

The *μανία* of Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, the *μανία* of Dionysus defies all boundaries. While some might claim that it is a “madness” that lies at the root of what it is to be human, Pentheus' primary objective is to suppress this *μανία* that is present in not only his citizens, but also himself. On the one hand he fears this component of his being, but on the other he is deeply fascinated with it. He denies its power and the idea of relinquishing his self-control and the control he has over his people, but he is captivated by what might occur if he were to go beyond the boundaries that he has established. This paper will examine those boundaries, both physical and psychological. It will explore Pentheus' fear of Dionysus' *μανία*, and how that same fear gives way to an uncontrollable desire that results in him experiencing a part of him that he has long suppressed. Pentheus' denial is dangerous, and both Cadmus and Tiresias plead for his acceptance of Dionysus, but what does Pentheus' acknowledgement of the god say about his recognition of his own *μανία*? As Charles Segal says in *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, “This tension between the extremes of reason and emotion is one of the most characteristic features of Euripides' art and of the most difficult to grasp fully,” (Segal 1982). However, this paper will attempt to do just that by offering reasons why that tension exists within Pentheus, and what motivates his overwhelming need to subvert his own boundaries.

Bibliography

Segal, Charles. *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.