

Apollonian Restraint and Dionysian Excess in Euripides' The Bacchae

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Euripides was one of the first Greek tragedians to use what we would now refer to as psychoanalysis in the creation of his characters. His play *The Bacchae* brilliantly portrays the conflict between the soul/mind and the more base urges that exist in all humans. The drama reveals the horrifying results of Apollonian restraint (the Athenian ideal) which denies the primal part of human nature. Euripides stresses that an actual balance, as opposed to a perceived sense of balance, must be found in the individual person and in society. Euripides also reveals the interconnectedness of the primal urges and the rational nature present in all human beings. Euripides' unique portrayal of Pentheus (the rational representative of the polis) and Dionysus (the god of ecstasy, wine, and madness) is both critical and sympathetic, which reinforces the idea that these elements in human nature are inseparable.

He is the son of Zeus and Semele (the daughter of King Cadmus). According to some versions of the myth, Semele is destroyed by lightning when she beholds Zeus in his full glory. Zeus is said to have placed Dionysus in his thigh, where he stayed until his birth ("Dionysus," par. 1). At the beginning of the play *The Bacchae*, Dionysus explains that he has arrived in Thebes disguised as a mortal man to avenge his mother. According to some versions of the myth, Hera deceives Semele into asking Zeus to reveal himself in his full glory. She is quickly destroyed by his lightning bolts, and Zeus sews the infant Dionysus into his thigh until the child is born. At the beginning of the play, Dionysus reveals that he has driven Semele's sisters mad because they had dishonored her memory by claiming that she had not been impregnated by

Zeus but a mortal man. He is angered because Pentheus, the heir to the throne and his cousin, refuses to worship him. Although Dionysus was born of a male, he is closely linked with women. “The Homeric Hymn to Dionysus tells us how his divine presence spread through the forest and mountains after he had been reared by his nurses” (Kerenyi 88-89). The bacchants and maenads, his primary followers, are also all women.

Dionysus is described as “the god of luxuriant fertility, especially as displayed by the vine; and therefore the god of wine” (“Dionysus,” par. 1). Dionysus is portrayed in mythology as both a giver of life and a destroyer. He is the god who nurtures the vine and provides men with rapture. In many historical accounts, he is praised as “the giver of wine which removes all sorrow and care.” He is also called “the god of many joys” and “the dancer, the ecstatic lover, and the bestower of riches” (Otto 113). He is thought to have given men the ability to conquer their fears, even if the effect was only temporary. In *The Bacchae*, the character Tiresias explains the benefits bestowed on mankind by the god.

And he who filled the complementary role, Semele's offspring,
to mortal, that which stops wretched men
from suffering, when they are filled with the stream of the vine,
and gives sleep as oblivion of the evils that happen by day;
He is poured as a libation to the gods as to himself,
So it is through him that men have all good things. (278-283)

The god of revelry is also portrayed as having a savage element in his being. As the reader of *The Bacchae* learns, Dionysus is a primal force with the ability to act without mercy.

He is often called “the god of many forms” (Otto 110). He is both the friendly god that lavishes blessings and removes the cares of the world, and the bestial and wild god with a savage

nature. He appears as a goat, a bull, and an ass in some stories. All of these creatures represent fertility and sexual desire. He also appears as a lion, a panther, and a lynx in some tales. In contrast to the aforementioned creatures, these represent the bloodthirsty desire to kill.

The panther often appears in artistic works depicting Dionysus (Kerenyi 66D). The creature's elegant appearance and deadly skill in the hunt make it an appropriate symbol to represent the god. The Dionysus of *The Bacchae*, like the panther, garners admiration for beautiful his physical appearance, but he is akin to a wild animal in his savagery. Dionysus is also often represented as "being in a chariot drawn by panthers and decorated with ivy and vines. His escort is composed of bacchantes, silenoi, satyrs, and gods who were more or less insane" ("Dionysus," Wordsworth 74). Dionysus is described as keeping company not with the higher gods, but women, who had little power or standing in the Greek world. His followers also include people and creatures from the lowest levels of society such as slaves, and the licentious man/beast creatures of the forest.

Because Dionysus is portrayed as being part of the revelry, the very nature of the Cult of Dionysus seems to allow the worshiper to obtain closeness with the god. By indulging the most base human urges, followers could be one with a god. The myth of Dionysus originated in Crete. According to Karl Otfried Muller, a noted philologist and mythologist whose work in the early nineteenth century influenced archaeology, the worship of Dionysus allowed the worshiper to enter an altered state.

Nature overpowering the mind and hurrying it out of a clear self-consciousness (whose most perfect symbol is wine) lies at the basis of all Dionysian creations. The cycle of Dionysian forms, which constitutes as it were a peculiar and distinct Olympus, represents this nature-life with its

effects on the human mind, conceived in different stages, sometimes in nobler, sometimes in less noble shapes; in Dionysos himself the purest blossom is unfolded, combined with an afflatus which arouses the soul without destroying the tranquil play of feelings. (Kerenyi 27)

Wine allowed the followers of Dionysus to receive what they must have felt was divine inspiration. In Euripides' lifetime, the Dionysian festival evolved into a civilized dramatic celebration. The festival of Dionysus was no longer characterized by drunken revelry, sexual excess, and madness.

By the Hellenic Age, these excesses were confined to rural areas, for the Dionysiac impulse was constantly being tamed by the Apollonian spirit and urban life. In Athens, the drunken worship of Dionysus was transformed into a civic festival, the Dionysia, from which tragedy, possibly the highest expression of the Greek ethical genius, was born.

(Matthews and Platt 57)

Later generations of Athenians sought to harness the creative and inspirational value of Dionysus and repress the primal elements. This reconciliation of excess and restraint produced the timeless works of the Ancient Greek dramatists. In its purest form, Dionysian worship would cause divine knowledge or inspiration, but as Muller mentions, the effects were not always ennobling.

In Euripides' portrayal, the god himself is not always noble. The experience of the bacchants depends upon the whim of the god himself. Some experienced great pleasure, while others like Agaue, suffered a terrible fate. Because of Agaue's treatment of Semele and her refusal to accept Dionysus voluntarily, Dionysus possesses her and causes her to see her son as a

young lion and claim his severed head as her prize.

The myth tells again and again how his fury ripped them loose from their peaceful domesticity, from the humdrum orderly activities of their daily lives for the purpose of making them into dancers in the wilderness and the loneliness of the mountains, where they find him and rage through the night as members of his revel rout. (Otto 133)

Through ecstatic worship the bacchants could temporarily release themselves from the civilizing constraints on sex, aggression, and violence, but there were dire consequences for this liberation. *The Bacchae* immortalizes the conflict between culture and nature, and thought and feeling (Segal 344).

It is no mere coincidence that Dionysus is portrayed as having such a close association with women. The form he takes when he appears to Pentheus is that of a young man with “hair all fragrant with light brown tresses, with ruddy cheeks and the charm of Aphrodite in his eyes” (Euripides 235-236). Pentheus observes Dionysus’ human form and notes:

Your locks are long, through keeping clear of wrestling,
and flow right down to your cheeks, full of desire;
and you keep your complexion fair by careful contrivance – not the sun’s rays but
under the shade
hunting the pleasures of Aphrodite with your beauty. (455-458)

Homer knew of the Dionysian cult, and through his characterization of Zeus, he said that “the son of Semele had been born for the joy of man.” He was probably referring to Dionysus’ role in making the wine-making process available to humans (Kerenyi 55). Although this is a plausible explanation for his reference to Dionysus as “being born for the joy of man,” it is more

likely that Dionysus was a much more willingly available god to his worshippers. His followers did not have to pray to Olympus, the god himself joined in the worship activities. Through madness and ecstasy, his followers were allowed to glimpse divine release.

The Cult of Dionysus was especially appealing to women. Although Otto refers to the “peaceful domesticity” of Greek women’s lives, they were virtually slaves to their husbands. The Athenian women of Euripides’ time were expected to pursue the ideal of respectability. Married women were forced to stay indoors, perform domestic chores, and run the household. They were not allowed to obtain an education, participate in government, or own property (Matthews and Platt 40). The ecstasy and madness of the Dionysian cult were probably welcome diversions.

In *The Bacchae*, Dionysus arms his bacchantes with thyrsi, which they use to make water spring from rocks and wine spring from the ground (Euripides 703- 711). The bacchantes could also make the thyrsi drip with honey if they wished. The bacchantes were endowed with superhuman strength, able to tear beasts apart with their hands (733-747). Through Dionysus, women were imbued with power that the patriarchal societies of Greece had denied them. They were also endowed with strength superior to the men who had oppressed them.

Author Sue Blundell notes that women in myth are often associated with nature.

Prominent among these [symbolic associations of the mythological female] is the identification of women with the wilderness of nature- that is, with whatever exists beyond the boundaries of an ordered civilization. It is generally assumed that it is women’s capacity for child-bearing, and hence their alignment with natural forces beyond male control, that prompts these commonly envisaged relationships with trees, plants,

springs, birds and so on. (Blundell 18)

Euripides' depiction of the bacchantes is complex and spectacular. They convey both an image of harmony with nature and an image of explicit destructiveness. A messenger for Pentheus describes a scene in which he finds the bacchantes sleeping in the forest. Before the frenzy in which the bacchantes tear the flesh of the cattle and kill them, the women are sleeping peacefully. When they awaken, some of the women suckle wolf cubs while others allow the snakes, used to fasten their animal pelt garments, to lick their cheeks (lines 690-712). The ivy and flower garlands that sit upon their heads give them an ethereal image, but the madness and bloodlust lingers just below the surface.

One possible explanation for the bacchantes' strange behavior toward the cattle is that the worshippers hoped to take on some of Dionysus' power. Dionysus often appeared in the form of a bull. If the bacchantes devoured the flesh of the bull, they could devour the transubstantiated god and incorporate his power and fertility into themselves (Otto 127). Dionysus is portrayed in many myths as "the eater of raw flesh," so it may be assumed that his followers have simply taken on his primal nature or madness. Dionysus is both a gentle and a terrible god. Like his followers, he is both savage and serene. Euripides' portrayal displays how these qualities exist simultaneously in the god and his followers. Perhaps Dionysus and the bacchantes represent a deep, destructive, underlying urge present in all humans. The rational part of the human psyche is often at odds with the primal urges. Like the women of Euripides' time, the bacchantes and maenads of *The Bacchae* are oppressed by the patriarchal power which Pentheus represents. The cult of Dionysus allows them a freedom and power that they had never experienced. The behavior of the bacchantes may be seen as a warning to the men who held power in Athens. Their violent and uncontrolled behavior warns the audience that those who are oppressed are

dangerous, and should not be taken lightly.

Euripides hopes to show the Athenian patriarchy the error of its ways through the actions and subsequent fate of Pentheus. In *The Bacchae*, language plays a very important role. The character Pentheus' name means "grief" (Segal 277). His name foreshadows his role as the punished oppressor of Dionysus and the bacchantes. When Dionysus appears as a Lydian stranger before the young king, he makes reference to the name.

DIONYSUS. You know not what your life is nor what you do or who you
are

PENTHEUS. Pentheus, Agave's son, Echion my father.

DIONYSUS. Suited for misfortune in your name. (506-510)

Euripides' treatment of the character Pentheus is difficult to postulate. His portrayal of Pentheus is both sympathetic and judgmental. Pentheus epitomizes Apollonian restraint. He is concerned with maintaining law and order, and he is determined to punish the Lydian stranger (Dionysus in disguise) who Pentheus feels has corrupted the women. Although he claims that his intentions are honorable, Euripides reveals through the continuing dialogue that he is actually motivated by his own selfish desires.

The rest of you go through the city and track down
the effeminate stranger, who introducing a new disease
to our women and dishonoring their beds.

And if you catch him, lead him here
in chains to get his deserts by stoning.

And so die, after seeing a bitter end to the bacchanals in Thebes.

(352-357)

Pentheus' tragic flaw may be his inability to listen to others. In line 649, Dionysus says, "Did I not say—or did you not hear me?—that someone would release me." Pentheus is impatient, and he often fails to listen in the most important situations. He barks orders and issues commands with little regard for the opinions of those around him. He also embodies the rashness of youth. Pentheus refuses to listen to his messenger who warns him that this god has great power. The messenger vocalizes his fear of the King's wrath.

But I want to hear whether with freedom of speech
I am to tell you the news from there, or whether to trim the tale;
for I fear your impetuosity, lord,
and your keenness of temper and excess of royal disposition (668-671)

Through these lines, Euripides allows the audience to glimpse Pentheus' controlling nature. When the messenger describes the miracles that the maenads perform, Pentheus pays no attention. Instead, he concentrates on the unruliness of the maenads on Cithaeron. He is not a "just king" as he professes because he refuses to listen openly to the chorus or the mysterious stranger. A just king would seek to listen impartially to all arguments. He feels his position as king entitles him to completely ignore the will of others. Much like the men in power during Euripides' lifetime, Pentheus is characterized by a shrewd, business-like way of looking at everything (Jaeger 334). He claims to be motivated by morality, but Euripides allows the audience to see that his true motivation is the perpetuation of the patriarchy and his own power.

In lines 673-676, Pentheus ceases to use the word justice and begins to use punishment instead, indicating his true nature. His comments about women are very revealing.

Already close by it blazes up like fire,
this mad insolence of the bacchantes, a huge reproach to the men of Hellas!

There must be no hesitation: you, be off to the Electran gate;
order the all the heavy infantrymen
and the riders of swift-footed horses to parade,
and all who ply light shields and make the bow string
sing with their hand, since we shall march against
the bacchants. No this exceeds all bounds,
if at the hands of women we are to suffer what we do!

Pentheus obviously feels that women are inferior to men and that because these women possess new-found power, they are a threat to his ordered society. In this scene, his arrogance is boundless, and he seems to feel that it is beneath him to have to deal with these women. In his haste to fulfill his role as the keeper of order, he seems to have forgotten that some of these women that he hopes to punish or kill are related to him, including his mother. Pentheus' behavior exaggerates the typical Athenian male's view of women as inferior creatures.

The conversation between Pentheus and Dionysus is interesting because of the characters' divergent modes of discourse. Pentheus blusters on but is unable to silence Dionysus (Segal 285). On the contrary, Dionysus is calm, and he mocks Pentheus with his relaxed manner.

PENTHEUS. Since you say you saw the god plainly,
what was his nature?

DIONYSUS. Whatever he wished to have; It was not I who determined
this.

PENTHEUS. Again you have cleverly diverted the question, though your
words are meaningless.

DIONYSUS. He who talks wisdom to an ignorant man will seem out of his senses. (478-480)

In essence, Dionysus eliminates Pentheus' authority and causes him to look childish and impotent in front of his subjects. In yet another reversal, Pentheus' Apollonian restraint is reduced to immature ranting in the face of the Dionysian excess that he refuses grasp. The violence of Pentheus appears childlike in comparison to the serenity of the god who is known for erratic behavior. Euripides makes it clear to the audience that Dionysus will be the victor. Yet he does not make it clear whether or not the god deserves to be victorious (Bonnard 42).

Pentheus is a young man full of impetuosity and self importance. He is ignorant of his own dual nature, and he refuses to open-mindedly consider a religion which he does not understand. Pentheus is the embodiment of the principle of order, and of simple reason in its most limited recognition -- common sense, good sense. Pentheus, with inflated sense of self, expects the gods to be like him. He cannot fathom a god that requires believers to gain divine inspiration through sensation and feeling rather than rationalism. Pentheus embodies the egocentric Greek notion of "man is the measure of all things."

In many ways Pentheus is trapped by the constraints of the male gender role. He constantly questions whether or not his actions measure up to the expectations of his society. He barks orders, and frequently worries about how his actions will be perceived by others. He strives to emulate the Apollonian ideal of supposed restraint, wisdom, and moderation. Yet his words and actions reveal that he is eager to indulge his Dionysian longings.

Although Pentheus is the rational representative of the polis in the play, his behavior belies the true nature of the men who hold power in the polis. His attitude is neither flexible nor rational. When he is challenged to accept that which he does not understand, he becomes

petulant and refuses to listen to anything anyone else has to say about the subject. Pentheus is on the threshold of manhood, which excuses some of his behavior and makes his death all the more tragic. Euripides' Pentheus is a complex character, full of both good and bad traits. In a touching moment, Cadmus reflects on the caring nature of his dead grandson.

CADMUS. Most beloved of men – for, though you live no longer, still
You shall be counted, child among those I love most—
no longer will you touch this beard with your hand
and fold me in your arms, calling me “mothers father,”
and saying, “Who is doing you a wrong, old man, or not paying due
respect?
Who disturbs your heart by being disagreeable to you?
Tell me so that I may punish the one who wrongs you, grand-
father.” (1316-1323)

His protective nature and deep affection for his grandfather are revealed in this passage. Euripides causes the audience to feel anger and pity towards him simultaneously. His need to protect his grandfather and his need to punish those he sees as wrongdoers is indicative of his understanding of the male gender role. Even Pentheus' treatment of women is understandable because of his age and upbringing.

Dionysus appeals to Pentheus' intense curiosity about women. Several times during the play Pentheus mentions the orgies in which he believes the bacchantes participate. He is intensely curious about women. He is attracted to them, but he feels that they are inferior because this is the accepted view in his society. The feminine form that Dionysus takes when he appears to Pentheus seems to aggravate his confused state. Not only does Dionysus represent the repressed

emotionality of women, he himself spans both male and female (Segal 159). Euripides' androgynous representation of the god emphasizes the difference between Apollonian restraint and Dionysian excess.

The vehemence of Pentheus' resistance to Dionysus and the close association of Dionysus with women in the play together constitute a remarkable insight into the Apollonian view of self and world that has come to dominate Western consciousness. This "structure of consciousness" to quote James Hillman, "has never known what to do with the dark, material, passionate part of itself, except to cast it off and call it Eve." (Segal 158)

Pentheus' protests and his tirades about the bacchant's exploits seem contrived. It is as if he feels that society expects him to rant rather than to allow such excess. He harps upon the drunkenness and immorality of the woman, and fails to listen to reports which contradict his beliefs. In line 238, he refers to sex acts he thinks take place between Dionysus and the bacchant's, which are never substantiated. When Dionysus offers to take Pentheus to see the women, he says, "I would give untold weight of gold to do so!" (line 810). Pentheus overtly reveals his sexual curiosity in line 958: "Yes I imagine them as in the thickets, like birds, gripped in the sweetest toils of love-making!" The city is structured and ordered, and despite his protests, Pentheus longs to see what happens in the wilderness when societal constraints are removed. Although his curiosity compels him to see these women, he is hesitant to do so. He fears that he will be seen, and this would be a terrible impropriety for a King who had adamantly opposed all that Dionysus represents. Pentheus is described as a young man, and this may be one of the reasons for his disdain for women. Pentheus' fascination with women, who are symbols of "the otherness of the unknown," is clear to the audience (Segal 162). For Pentheus,

women are not only sexual objects that escape his understanding; they are mysterious creatures tied to nature in a way that he is not. More closely connected than the male members of the polis to the biological processes of natural life, to birth, growth, and change, they are more closely associated with Dionysus as a god of vital energies and also more closely associated with the release of repressed emotionality that he embodies. (Segal 162)

Women are both a part of the polis and a part of nature. Their connection with nature both confounds and frightens Pentheus. This connection with nature threatens to overwhelm the civilized polis that Pentheus has worked so hard to protect. Pentheus attempts to rationalize and categorize women and the emotionalism and mystical ecstasy that they and Dionysus represent.

Euripides' portrayal of Dionysus is also very problematic. For much of the play Dionysus is portrayed as a callous harbinger of vengeance. In an unexpected twist in the play, the seemingly merciless god appears to soften and offer Pentheus redemption.

DIONYSUS. Sir it is still possible to arrange this satisfactorily.

PENTHEUS. By doing what? taking orders from my own slaves?

DIONYSUS. I shall bring the women here without using weapons.

PENTHEUS. Ah me-- now this is the trick you are devising against me!

DIONYSUS. What kind of trick is it if I save you by my arts?

PENTHEUS. You and the women arranged this between you, so as to
continue on with your bacchic rites. (802-809)

Dionysus reaches out to Pentheus and urges him to give up his plans to capture the bacchantes and punish them. Above all else, Dionysus wishes to be accepted as the son of Zeus. He invites Pentheus to accept him and all that he stands for, but Pentheus, ever suspicious of what he does not understand, refuses. Pentheus' refusal marks a change in Dionysus' tone and demeanor.

From this point on in the play, Dionysus seeks only to humiliate and destroy Pentheus.

The robing scene is one of the most fascinating aspects of the play. Dionysus convinces Pentheus, the rational, overly-masculinized representative of the polis, to dress in female garb to avoid the anger of the maenads. Pentheus worries that the maenads will mock him if they discover him in the female garb. Again, the audience sees that in many ways Pentheus fears women. This is his last attempt at free will. At first he is reluctant and disdainful, but as the process continues, he seems to enjoy it. Dionysus seems to possess Pentheus. Pentheus, who at the beginning of the play considered Dionysus his antithesis, has become the thing he despised. One of Pentheus' tragic flaws is that he can neither integrate nor deny the primal part of his nature. Unlike Pentheus, Dionysus is a god, and he is not inhibited by what society expects from him.

Euripides continues to unnerve the audience by meddling with the roles of men in society. The audience's anger toward Pentheus' arrogant behavior is replaced with sympathy and disgust. In one of the many inversions of the play, Dionysus sends Pentheus to his death in the clothes of a woman.

In an instant Pentheus, the spokesman for male rationalism, is turned into a drag queen worrying about his make-up and the hem of his skirt. In this particularly terrifying moment, Euripides dramatizes and visualizes the darkest psychosexual-political nightmare of Athens. The world is turned upside down and inside out. Not only does the mother devour the son, not only is the patriarchal order of the polis destroyed, but the body of the male monarch is mutilated and dismembered by crazed bloodthirsty woman. (Zelenak, par. 60)

Euripides in yet another reversal makes Pentheus, who was the hunter, into the prey. The

chorus calls for the destruction of Pentheus: “Go forth, swift hounds of Frenzy, to the mountain, where the daughters of Cadmus have their sacred band” (977).

According to the commentary written by Geoffrey S. Kirk, in the 1970 Prentice Hall publication of *The Bacchae*, Frenzy or Lyssa is a frightful figure associated with Erinyes or the Avenging Furies. She hunts down her victims with hounds. Euripides in yet another reversal makes Pentheus, who was the hunter, into the prey. The women, who have been oppressed by the patriarchy now hunt down and literally dismember its representative. The chorus also asks the god to appear in one of his animal forms, which is more raw and unforgiving.

Go, O Bacchus—around the hunter of
bacchants

With smiling face cast your noose;
under the deadly herd
of maenads let him fall. (1019-1021)

Pentheus’ death at the hands of the bacchants is gruesome, and the audience cannot help but feel some sympathy for the impetuous young man and his mother, Agaue. Pentheus was willful and arrogant, but most young men are. One must question whether or not Pentheus’ denial of Dionysus and the treatment of Semele’s memory really warrant such a harsh punishment. The scene in which Cadmus coaxes Agaue to realize that she holds her son’s severed head in her hands is heartbreaking. Dionysus decrees that Cadmus, his wife Harmonia, and all of their daughters be banished from their homeland. Cadmus implores Dionysus to relieve their suffering, but Dionysus is unmoved.

CADMUS. Dionysus we beseech you! We have done wrong!

DIONYSUS. You were too late to understand us. When you should have,

you did not know us.

CADMUS. This we have come to recognize; but your reprisals are too severe!

DIONYSUS. Yes, because I am a god, and you insulted me.

CADMUS. Gods should not resemble men in their anger! (1344-1348)

It is interesting to note that Dionysus does not display the need to justify his actions to Cadmus or anyone else. He offers no apology for his actions; the fact that he is a god will suffice.

Dionysus is merciless and cold to his victims. He is the legendary hunter, with a taste for blood. Unlike the humans in the play, he is not bound by societal limitations. He freely indulges all of his appetites.

In many ways, Pentheus and Dionysus are doubles. Both characters are very concerned with affirming their identities.

Dionysus, having a hereditary right to Thebes through the maternal line as the son of Semele, is principally concerned, as he says repeatedly, with proving himself the son of Zeus. Pentheus, who has obtained his kingship through his maternal grandfather, Cadmus, father of Agaue (and Semele of course) is concerned to defend the male warrior class, the hoplites, with whom he identifies (Segal 168).

Dionysus appears in the form of a young man approximately Pentheus' age, but he is effeminate whereas Pentheus is masculine. In many significant ways, the two characters change roles after meeting. Pentheus, the authority figure and king, becomes pliant and vulnerable. The most significant change occurs when Pentheus dresses in the costume of a bacchant as opposed to the armor of a soldier. He is in a hallucinatory state following his transformation into a bacchant,

and he comments that he sees two suns, two Thebes, two fortresses, and he sees the god as a bull. Charles Segal suggests that “the bull shaped youth whom he sees now before him is a symbolical projection of his own unintegrated animality” (170). The scenery also changes in favor of the god. Pentheus is moved from the comfort of civilization to the forest, where Dionysus is master. Finally, Pentheus is changed into a beast in the eyes of the bacchantes. He dies like a wounded beast instead of being the victorious hunter.

Euripides does not provide the audience with a clear hero. The characters and plot are complicated, and it would be foolish for any scholar to attempt to apply a simple interpretation to such an intricate work. It is probable that Euripides was interested in conveying the importance of a balance between the more base urges present in humans and the rational, logical part of the human psyche. Author Werner Jaeger explains that Euripides was the first author to articulate the deep inner conflicts that human beings experience.

Euripides was the first psychologist. It was he who discovered the soul, in a new sense-- who revealed the troubled world of man's emotions and passions. He never tires of showing how they are expressed and how they conflict with the intellectual forces of the soul. He created the pathology of the mind. (Jaeger 353)

In order to examine this idea of balance, one must compare two very important mythological characters. If Dionysus is for the Athenians the representative of “excess and the animalistic urges,” then Apollo would seem to be his opposite. Dionysus is a god of natural and animalian things; whereas, Apollo is a god of men. Dionysus is not a god of conscience; he is a god of nature and the world (Bonnard 48). Apollo, the Athenian ideal, is also called Phoebus “the bright one” (“Apollo” 46). Apollo is described as handsome, young, tall, and outstanding in

word and deed. In *Hymn to Apollo*, Homer writes, “he has the appearance of a robust, strong man” (46). He is also described as the model for and the protector of the Kouroi and an archetype of virile beauty. He is portrayed as a master musician and a skilled archer. Although Apollo is superficially perfect, like Pentheus, he is proud and arrogant. He abuses his power and is said to have raped a young girl named Creusa, who gave birth to his son, Ion. Euripides reveals the immoral urges of the god in *Ion*. Through the voice of Apollo’s son, Ion, Euripides chastises the god for his reprehensible behavior. Apollo is also blamed for violating the daughter of Erechtheus in Attica (Decharme 53). It is interesting to note that the Athenians idolized a god who on the surface had grace, talent, and beauty, yet whose egocentric behavior led to such hideous treatment of women. It is as if the Athenians turned a blind eye to his behavior because of his position, power, beauty, and charm. The seeming restraint of Apollo is superficial. In reality, he does not control his sexual urges any more than his supposed opposite Dionysus. Neither Apollo nor Pentheus respects women. Women in Athenian society were viewed as the property of men. Both Apollo and Pentheus appear to be rational and in controlled on the surface, but the qualities are superficial in both characters.

It is indisputable that Hellenistic ideas have shaped the way Western humanity sees itself. The superficial notion of balance, incarnated in the flawed example of the god Apollo, continues to influence our understanding of the equilibrium between reason and excess. Throughout history, some groups and individuals have sought to achieve a divine state through denial of the primal urges. Some have sought enlightenment through monasticism. Others have sought divine release through outlets like alcohol, drugs, and sex. For example, a large number of young people in the late 1960’s sought illumination through the use of illicit drugs like LSD and multiple sexual partners. *The Bacchae* is still relevant today because men and women still search

for the mystical balance between these two opposing forces that are present in their natures.

Both Apollo and Dionysus occupied important positions in Delphi; Apollo shared the Delphic festival year with Dionysus. A vase painting from about 400 B.C. shows Apollo and Dionysus in Delphi holding out their hands to one another (Otto 203). Perhaps the artist and the citizens of Delphi understood that both of these elements must be nurtured in order to achieve true balance. Conceivably, like Euripides they realized that these two elements in human nature are interdependent. Euripides' portrayal of Pentheus and Dionysus challenges readers to examine themselves and to attempt to find a balance in the opposing, yet mutually dependent forces present in all human beings.

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Biography

Dawn Higgs received her BSE in 1997, from Henderson State University. Having then taught secondary English and oral communications for six years in Arkansas public schools, she returned to Henderson State University where she is currently a Graduate Assistant pursuing a Master of Liberal Arts degree with a major emphasis in English and a minor emphasis in art.