The μανία of Dionysus in Euripides’ Bacchae

**Driving Questions**

1. What would it mean for Pentheus to fully accept Dionysus into the city of Thebes?
2. What would it mean for Pentheus to accept his own μάνια, to break down not only the physical boundaries around Thebes, but also the ones that he has built around his own mind and those of his citizens?
3. Does Pentheus know what, exactly, he is keeping at bay?

**Thesis**

1. Pentheus’ containment and control of the μανία of Dionysus and that of his own is necessary for the prosperity and preservation of Thebes, its citizens, and himself.
2. Pentheus must know what he is fighting against, what it is exactly that he is working to control.

**Major Claims**

1. 2-fold identity of Dionysus (the stranger vs. the divinity)
   a. Pentheus does not truly understand either of these identities
2. Pentheus must know the nature of the part of himself that he works so hard to contain, this μανία that he harbors inside of himself.
3. Just as Pentheus does not accept the worship of Dionysus into the city of Thebes, because he does not recognize him as the divinity which he is, Pentheus does not know who he himself is nor what he is doing.
4. Pentheus cannot live without Dionysus, and his demise is his punishment for attempting to do so.
5. However, it is not Pentheus himself that Dionysus is trying to destroy, but instead the tight control and limitations that the King of Thebes administers.
6. Pentheus was correct in recognizing the threat that Dionysus posed to his city and to himself.
7. Pentheus is only able to experience his own μανία and know his whole being when he allows himself to be pulled towards a more middle ground; for to reside at either extreme, as Euripides shows us, results in death.

**Passage 1** *(Bacchae 215-220)*

Πε: ἐκδημος ὃν μὲν τῇσδ ἐτύγχανον χθονός, κλύω δὲ νεοχμα τήνδ ἀνὰ πτόλιν κακά, γυναῖκας ἡμῖν δώματι ἐκελοπιέναι πλασταίσι βακχείαισιν, ἐν δὲ δασκίωι ὄρει θοάζειν, τὸν νεοστὶ δαίμονα Διόνυσον, ὅστις ἐστι, τιμῶσας χοροῖς.

Pe: I happened to be away from this land, but I hear of the new evils throughout this city, that our women have abandoned their homes in feigned Bacchic frenzy, and in the thick-shaded mountains move rapidly, honoring with dances the new god Dionysus, whoever he is.

**Passage 2** *(Bacchae 221-225)*

Πε. πλήρεις δὲ θιάσσοις ἐν μέσοισιν ἑστάναι κρατήρας, ἄλλην δ' ἄλλοσ' εἰς ἐρημίαν πτώσοσονες εὐναῖς ἁρσέων ὑπηρετεῖν, πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δὴ μαινάδας θυσκόους, τὴν δ’ Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ’ ἄιειν τοῦ Βακίου.

Pe. they have placed filled wine-bowls in the middle of their Bacchic revel, slinking off one after another towards a desolate place to serve the beds of men, indeed, they consider themselves to be Maenads, priestesses, but they rank Aphrodite before Bacchus.

**Passage 3** *(Bacchae 72-75)*

Χο. ὃ μάκαρ, ὅστις εὐδαιμων τελετὰς θεών εἴδος βιοτάν ἀγιστεύει καὶ θιασεύται ψυχὰν

Co. Oh blessed one, whoever has known the rites of the god is fortunate he lives his life purely and initiates his soul
Bibliography


