

Costume and props have long been considered decorative additions to dramatic performance rather than key components of tragic action. My goal in this paper is twofold: I intend, first, to refocus attention on costume and props as generators of stage-action in Euripides' *Bacchae* and, second, to explore the cultic function of mimesis in the worship of Dionysus. In particular, I am interested in the madness-producing potential and ritual agency of Dionysus' paraphernalia (his ivy, thyrsus, mask, and fawn skin) in the *Bacchae*.

Actors in Greek tragedy always wore masks. But the wearing of masks in the *Bacchae* is particularly charged, in so far as the god himself appears in masked form even outside the theater. The so-called *Lenaea* vases depict Dionysus as a wooden pole draped with clothing, ivy, and mask. The mask of the actor playing Pentheus achieves a starring role at the very end of the *Bacchae*, when Agave mistakes her son's decapitated head for that of a lion and, holding it impaled on a thyrsus, returns to Thebes triumphantly. Is it only a coincidence that Dionysus has thus transformed Pentheus into a mimetic double of his own cult statue? The head/mask on a pole is a powerful representation of the god's body. But this final scene goes beyond representation, turning the relationship between original and copy—model and mimesis—on its head (as it were). By the end of the *Bacchae*, Pentheus has surpassed the disguised Dionysus in his bid for authentic impersonation of the divine. The fate of Pentheus' mask and body in the *Bacchae* encourages us to question the ontological status of mimesis, and to explore the possibility that an imitation may be even more real than that which it imitates.