephen Massicotte
Cadmus	Michael Baird
Agave	Reyna Giroux
Tiresias	Shaker Paleja
Messenger #1	Mark Gatha
Messenger #2	Greg Schneider
Squad Leader	Curt McKinstry
Guard #1	Chris Cully
Guard #2	Dom Poulin
Guard #3	Kelly Abrams
Chorus Leader	Melanie Windle
Chorus	Dodi Enno
Chorus	Erin Gatha
Chorus	Cathy Hergott
Chorus	Sharia Herman
Chorus	Moni Janssen
Chorus	Melanie Jones
Chorus	Cori Pfannmüller
Chorus	Andrea Revel
Director	Nicole Zylstra
Designer (set and costumes)	Sheena Ross
Designer (lights)	Brian Kirby
Asst. Designer (lights)	Kim Stewart
Choreographer/chorus	Anita Mioti
Composer	Brigit Knecht
Rhythm/chorus	Nicola Elson
Dramaturge	Jennifer Anderson
Stage manager	Luke Dahlgren
Asst. S.M. (costume)	Heather Ward
Asst. S.M. (props)	Janet LaMonte
Wardrobe mistress	Lisa Roberts
Props master	Werner Karsten
Producer	G. Brian Smith
	University of Calgary



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