

Lecture: 8

1	<p>Dionysus as a god is not originally the god of wine, solely. Originally, he was the god of ‘all fluid nature.’ Anything that flows or oozes from trees and fruits. In other words, not just grapes and grape juice, but sap and syrup and anything that is ‘goodness’ – anything that comes out of those types of things. He is what is called a ‘vegetative’ god; not because he sits and watches TV all of the time, but rather, because he is always associated with vegetative parts of nature. This is why, in <i>The Bacchae</i>, which you should have read for today, when the Bacchantes, when the maenads are gripping rocks with their fingers and tearing them, when they are ripping at the ground with their fingernails, milk, honey, and water are spewing out everywhere. That’s because of the associations between fluid nature and Dionysus. As I’ve said before with Apollo, and just like Apollo, Dionysus has these contested origins. We’re not exactly sure where his worship originally started. There are two theories, the old theory and the new theory (the next slide has the new theory). The old theory, which held up until the mid 20th century, was that Dionysus was not one of the original twelve Olympian gods, but rather he was an import, an import from Lycia. You’ll remember one of the epithets of Apollo was “Leukios;” well, that’s also an epithet for Dionysus. As a Lycian import, he would have been Eastern. You may recall in the opening speech of the play <i>The Bacchae</i>, when he comes out and Dionysus says, “I am come, the son of Zeus, Dionysus.” He goes on and talks about all the places he’s been. One of the places mentioned is Bactria. For whatever it’s worth, Bactria is the ancient Greek term for present-day Afghanistan. That’s fascinating for two reasons. One of which is, my goodness, the ancient Greeks got all the way east as Afghanistan. Also, that points out that Dionysus has these eastern, that is to say non-Greek, traditions and origins, in the same way that Apollo does. A big difference, though, is that (and this is especially played out in their types of worship) Apollo is a very Greek god with a very Greek form of worship, and his religion was staid, it was sort of pomp and circumstance; it was very traditional. Dionysus worship was a little bit off-kilter. We’re going to talk about this more later in the lecture, but basically to worship Dionysus was to revel and to sing and dance, to get swept up in the moment of celebration. It’s called an ‘ecstatic religion.’ Though Apollo might have also been an Eastern import, he very quickly becomes Greek. Dionysus, though he’s a Greek god and the Greeks worshipped him, to the point where a literature grew up because of Dionysus (Greek tragedy, Attic tragedy). He’s obviously Greek but there are aspects of him that were decidedly non-Greek and very Dionysian as opposed to Apollonian.</p>
2	<p>So, as I said, there’s an old theory and a new theory. While the old theory purports that Dionysus was an eastern import, the new theory doesn’t necessarily suggest something different, but it does suggest it in a different way. It begins with this guy named Heinrich Schliemann, who was a German business man, though he later became a US citizen. He was sort of an amateur archaeologist, though the archaeology he did is some of the most significant, ever, in terms of the Classical (ancient Greek/Roman) world. Among other things, he was a Homer fanatic. He just loved</p>

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Homer. He read him religiously in the original Greek. He was an incredible polyglot (someone who knows multiple languages; you can be bi-lingual, tri-lingual, but once you start getting in to four or five languages, you're called a polyglot). Schliemann knew about 18 languages; he knew just about every language of Europe, including Greek and Latin. He was a pretty sharp guy. His wife was Russian and he actually opened a business in Sacramento, CA. For whatever reason (I can tell you, I'm from CA and it makes no sense), he preferred Sacramento even to San Francisco. That's absurd to me, but okay. Everyone likes something different, I guess. Anyway, having read Homer so much, he decided: "I know what I can do; I can use Homer as an atlas. He tells us where everything is." So, Schliemann goes to Turkey and he digs at a site called Hirsalik and after various excavations at this dig, Schliemann claims to have found Troy. This is based on a bunch of artifacts and other archaeological evidence he finds from the Bronze Age. He says, "Hey, this is Troy. It must be. This is just where Homer tells me it is."

Now, this is a slightly controversial topic (more controversial than 'slight' among some scholars), but it's not even a major question even among scholars. There's some controversy over whether he actually found Troy because some scholars say his findings were fraudulent and that he planted things there. Also, the problem is that Homer is notoriously bad at his geography; you can hardly rely on Homer for anything in that respect. So, the idea that maybe he actually found Troy is a little hard to swallow if he used Homer alone. But, he may have had perfect luck. While there is controversy about whether or not he actually found Troy, the fact remains that he did find Bronze Age stuff. That alone makes his discovery particularly significant. After saying, "I found Troy!" he goes to the Peloponnese, where he has another dig at this place called Mycenae. Mycenae is the home place of Agamemnon, who is an extremely important character in the *Iliad*. If you saw the movie *Troy*, which incidentally completely butchers all the stories surrounding the Trojan war (it's a terrible, terrible thing and poorly acted, anyway – if this were a normal class in a classroom, maybe we would watch some scenes so I could point out just how bad things are in it), you might remember the character Agamemnon, who was played by Brian Cox, the big guy with the beard and the long hair who is such a jerk to Achilles (Brad Pitt) throughout the whole movie. That's Agamemnon. When he goes to Mycenae, he also says, "hey, look, I found the tomb of Agamemnon. Here's his death mask." He found this gold death mask, which is a funerary mask you put over a dead man's face before burial. Again, whether or not he actually found this, because the chances of Agamemnon actually having been a real man are slim, certainly when you're using Homer to go find him. But he did it, again; he found ancient, Bronze Age stuff. The fact that he did that is very significant. So, other Bronze Age remains were also found at Knossos, on Crete. I mentioned Crete before; it's that big island south of mainland Greece. Among the Bronze Aged things found on Crete, were a bunch of writing tablets that had two different types of text on them. Of the two different types of text, one is called Linear A, and the other is called Linear B. These are very, very old forms of writing. Linear B, it seems, is pre-Greek, but is related to Greek in some way. Linear A has never been translated; we've never decoded Linear A. We don't

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know anything that it says. Linear B was decoded in 1952, by these two guys named Michael Ventris and John Chadwick, and it is clear enough that it is related to Greek, it's just a very early form of it. Not only is it very early, it's also not very interesting. It's just storehouse records and courtly records, taking account of things that go on at a royal court. It's boring. There's really nothing exciting about it; the only excitement surrounding Linear B is that we found it and we figured out how to decode it. However, among the gods that are listed on these tablets in Linear B (because they would write things like, 'we have 400 crates of grain from Demeter'), is Dionysus' name. This is where this all comes together and it's very important.

If indeed Dionysus was an import from the East, if he's not originally a Greek god, he was imported into the Greek pantheon really, really, really long ago. Pre-Bronze Age, right? He was already being worshipped in the Bronze Age, which means he must have been there at least by that time, if not quite a bit earlier. So, if he is a god from the East, and not originally a Greek god, he is so old that he essentially is a Greek god. This is what is so interesting; unlike Apollo, he doesn't go through any changes, it seems, to make him more Greek. One implication of that is that the Greeks saw the need to keep him that way in order to give balance to Apollo and Apollonian ideas. Whereas Apollo is all about calm and rationality, Dionysus is all about inspiration and action, revelry and losing oneself. So, it provides a balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. There is certainly significance in that.

3

Like Hermes, Dionysus is one of those gods who is usually pretty easy to recognize in art. This is because his iconographic features are pretty unique and it's hard to miss them. Of those iconographic features that are specific to Dionysus, one of them is the thyrsus. The thyrsus is this long staff that has a bunch of plant stuff at the top, usually some sort of grape vine, some fruit maybe. Basically, it's a sort of a dancing celebration stick; you'll see it in some pictures that we'll come across next. That's pretty unique to anything to do with Dionysus; he himself is not always carrying one, but someone in his attendance is. He's very typically wearing either a fawn skin or a lion skin around his shoulders or draped across his back. Next, this is where you have to be a little careful: Apollo, remember, he had his laurel wreath around his head. Dionysus is almost always wearing an ivy crown or a grape leaf crown. They look a little bit different, the ivy or the grape leaf, versus the laurel leaf. Be careful when you see those, but there are other things that should give it away. Sometimes Dionysus can be young, and other times he's an older guy, with a beard. But he doesn't have to be bearded; even when he's a little bit older, he is still sometimes without a beard. So you can't always rely on that, but you can almost rely on the fact that he's going to look drunk. He may have a vacant look in his eye, his mouth might be hanging open, people around him or maybe possible he himself will be dancing, his hair might be mussed up, and very, very frequently he will also be holding either a wine cup or a mixing cup. The reason I say 'mixing cup' (we'll talk more about this later, actually, when we're discussing the *Odyssey*) is that Greek wine was extremely potent; it was very strong and it wasn't something that you would just drink right out of a flask. You would never drink wine 'neat' (when you drink something neat, it means you don't mix it with water); you just wouldn't do that with Greek wine. In terms of strength, it

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	<p>was probably more like a brandy or a cognac; it was still made from grapes but it was almost more like liquor. The Greeks would mix it with water, which is why I said both ‘drinking cup/mixing bowl’.</p>
5	<p>Now I want to say a few words about the Attic tragedian, the Attic playwright Euripides, who is the playwright for the <u>Bacchae</u>, which you were to have read for today’s lecture. Euripides’ most famous plays are the <u>Bacchae</u>, which we’ve read, the <u>Medea</u>, which we’re going to read, and the <u>Hippolytus</u>, which we won’t be reading in this class but we will read Hippolytus’ myth in Ovid. Euripides was Athenian, born around 480 B.C.E; he dies in about 407 or 406. The <u>Bacchae</u> doesn’t get performed until after his death; his son produced it and brought it to the stage. It wouldn’t appear that he won very many of the competitions, for with the dramatic festivals, there were competitions attached. Euripides, among other attributes of his plays, he is often considered to be the most philosophical of the Attic tragedians, which is not to say that Sophocles or Aeschylus weren’t perfectly philosophical, but they were less philosophical on purpose. In other words, they approached major themes that are timeless and very important, but they weren’t as necessarily philosophical in the sense of, “Whoa, that guy is just so philosophical I can hardly handle it sometimes.” Euripides is very deep; he often explores women’s issues and the role of women. He has female characters that are quite strong. He also often explores religious issues. This is as opposed to Sophocles, who’s often exploring the issue of fate in its relation to human interaction, so like Oedipus or the story of Ajax (Achilles had this incredibly wonderful armor. After his death, Odysseus and Ajax fight over the armor; they have a debate and Ajax loses the debate. Because Ajax feels that it was a stain to his honor to not have the armor, he kills himself). So Sophocles asks the questions like: What is it to be a good man? What is it to be brave? What is it to be a strong soldier? He asks those types of questions, which are philosophical, but Euripides explores ideas of spirituality and weakness of will. Euripides asks questions like: What is it to worship the gods? Are there gods? So, he’s more philosophical in that sense. He’s also noted for having a more colloquial style in his Greek. He wasn’t as ‘old school’ as Aeschylus, who was all about using these old, grandiose forms in his poetry. Rather, Euripides introduced newer Greek forms, more contemporary speech, less heroic characters (people who you felt a little more ambiguous about, ‘should I be rooting for this character? She’s clearly the hero of the play but she’s going to kill her children). These are the things that set Euripides apart from his predecessors, Sophocles and Aeschylus.</p>
6	<p>So, what are these things: Attic theater, Greek tragedy? Well, you remember the word Attic, which means ‘from the area around Athens.’ The first thing (I sort of mentioned this in the 2nd or 3rd lecture, but we need to revisit it here, now that you’ve read one of these plays) is that it’s poetry; it was metrical. It actually followed a metrical scheme. All tragedies were written in <i>iambic tetrameter</i>, which would be six iambs in a line. So, you would have 2 iambs, 2 iambs, 2 iambs, and that was a line. There was room for some variation in that. It was not initially intended just for recitation, but rather to be sung out. The word tragedy means something to the effect of ‘goat song’ (<i>tragoedia</i>). It started out, before it became a play as we would recognize a play, it</p>

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started out as choral performances. You would have 50-60 men lined up and they would sing choriamb. Eventually what happened was that one of those choral performers stepped out of the chorus line and had interactions with the chorus. This was really the birth of tragedy and theater as we think of it today. Originally you had a choral performance and then someone stepped out. It wasn't an actor who did this; it was probably the poet or producer who made this choice. Once that person stepped outside the chorus line, they became an actor and not just a singer. The tragedies were performed during official festivals that were sponsored by the state. By 'sponsored by the state,' I mean: if you were an actor, you got leave from the military. You would get military leave to perform. Additionally, the city subsidized these performances so that if you were poor and you couldn't necessarily give up a day's work or if you couldn't make the journey to the center of Athens, you could get cheaper tickets (grants, essentially) to go to these plays. What is extremely vital to remember is that these were religious festivals. The religion didn't necessarily come first, but it was very central. Even though people may have gone just to see the plays in the end, they were still immersed in all the religious functions and festivities that surrounded this. There were days of religious festivals leading up to the tragedies, so you couldn't help but take part in the religious aspect of these festivals. There were two main festivals. There was the Lenaia, which was less prestigious than the one in the spring; the Lenaia took place in the wintertime. And then there was the great Dionysia, sometimes called the 'City Dionysia,' which was a springtime festival and was more prestigious. For whom is this prestige an issue? It was an issue for the playwrights, because the playwrights submitted plays and it was a competition. Getting your plays performed at the city Dionysia was a prestigious thing because that meant your plays were better. Both of these festivals, the Lenaia and the great Dionysia, were festivals to Dionysus. That's why we're talking about this; this was all about worshipping Dionysus in a very controlled way in the city. At each festival, there would be three playwrights who would each produce a trilogy plus one play, called a satyr play, which was a sort of slapstick comedy. All tragedies were written as parts of trilogies; we only have one surviving trilogy and that is Aeschylus' Orestia. People often think that Sophocles' Oedipus the King, Antigone, and Oedipus at Colonus all make up a trilogy, but they don't. In fact, they were written over the course of almost his whole literary career; one was written in his youth, one in his middle age, and one when he was an older man. That's not a trilogy. Basically, when he wrote *Oedipus the King*, he would have written two other plays to be performed at the same time. Similarly, the Bacchae, which you read for today, would have had two other tragedies attached to it and also a satyr play, a slapstick farce, also attached. They all would have been performed. The trilogies were linked together, but not necessarily by plot. It's not necessarily that one play would be performed, then the story continued in the second play, and continued or wrapped up in the third. They may only be connected thematically: there may be three very disparate myths being told, but all of them may share a similar thematic concern. As it happens, the Orestia of Aeschylus is a set of three plays that follow each other in storyline, but that would not necessarily have been the norm. As I said before, Euripides doesn't seem to have won many of the competitions associated with these festivals, but he did certainly do well at them. He

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came in second or something, and just being selected says a lot. But he just didn't win that many, considering the amount of plays that he wrote. We have more surviving plays of Euripides' than of any other playwright. He enjoyed a re-flowering later on after his death. It should also be noted that the Bacchae is the only play that is actually about Dionysus. All the other tragedies are *for* Dionysus, they celebrate Dionysus, and Dionysus is associated with tragedy, but the Bacchae is the only one that actually tells us any kind of a story about the god of wine.

7

Now I want to talk a little bit about the actual theater itself, the structure of the theater. In Athens, the main theater was called the theater of Dionysus; it was located below the Acropolis. The Acropolis (as you can see in the images below) was this promontory that stuck up above the city, and on it is the famous Parthenon (which I'm sure you've heard of) and other religious and governmental installations that made it always in view. Among other things, the treasury was located up there. The theater of Dionysus, as you can see on the diagram of the Acropolis (the top, left-hand picture), was located on the bottom corner. The thing with the theaters is that they were huge. The largest that we have is the theater at Epidaurus, which you'll see in a second. For as big as these structures were, they had to accommodate 30,000-50,000 people. It's been estimated that if you went to the theater and you were sitting in the amphitheater, in the *theatron* (we'll talk more about what the different parts of the theater are called in a second), you had about 14 inches of space for yourself. Hold up your hands and make about 14 inches. I mean, I'm a big guy, I'm 6'7", so I would barely fit in that at all, but I think most people would find that a little cramped. Even the skinniest person would find that a little cramped because they would stay there all day long and watch many plays. We're talking about watching 4 or more plays, plus religious rites throughout a whole day. There were vendors, there were people coming around and selling stuff, just like at a football game. I think the best comparison to this would be going to a PSU football game and sitting in the student section (not having a seat) where everyone is crammed in there and the person to your left is not smelling so great and the person to your right is drunk and about to get sick. There wasn't the disgusting element in the Greek theater, but the discomfort was certainly there because they sat on marble or stone. There's a picture in the right-hand corner of the page, and you can see: that's just rock they're sitting on. This was not a particularly comfortable thing to do, but people loved it. It was such a change from their routines.

As I say, they were built on inclines or some kind of hill and because of that they had perfect acoustics. The Greeks figured that out really early and someone sitting at the very back would have had no problem hearing actors on the stage. This is important because the actors obviously didn't have microphones and the actors actually sang through a mask (through either a paper mâché, a wooden, or even a clay mask). It was still not a problem to hear it. I've heard stories that if you go, even today, you can drop a coin and hear it. We're talking almost 'hear a pin drop' type of acoustics. The acoustics worked so well because of the shape of the theater and the way the seats are graduated up a hill, but this isn't science class so we won't be going too much into that. But remarkable that even through masks this was possible. So, check out these pictures below and you can see 1) the plan of the Acropolis 2) how the Parthenon fit

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into it all because that's a very important temple to Athena and 3) what is left of the theater of Dionysus at Athens today.

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What you're looking at here is a drawing of the layout of a Greek theater. I do want you to know the different parts of the theater because it's important to know what the playwrights themselves were working with when they were writing this and then what the producers were working with when they went to stage these things. So, looking at this top image, I've labeled the parts for you. The *skene* is that one-story building at the back (this is where we get our word scene); they would paint the *skene* to depict maybe the countryside or a palace setting or something like that. Jutting off from the *skene*, the part that actually looks like a stage as we know it: that's called the *proskenion*. That was a platform that came off the building and it would maybe be used to show action inside and outside. You could bring action out through those doors and the audience could know that they were supposed to be 'indoors' now, but there were other ways of doing that. Then we also have the *orchestra* (C) and that's the whole, round, open area in the middle. There's an altar there, just right in the center. The *orchestra* is the whole open area there and 'orchestra' just means, 'the dancing area.' So, we have *skene*, which is that back building (it's actually inside the *skene* where there would be costume changes – that was the equivalent to our 'backstage' nowadays and the *proskenion* is just a part of that). The *orchestra*, as I said, was the dancing area.

The part labeled D, that's the *theatron*, and although the drawing doesn't suggest what it is, the *theatron* was where people sat. That comes from the Greek word *theaomai*, which means, 'I see.' *theaomai* is the word from which we get 'theater' and 'theatrical' – it has to do with seeing and taking part in a visual experience. The last part that I want you to know is the *eisodos* (E). I want to be sure to point out that there are arrows that run off of the letter, which point towards little pathways between the *skene* and the *theatron*. What I want to point out is that those arrows aren't pointing to something specific, but rather that they are pointing to exits. The way the action of the play worked, if someone exited to the left, they would say, "I'm going to the woods," and it was understood then, for the rest of the play, that going to the left exit meant you were going to the woods, whereas going to the right meant you were going to the city, for example. Those were the two places where the actors could come and go and where the chorus could file in and out. There were several options, then. You can see on the *skene* that you have three doors to choose from: people could come in and out of those doors, or they could come in and out on the *eisodos* on the sides. Scroll down the screen a little bit to the image in the middle, which shows machinery and scenery for Euripides' Hippolytus. I want you to look at this and ignore most of the words. It's not important that this is actually for the Hippolytus (where it says, 'shrine of Artemis, for example – that is not important). I want you to notice is the person that appears to be being hung above where it says, 'shrine of Artemis.' That is a person, one of the actors, hooked up to the crane. The crane is called the *mechane*, that's the Greek word for it. We have a Latin term, and it's still used today: '*deus ex machina*,' which literally means 'god out of the machine.' What would happen was: at the end of some Greek tragedies, when the action seemed irresolvable, a god (usually a god from

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the play) would appear above the *skene* or the *proskenion*, attached to the *mechane*, the crane, the flying machine. Some action would take place with the god up there, flying and being a god, and that would help to resolve all of the action. Maybe someone would be killed, maybe someone would be rescued, or a god would make some speech that resolved the action in some way. This was a very dramatic thing; people came to expect it sometimes, but you never actually knew if the playwright was going to use it. It was exciting because you would actually be able to hear that crane creak as it came around and you would see the actor appear, sort of hovering above the audience. This would have been cool because you wouldn't have known if there were going to be a *deus ex machina* in the play until you heard that creaking noise of the crane (the *mechane*) coming around; you can see this on both sides. Of the plays we're going to read in this class, the only play that would have used the *mechane* for a *deus ex machina* would have been the Medea, and even that wasn't a *deus ex machina*, but the use of the crane would have certainly been there.

The other thing I want you to notice on this image is on the bottom right side and is called the *ekkyklema*. The *ekkyklema* (I like to call it the 'dramatic wheelbarrow') was basically a plank on wheels or a cart on wheels that allowed you to roll people in and out of the *skene* and out from the *proskenion*. That's often how you would bring 'inside action' outside; in other words, when the *ekkyklema* came out, that meant we were indoors for the audience. Also, that was the way to show a dead body. You were not allowed to stage deaths in the Greek theater. A death did not get staged. There's only one play that we have that has a death on stage and that's Sophocles' *Ajax*. When he kills himself over the armor of Achilles, he kills himself onstage. There are other things that are death-like, and we see some pretty gruesome things, like in the Bacchae. When she tears his head off and brings it in and shows it to her father, when she's so excited... probably what would have happened, because they all wore masks, what they probably did was to take the acting mask for Pentheus, painted it red or something, and actually brought the mask onstage. They might have even draped red fabric from the bottom, to represent guts or gore. They could have brought that mask out and it would be the 'head' you were used to seeing. They were able to do some pretty crazy things even though the technology they had (especially compared to a Hollywood movie today) seems very primitive and basic.

So, as I say, there only three actors in Euripides' time; there was only one actor when Aeschylus first started, and by the time Sophocles and Aeschylus were both working (they were contemporaries), two actors were being used. By the time Euripides was working (the same time as Sophocles; Sophocles was a contemporary to both Aeschylus and Euripides, but at different times), there were three actors for all the parts in the play. That was except for the chorus, which was 12-15 men on their own and one of the chorus members might have sung solo. All the actors were men, and that's why there's that issue of military service and there were those exemptions from military service during these performances.

Now I want you to look at the bottom pictures, which show you examples of ancient

Greek masks. The first one is of a slave, which a ridiculous caricature. They're all ridiculous caricatures, but that one is particularly ugly and it's probably because the slaves were of the lower class. The picture on the right (5 different masks) is interesting for the range of different facial expressions on there. At the bottom, I want you to look at the one that's more from a tragedy. The mask themselves helped bring out the pathos of the play. If there was particular tragedy in a play, then the masks would look particularly tragic. On the comedy plays, they would have the silly, goofy, grotesque faces. On a play that focused on death, there might have been more of a look of mourning than horror. For Oedipus, for example, he's horrified when he realizes he's been getting it on with his mom, and so he's horrified as opposed to something where everybody's dying, where there would have been more of a somber expression.

So take a look at these masks and I do want you to study these diagrams because they're quite significant to understanding what's going on as you read these plays. As you read the plays (because it's fun and it helps to bring them to life a little bit), think about how you would stage them. What would you do differently from what the stage direction in the translation suggests? The actual text of an ancient Greek play has no stage directions. They're implied in the text through various means, but Euripides himself does not actually say, '*Enter Pentheus.*' Maybe another character says, 'Ah! And here comes Pentheus' but all the stage directions (like, *shouting*), that might be added by a translator or an editor now, those are based on interpretations of the text. Think about how you would stage the play, maybe a little bit differently from how a translator would. I think it makes the tragedies a little bit more exciting to read.

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I just want to say a few more things, about the Bacchae as a text. In case you missed this out when you were reading or in case you haven't gotten to the reading yet, Dionysus goes by several different names in this play. In addition to Dionysus, he is referred to as 'Bromius' and as 'Bacchus' and as 'Evius.' Evius is brought out even more so in some of the choral chants (and also in some of the dialogue) when the bacchantes, when the maenads shout, "Evoue, evoue" Some translations handle that a little bit differently, so depending on the translation you're using (the one online, the one I assigned, or whatever), you may see something different. But when the bacchantes shout, "evoue!" it's sort of like saying, 'O, Dionysus!' They're getting really excited.

What are these maenads, these bacchantes? These are Dionysus' revelers. These are women who are up in the hills, freaking out, having their Dionysian rituals. These are also called the bacchae (bacchae, maenads, bacchantes – it's all the same). Bacchae is the Greek word, though one can easily translate Bacchae to Bacchantes (that's more the English word for it) and it depends on the translation you're using. If you're using the translation that I put in the bookstore for you, the title of the play is technically the Bacchantes and not the Bacchae.

The reason they're dancing and going crazy the way they are is that they are *entheos*, which is where we get our word for 'enthusiasm' because to be *entheos* is to

experience *enthusiasmos*. You can see, if you remember the word ‘theogony’ (birth of the gods), here ‘entheos’ means ‘in the god’ but when you say ‘in the god’ it’s more ‘in the manner of the god’ because he is inside of you, he is possessing you. This is more a type of possession but not necessarily a bad thing or demonic. The rites that they are performing are called ‘*orgai*’ and these are orgiastic rites and that means that they are religious rites that center on revelry and ecstatic worship and things like that. They’re called *orgai* or orgiastic or orgies, so don’t confuse it. When it says that they are having ‘orgies’ in the woods, this doesn’t mean that they’re swingers and they’ve got eight couples doing something naughty; it’s not like that at all. So, if these were ecstatic, orgiastic events, there are questions to be asked. Was everyone drunk? I don’t know; do you remember this? The answer is no; not everyone is drunk.

Some people are drinking wine, some people are drinking milk, and some people are not drinking at all. It’s not really an issue of getting wasted; it’s an issue of experiencing Dionysus organically and letting him overtake you, whether he overtakes you by wine, by song, or by dance. You can think of this as going to a big sporting event. If you go to a big Penn State football game, or maybe even when you go camping with a bunch of your friends or something. When you go to a Penn State football game, and as a PSU student, you know how to respond to “We Are..” When you’re at the football game, even people who don’t really care about football get excited about that. Even if you just go to be with your friends (even people who don’t give a hoot about football), you still get excited when the wave comes around, and you still get excited with a touchdown. It’s getting rapped up in the moment and that’s what this *entheos* is here. I said it’s kind of like when you go camping, too. When I was in high school, I would go camping with my friends, and everyone would get drunk, except for that one person who would stay sober. When you’re up in the woods, someone has to look over the others. It’s a bad idea for all to indulge. But even the person who stayed sober and didn’t drink would still act stupid and goofy, they still would hop around, laugh, have a good time; it was sort of ‘by association.’ That’s what’s going on here. In these orgiastic rituals, even if these people weren’t drinking wine, they were still taking part in the ecstasy.

I don’t want you to mistake what they were doing. I don’t want you to think that just because you worship Dionysus, that you’re getting out of your head and hopping around a forest. It’s religious and you have to keep that in mind. This is primarily a religious issue and a religious event to go up and celebrate these rites of Dionysus. It’s not about getting drunk, at all. That’s sort of secondary; it’s not divorced from worshipping Dionysus, but it’s not the point of worshipping Dionysus.

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We need to talk a little bit now about Dionysianism and what Dionysian worship was. As I said, there was this state of being *entheos*, when you experience *enthusiasmos*. You don’t have to be drunk; this can happen through dancing or through song. This is when you get totally carried away within yourself. You have a moment of inspiration; the ecstatic worship overtakes you and you necessarily become a participant in his worship. When this happened, a very strange thing took place at the very peak of the ritual. A very unusual form of animal sacrifice took place, and that was called

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‘*sparagmos*.’ They would sacrifice an animal by ripping it apart, limb by limb. You see this several times in the text: the bacchantes do it to the cows, to the cattle running around, and they also do it to Pentheus at the end (I hope you read or I just totally ruined the end). So, it’s a combination of two things: *sparagmos* (the ripping apart of the flesh limb by limb) and *omophagia*, which means ‘eating raw.’ So they would tear these animals apart and then eat the flesh, just start chewing on it and pulling it with their teeth. This is all based on a myth that we aren’t going to read in this course...

When Dionysus was a baby, the Titans ripped him apart and ate him. He was somehow reborn in full bodily integrity afterwards so this is a reference to that part of the myth. By ripping apart a cow and chewing on the raw flesh, if you were a Dionysus worshipper, you were taking on the role of the Titans consuming Dionysus so that Dionysus could be born again and you could do the same thing again the following ritual. So, that’s what the crowning moment of the worship was. This was unusual; this was not a common thing and it was specific to Dionysus. We also see a reference at one point when Pentheus believes to see Dionysus as a bull. What this does is that it further backs up the idea that by ripping the cows apart, the bacchantes were seeing themselves as participants in this very old idea that Dionysus was ripped apart and eaten by the Titans. So if Dionysus is represented as a bull and they’re tearing apart the cows, they’re tearing apart Dionysus and it’s part of the ritual. They didn’t necessarily believe that they were actually tearing apart Dionysus here; it’s all symbolic. I make a reference to you, to the Christian ‘spin’ on the Seder meal: the idea of Communion in the Christian church. The idea of the Communion, where drinking wine symbolizes drinking Jesus’ blood and eating the wafer, eating the bread, represents his body. I don’t think very many people going to church actually believe that the wine they drink out of that little shot glass or out of the big chalice is actually the blood of Jesus. I don’t think many people believe that, nor do they believe when they bite the wafer that it’s Jesus’ body. It’s symbolic; that’s what’s going on here in these Dionysiac rituals. They were symbolically reenacting those events in their religion.

I leave you with two links here because the death of Pentheus did have some representations in ancient art. Unfortunately, I don’t have copyright access to either of these two pieces, which are really excellent. I encourage you to open up these two links (it will open a separate window in your browser so it won’t take you away or anything) and these are pretty nasty, one in particular. These show Pentheus being torn apart by his mother and his aunt and the other bacchantes. I leave you with these images and I hope you enjoy all of their gore.