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The ancient reception of Euripides' *Bacchae* from Athens to Byzantium

Abstract: This chapter offers a reception history of Euripides' *Bacchae* from its original production until its intertextual transformation in the Byzantine *Christus Patiens*. It traces a broad arc from Classical Athens through the Roman Empire, taking in also Hellenistic Alexandria, the Greek-speaking East, Christianity, and Byzantine literature. By examining the cultural contexts and inflections of the different receptions of one poetic text – Greek, Roman and Italian, 'Eastern', and Christian – it exposes distinctions between religious or cultural attitudes to Bacchus/Dionysus across a broad range of Greek and Latin sources. The discussion is divided into four thematic sections, within which receptions are mostly presented in chronological order: Classic *Bacchae*; Performances; Narratives; and Christian discourse. These sections encompass drama, epic, didactic, epyllion, historiography, biography, epigram, scholarly citations, and theological texts. A selection of the most significant case studies receive in-depth discussion in the body of the chapter; for completeness, the reception history of *Bacchae* is filled out by listing additional receptions in summary form in an appendix.

Introduction

Euripides' *Bacchae* was undoubtedly the single most influential literary text for constructions of Dionysus throughout Greco-Roman antiquity. In this chapter, we examine how receptions of the play across the spectrum of Greek and Roman literature act as a barometer for cultural attitudes to Dionysus. Many of the most significant and revealing receptions occur in Latin texts or in Greek texts that deal with Roman subjects, whether Plutarch's *Antony*, Greek epigrams about Italian pantomime performances, or Christian writings polemicizing against Greek and Roman cults. Accordingly, many of the Greek literary receptions bear directly on the Roman focus of this volume. Though not all of the receptions that we discuss are directly relevant to Roman affairs, nonetheless we have decided to aim at a detailed reception history of the play from Athens to Byzantium for two reasons. First, because the contrast and interplay between Greek and Roman receptions help to give definition to what is distinctly Roman or otherwise about specifically

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Roman receptions. And second, because a comprehensive reception history of Euripides' *Bacchae* is a desideratum in its own right.[1]

Euripides' *Bacchae* is good to think with when examining the close relationship between Dionysian myth and ritual, and thus between literature and religion. The play itself already thematizes attitudes to the god, and is suffused with ritual motifs and language,[2] but the dramatic presentation puts these at a remove from lived experience. The play's reception history plays out in particular two main positions or sets of positions, pro- and anti-Dionysian. Interestingly, there are patterns or clusters of pro- and anti-Dionysian positions across the Greek-Roman divide: Roman receptions of the play tend to manifest censoriousness about Dionysus as against their Greek counterparts, in ways that can only be appreciated if both sets of sources are viewed as a whole. The pro- and anti-Dionysian positions are themselves dramatically elaborated within the *Bacchae* itself, and so the reception history engages with a tension at the heart of the play. The chorus and the disguised stranger express a beatific vision of the Dionysian experience, which draws on the language of mystery cult; Tiresias puts forwards philosophical arguments for worshipping Dionysus, and Cadmus politically pragmatic ones. On the other hand Pentheus supplies a dissenting voice – censorious, cynical, rational, yet still curious to the point of prurience – but his anti-Dionysian rhetoric will echo throughout the ages from Livy's consul Postumius through to Christian apologetics. As far as the Greek evidence is concerned, it has been argued that Euripides' play exercised a significant influence on historical ritual practices, at least as far as maenadism and the thiasos were concerned.[3] On the Roman side, descriptions of Bacchic worship often echo motifs from the *Bacchae*. With reference to the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BCE, Peter Heslin argues that the '*Bacchae* was revised by the Roman Senate from the perspective of Pentheus, con-

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1 On the ancient reception of the *Bacchae* see Sandys 1900, lxxxii–lxxxviii; Dodds 1960, xxix; Funke 1966; Roux 1970, 72–77; Seaford 1996, 52–54; Mills 2006, 103–5; Sauron 2007; Massa 2014, esp. 69–72, 167–80; Friesen 2015; Perris 2015, 508–11. On the play's modern reception see Radke 2003 and Billings 2018 (scholarly reception); Fischer-Lichte 2014; Perris 2016 (literary and dramatic reception).

2 Versnel 1990, 167–69; Seaford 1996, *passim*, but see esp. 35–44.

3 See Henrichs 1978, 122 on maenadism; Jaccottet 2003, I, 17–30 on the thiasos; and in general Massa 2014, 69–70. For analytic discussion of historical versus mythical maenadism see Bremmer 1984.

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sidered not as an impious and feckless tyrant, but as a dutiful Roman magistrate.'[4] And Alessandro Schiesaro has suggested that Hispala's lurid imaginings that she would be ripped apart by the Bacchants if she were to disclose their secrets is based on the sparagmos in Euripides' play, in which Pentheus is torn limb from limb by his mother and aunts.[5] It would seem that even though Euripides' *Bacchae* by no means defined the historical Dionysian cult, which varied across time and space,[6] it affected perceptions, and could be drawn on to articulate a position for or against Dionysus. It evolved from being a poetic manifestation of cult and historical practices to being used as a quasi-historical record of ritual practices, instantiating them anew.

We begin by sketching the contours of the survey and establishing the classic status of the *Bacchae*; we then order the material into three partly overlapping categories: (i) performances, (ii) narrative retellings, and (iii) the place of the *Bacchae* in Christian discourse, looking in each case at how the receiving source may be read as an interpretation of the *Bacchae*, and at what it tells us about ancient views of Dionysus. We discuss the most interesting and dynamic receptions in the present pages, and summarize the remaining evidence in an appendix. But first a methodological question: what distinguishes a reception of the *Bacchae* from a treatment of or allusion to its myth? The question is resonant of the 'intertextuality wars' of the long 1990s.[7] Indeed, what is an allusion, a reception, or a literary adaptation?[8] These questions are also complicated by the fact that poetic and visual versions of the story predate Euripides' play; indeed, some receiving sources seem conversant with both *Bacchae* and parallel traditions. We focus as far as possible on specific reminiscences of the play, as determined by verbal echoes such as direct quotation, or other similarities such as structural imitation. Some of the sources which we examine respond to Euripides' *Bacchae* by modifying or inverting some feature, often as part of a dynamic debate on the meaning of the *Bacchae*.

4 Heslin 2005, 247.
5 Schiesaro 2016, 31.
6 Wyler 2011, 191 cautions against making Eur. *Ba*. definitive in our understanding of Dionysus and his cult.
7 See, e.g., Thomas 1986; Hinds 1998; Edmunds 2001; and now Conte 2017. With reference to the reception of *Bacchae* see Friesen 2016, 66–69.
8 Martindale 1993; Irwin 2001; Irwin 2004; Hutcheon 2006; Sanders 2006.

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Classic *Bacchae*

There is a tradition (albeit impugned)[9] that Euripides composed *Bacchae* in Macedonia before dying there in 406 BCE. Perhaps in 405 BCE, a tetralogy comprising *Bacchae*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Alcmeon*, and (presumably) an unnamed satyr play, produced by 'Euripides the Younger' at the City Dionysia, won the tragic poet a fifth, posthumous victory in the city's premier dramatic competition.[10] The play was successful from its first production. Indeed, it has been suggested that it provoked a response in Aristophanes' *Frogs* even before it was staged.[11]

As well as being widely performed and read in educational contexts, *Bacchae* also prompted responses in Greek and Roman drama; some of these are difficult to pin on the *Bacchae* specifically, since the play itself was but one of several on Dionysian subjects with which it may have shared structures, themes, motifs and language.[12] As Dodds surmised, 'The πάθη of Dionysus, the patron god of drama, may well be the oldest of all dramatic subjects.'[13] *Bacchae* was thus only one entry in a series of tragedies about Pentheus, unfolding within a broader series of tragedies about Dionysus. Most notable of all the earlier plays on Dionysian themes were Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia* and so-called 'Theban tetralogy', both of which offer some parallels to the *Bacchae*.[14] Euripides clearly drew on the *Lycurgeia* in a number of ways.[15] At the same time, *Bacchae* also departs significantly, and influentially, from Aeschylus' treatment of the Pentheus episode in *Pentheus* and, more generally, from the 'standard' myth. In particular, the standard account prior to *Bacchae* appears to have had Pentheus losing a military engagement on Cithaeron; Euripides certainly bolstered Agave's role in the dramatic plot, and

9 Scullion 2003.
10 *Σ* Ar. *Ran.* 67; *Suda*, 'Euripides'; see Hall 2016 on audience reception of the first performance of *Bacchae* in Athens.
11 See Friesen 2015, 63–64; Kuch 1993, 548 (*Frogs* as post 404).
12 Greek tragedy in the fourth century and beyond, Kuch 1993; Easterling 1997; Gildenhard and Revermann 2010; Csapo *et al.* 2014; Kotlińska-Toma 2015. Dionysus and Greek drama, Dodds 1960, xxviii–xxxiii; Oranje 1984, 124–30; Bierl 1991; Dover 1993, 39–40. Euripides' influence in the fourth century, Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980, 28–34.
13 Dodds 1960, xxviii.
14 Dodds 1960, xxviii–xxxiii; Sommerstein 2016. See also Jouan 1992; Sommerstein 2008, 60–67 (*Edonians*), 18–23 (*Bassarids*), 126–29 (*Lycurgus*), 152–55 (*Youths*), 170–74 (*Wool-Carders*), 188–91 (*Pentheus*), 224–33 (*Semele*), 244–49 (*Archeresses*), 248–49 (*The Nurses of Dionysus*); and Sommerstein 2013.
15 Dodds 1960, xxxi–xxxii; Sommerstein 2008, 61; Sommerstein 2016 outlines the similarities and differences.

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may well have introduced the cross-dressing theme.[16] But Euripides' play comes to eclipse all the other plays on the same subject, and its innovations characterize the standard version to which later ones respond.

Looking back half a millennium to the Golden Age of Athens, Plutarch mentions *Bacchae* in his assertion that the Athenians spent more money putting on dramatic performances than defending their liberty from the barbarians.[17] A beneficiary of the Macedonian defeat of Athens, Alexander is reputed to have quoted Tiresias' claim that 'on a fine subject it is no great task to speak well' (*Ba*. 266) in reply to Callisthenes who had just eulogized the Macedonians in an after-dinner speech.[18] Although tradition records that Alexander quoted other lines from Euripides, it is perhaps not surprising that he quoted from *Bacchae*: one biographical tradition holds that Euripides had spent the last years of his life at the Macedonian court, and Alexander's mother Olympias was famously a maenad.[19] Moreover, this quotation may be seen in the context of Alexander's Dionysian behaviour while on campaign.[20] Later in Hellenistic Alexandria, where Dionysus was intensely cultivated by the ruling Ptolemies,[21] Callimachus embeds a quotation of the *Bacchae* into an epigram:

Εὐμαθίην ᾐτεῖτο διδοὺς ἐμὲ Σῖμος ὁ Μίκκου
 ταῖς Μούσαις· αἱ δὲ Γλαῦκος ὅκως ἔδοσαν
ἀντ' ὀλίγου μέγα δῶρον. ἐγὼ δ' ἀνὰ τῇδε κεχηνώς
 κεῖμαι τοῦ Σαμίου διπλόον ὁ τραγικός
παιδαρίων Διόνυσος ἐπήκοος· οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν
 'ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος', τοὐμὸν ὄνειαρ ἐμοί. (*ep*. 48 Pf. = *AP* 6.310, *Ba*. 494)

Simos son of Mikkos gave me to the Muses, asking for
 success in school, and they, like Glaukos, gave
a great gift in return for a little. So I'm set here,
 my mouth open twice as wide as the Samian's, I,
Tragic Dionysos, listening to schoolboys recite
 for the millionth time, 'The lock is sacred...' (tr. Nisetich)

16 Aeschylus' Pentheus as a soldier-king who dies in battle: Aesch. *Eum*. 24–26; March 1989; Sommerstein 2016, 33. Mythical innovation and cross-dressing in *Bacchae*: Buxton 2013, 219–40
17 *Glor. Ath*. 6. = *Mor*. 349A3.
18 Plut. *Alex*. 53.4, *Ba*. 266; see Sandys *ad loc*.
19 Lane Fox 1973, 44–48.
20 See Bosworth 1996, 120.
21 Rice 1983; Dunand 1986; Cusset 2001, 14–18.

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The epigram purports to mark the votive dedication of a tragic Dionysus mask that hangs in a schoolroom, weary of listening to schoolchildren recite their lessons. The concluding quotation from *Bacchae* suggests that the play was well established as a school text in the third century – one of its most 'numinous' lines has become hackneyed.[22] Indeed, not only was *Bacchae* included in the ten-play 'selected' edition of Euripides, but a second-century (?) BCE papyrus from Egypt, P.Tebt III.901, contains the beginnings of the first verse of the play copied out multiple times in a schoolboy's hand.[23] From the point of view of Ptolemaic religious politics, it is significant that in order to assert continuity with earlier Greek literature and culture, Callimachus alludes under the sign of Dionysus to an episode of Homer which mentions Dionysus, and to Euripides' *Bacchae*.[24]

The early Roman dramatists wrote plays on Dionysian subjects, which may have thematised Roman responses to Dionysus and Greek culture in ways that are now difficult to recover.[25] Of these, the surviving fragments of Accius' *Bacchae* are in a separate category, since their closeness to Euripides' version suggests that Accius' play may have been a relatively close adaptation. Scholars have examined in depth the cultural resonances of Accius' lexical choices as a translator.[26] For example, the 'Cadmeian' (Theban) women are 'translated' into *matronae*, with a thick layering of vocabulary rich with Roman resonances (Eur. *Ba*. 35–36; Acc. *Ba*. 235–36 R$^{2-3}$= 406-8 Dangel):

> καὶ πᾶν τὸ θῆλυ σπέρμα Καδμείων, ὅσαι
> γυναῖκες ἦσαν, ἐξέμηνα δωμάτων·
>
> deinde omni stirpe cum incluta Cadmeide
> vagant matronae percitatae insania

This brief example shows Euripides' classic text being freighted with cultural associations as it is translated into the Romans' poetic language.[27]

22 See Gow and Page 1975, II.183.
23 Cribiore 1996, #129 (p. 204) with plate XIV. For papyrus citations see Austin 2005.
24 Ll. 2–3 allude to *Il*. 6.234–36; Lycurgus' persecution of Dionysus and subsequent punishment has featured at 6.130–43.
25 See Mac Góráin, Introduction, pp. 8–9.
26 See Mariotti 1965; Zimmermann 2002; and Rosato 2005, 155–99.
27 For a re-use by Virgil see Mac Góráin 2013, 133.

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Performances

Modern criticism identifies Dionysus as a god of performance. He presided over the dramatic festival at Athens, and there were performative dimensions to his worship, both within and beyond drama. One response to the ancient complaint that certain plays had 'nothing to do with Dionysus' has been to point to the 'change of identity' brought about by participation in both drama and mystery cult, a view which sees performance itself as inherently Dionysian.[28] We turn now to the ancient evidence for performances of the *Bacchae*, real or imagined, complete or partial, focussing on what they tell us about *Bacchae* and attitudes to Dionysus. Once again, the Latin sources, or those Greek ones that bear on Roman or Italian affairs, have distinct resonances that suggest a contrast between Greek and Roman attitudes to Dionysian worship.

An anecdote from Diogenes Laertius' biography of Aristippus places Plato and Aristippus together at the court of Dionysius II of Syracuse.[29]

> καί ποτε παρὰ πότον κελεύσαντος Διονυσίου ἕκαστον ἐν πορφυρᾷ ἐσθῆτι ὀρχήσασθαι, τὸν μὲν Πλάτωνα μὴ προσέσθαι, εἰπόντα·
> "οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν." [Eur. Ba. 836, spoken by Pentheus]
> τὸν δ' Ἀρίστιππον λαβόντα καὶ μέλλοντα ὀρχήσασθαι εὐστόχως εἰπεῖν·
> "καὶ γὰρ ἐν βακχεύμασιν
> οὖσ' ἥ γε σώφρων οὐ διαφθαρήσεται." [Eur. *Ba*. 317-8, spoken by Tiresias] (Diog. Laert. 2.78)
>
> One day Dionysius over the wine commanded everybody to put on purple and dance. Plato declined, quoting the line:
> "I could not put on a women's robe."
> Aristippus, however, put on the dress and, as he was about to dance, was ready with the repartee:
> "Even amid the Bacchic revelry
> She who has self-control will not be corrupted." (tr. R. D. Hicks, adapted)

The quotations and capping suggest the play's cultural currency. They also characterize the two philosophers' positions: Plato's austere reluctance to play-act echoes Socrates' hostility to mimetic poetry in the *Republic*, while Aristippus responds with opportunistic pragmatism. The context of the quotations matters too: Plato makes himself the loser by quoting Pentheus from moments before his transvestite downfall, while Aristippus quotes Tiresias' response to Pentheus'

28 Seaford 2006, 102 and in general on Dionysus and theatre, 87–104.
29 For other versions, some of which place the story in Macedonia, see Swift Riginos 1976, 106–7.

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suspicions about the corruption of women in Dionysian ritual. Clearly, then, the exchange replays the conflict in the *Bacchae* between philosophical and prurient or moralizing attitudes to the cult; and Aristippus' victory suggests that Dionysian ecstasy, even if it begins with pretence or performance, is a more successful path to philosophical enlightenment.[30]

As for dramatic performances proper, we know that the play could be performed in part as well as in its entirety. A second-century BCE inscription from Delphi records that a certain Satyros performed, in the stadium, 'a song with a chorus, "Dionysus", and a *kitharisma* from Euripides' *Bacchae*' – whatever that means (*SIG*^{3} 648B).[31] In greater and more arresting detail, Plutarch describes the performance of a scene from the *Bacchae* (we do not know whether it was a complete production), in which the head of Crassus, killed in the battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE, is used as a stage-prop for the head of Pentheus. The context is that Hyrodes II, the king of Parthia, is visiting the court of the Armenian king Artavasdes II. The two have recently been reconciled, and their reconciliation is cemented by the engagement of Hyrodes' son Pacorus to the sister of Artavasdes. According to Plutarch, both kings were well acquainted with Greek language and literature, and the performance is part of the engagement festivities.[32] The head of Crassus is brought in and greeted with jubilation by the Parthians. Jason of Tralles, the tragic actor, sets aside his Pentheus costume, takes hold of the head of Crassus, and in a state of Dionysian frenzy (ἀναβακχεύσας) sings these lines of Agave as if divinely inspired (μετ' ἐνθουσιασμοῦ):

> [5] φέρομεν ἐξ ὄρεος
> ἕλικα νεότομον ἐπὶ μέλαθρα,
> μακάριον θήραμα.
> [6]
> καὶ ταῦτα μὲν πάντας ἔτερπεν· ᾀδομένων δὲ τῶν ἑξῆς ἀμοιβαίων πρὸς τὸν χορόν
> {<A.>} τίς ἐφόνευσεν;
> {<B.>} ἐμὸν τὸ γέρας,
> ἀναπηδήσας ὁ Ἐξάθρης – ἐτύγχανε γὰρ δειπνῶν – ἀντελαμβάνετο τῆς κεφαλῆς, ὡς αὑτῷ λέγειν ταῦτα μᾶλλον ἢ ἐκείνῳ προσῆκον. [7] ἡσθεὶς δ' ὁ βασιλεὺς τὸν μὲν οἷς πάτριόν ἐστιν ἐδωρήσατο, τῷ δ' Ἰάσονι τάλαντον ἔδωκεν. εἰς τοιοῦτόν φασιν ἐξόδιον τὴν Κράσσου στρατηγίαν ὥσπερ τραγῳδίαν τελευτῆσαι. (Plut. *Crass.* 33)[33]

30 On philosophy and wisdom in *Bacchae* see Oranje 1984, 156–66; Navarro González 2016.

31 See Csapo and Slater 1995, 45 (I.108); Chandezon 1998, 55; Prauscello 2006, 109.

32 There is some basis to the claim of these rulers' Greek culture; see Bertinelli 1993, 421–22; Sauron 2007, 254; Stepanyan 2015.

33 On the accuracy of the quotation see Seaford 1996, 243.

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> We bring from the mountain
> A tendril fresh-cut to the palace,
> A wonderful prey.
> This delighted everybody; but when the following dialogue with the chorus was chanted:
> (Chorus) 'Who slew him?'
> (Agave) 'Mine is the honour,'
>
> Pomaxathres [or 'Exathres', the man who had killed Crassus], who happened to be one of the banqueters, sprang up and laid hold of the head, feeling that it was more appropriate for him to say this than for Jason. The king was delighted, and bestowed on Pomaxathres (or Exathres; the text is uncertain) the customary gifts, while to Jason He gave a talent. With such a farce as this the expedition of Crassus is said to have closed, just like a tragedy. (tr. Perrin)

Whether the story is genuine or a fiction,[34] for Plutarch it shows life imitating tragedy. Indeed Plutarch often draws on tragic and Dionysian motifs to illustrate character.[35] In this case, as David Braund has shown, structures and motifs taken from *Bacchae* cast Crassus as a Pentheus-like figure who brings about his own tragic downfall.[36] The cultural layering of the story is especially noteworthy given this volume's focus on Roman attitudes to Dionysus: Plutarch with his Greek eye records 'Easterners' (Parthians and Armenians) putting on Greek drama, and this becoming the occasion to celebrate the Parthian defeat of Rome. Within this nexus of cultural interactions, the anecdote replays the 'Easterner' Dionysus' defeat of the 'Westerner' Pentheus, particularly if we cast Crassus as an embodiment of Roman hostility to the Bacchanalia, and suspicion of the 'Eastern' Dionysus.[37]

A couple of epigrams from the Greek Anthology comment on pantomimic renditions of *Bacchae*, pantomime being a performance art in which one actor wordlessly dances all the parts.[38] Pylades of Cilicia was a leading exponent of

34 Credulous: Kotlińska-Toma 2015, 156–158; skeptical: Easterling 1997, 221.
35 Pelling 1988; Pelling 1999; Mossman 1988.
36 Braund 1993; *Crassus* is paired with *Nicias*, which also ends with tragic catastrophe and quotation; see Braund 1993, 469 and Bertinelli 1993, 422; Zadorojniy 1997.
37 See also Sauron 2007, 254–55.
38 On the form see Garelli 2007; Hall and Wyles 2008; Manuwald 2011, 184–86. On these poems see Gow-Page 1968, II, 80–81, 209–10; Garelli 2007, 164–68; Hall 2008, 22; Hunt 2008, 175; Alonso Fernández 2013, 194–97.

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tragic pantomime in Augustan Rome, and may have been a freedman of Augustus.[39] Antipater of Thessalonica eulogizes Pylades performing what looks like it may have been based on the *Bacchae* (*AP* 16.290):

> Αὐτὸν βακχευτὴν ἐνέδυ θεόν, ἡνίκα βάκχας
> ἐκ Θηβῶν Ἰταλὴν ἤγαγε πρὸς θυμέλην,
> ἀνθρώποις Πυλάδης τερπνὸν δέος, οἷα χορεύων
> δαίμονος ἀκρήτου πᾶσαν ἔπλησε πόλιν.
> Θῆβαι γιγνώσκουσι τὸν ἐκ πυρός· οὐράνιος δὲ
> οὗτος ὁ παμφώνοις χερσὶ λοχευόμενος.

> When he brought the Bacchants from Thebes to the Italian stage, Pylades put on the form of the Bacchanal god himself, to all men's delight and terror, for by his dancing he filled the whole city with that deity's intemperate fury. Thebes knows the one born of fire; the heavenly god is this one here, brought to birth by these all-expressive hands. (tr. Gow-Page, ep. 78)

This epigram shuttles between the world of *Bacchae* and the pantomime's world, a slippage appropriate to the metatheatricality of the *Bacchae*. Pylades, himself an Eastern migrant to Rome, is credited with having brought the bacchants (or *Bacchae*, an allusion to the play by its title) from Thebes to the Italian stage, picking up from how Dionysus had brought the bacchants from the East to Thebes. The poem plays on several elements from *Bacchae*. There is emphasis on the god's birth (λοχευόμενος), recreated by Pylades with all-expressive hands rather than voice. The word ἐνέδυ picks up on the theme of acting and dressing in *Bacchae* (cf. Pentheus' ἐνδῦναι at 836, quoted by 'Plato', above). The oxymoronic phrase ἀνθρώποις Πυλάδης τερπνὸν δέος is reminiscent of Dionysus' self-description as most terrible but most gentle to mortals (*Ba.* 861 δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἠπιώτατος).[40] Pylades' animation of the city (Rome) with untempered frenzy (δαίμονος ἀκρήτου πᾶσαν ἔπλησε πόλιν) evokes the filling of the wine-bowl, but also, by alluding to Thebes in the grip of a Dionysian frenzy (cf. Cadmus at 1295, πᾶσά τ' ἐξεβακχεύθη πόλις), implies the suggestibility of Rome to Dionysian infatuation.

The other epigram (*AP* 16.289) describes a dancer (according to the MSS the otherwise unknown Xenophon of Smyrna) miming a series of Dionysian parts in what could be a version of *Bacchae* (some scenes are omitted):

39 See also *AP* 9.248 on Pylades' playing the role of Dionysus, with possible allusion to *Bacchae*. On Pylades see Jory 2003 and 2004; Garelli 2007, esp. 147–208; Hunt 2008.
40 Cf. Hor. *Odes* 3.25.18 *dulce periculum*, on which Nisbet-Rudd 2004 cite τερπνὸν δέος.

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Αὐτὸν ὁρᾶν Ἰόβακχον ἐδόξαμεν, ἡνίκα Λήναις
ὁ πρέσβυς νεαρῆς ἦρχε χοροιμανίης,
καὶ Κάδμου τὰ πάρηβα χορεύματα καὶ τὸν ἀφ' ὕλης
ἄγγελον, εὐιακῶν ἰχνελάτην θιάσων,
καὶ τὴν εὐάζουσαν ἐν αἵματι παιδὸς Ἀγαυὴν
λυσσάδα. φεῦ θείης ἀνδρὸς ὑποκρισίης.

We thought we were looking at Bacchus himself when the old man lustily led the maenads in their furious dance, and played Cadmus tripping it in the fall of his years, and the messenger coming from the forest where he had spied on the rout of the Bacchants, and frenzied Agave exulting in the blood of her son. Heavens! how divine was the man's acting. (tr. Paton)

Apart from the structural correspondences with the *Bacchae* – the sequence of scenes from parodos through the first scene with Cadmus, the first messenger speech, the Agave scene – there are a number of matching details: from the emphasis on Cadmus' old-man dancing to the echo in ἰχνελάτην of the hunting imagery that pervades the *Bacchae* to Agave's exultation.[41] More generally, the viewer's impression that the actor had embodied Bacchus, down to the appreciation of the man's divine acting, θείης ἀνδρὸς ὑποκρισίης, resonates with the idea of acting a role (at least in a festival for Dionysos) as a form of worship offered to the god of drama himself. But more than that, the first line Αὐτὸν ὁρᾶν Ἰόβακχον ἐδόξαμεν echoes Pentheus' words to the disguised Dionysus as he experiences the hallucination (or clairvoyance) of infatuation (918–19):

καὶ μὴν <u>ὁρᾶν</u> μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους <u>δοκῶ</u>, > ὁρᾶν ... ἐδόξαμεν
δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πόλισμ' ἑπτάστομον·

Pentheus sees double, and in a sense the poet does too: he sees Bacchus while recognizing that it is the actor, but is nonetheless affected by the Dionysian performance. The focus on performance in both of these epigrams, and the troping of performance as ritual, seems to point to the way in which the *Bacchae* uses metatheatre and (per Seaford) allusions to mystery initiation to present ritual as performance.

Like Plutarch's Crassus story, these epigrams see their subject with Greek eyes, and it is not surprising that even in Augustan Rome, Dionysus should have been so warmly celebrated in the world of theatrical performance. Tacitus' perspective on a Dionysian masquerade is rather different, as we would expect from

41 Cadmus' age: 185–89, 193, 252; hunting: *Ba*. 227–28, 231, 453, 730, 846–47; Agave's exultation: 1198.

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a sober Roman historian. We conclude this section with Messalina's bacchanal (*Ann.* 11.31).

> at Messalina non alias solutior luxu, adulto autumno simulacrum vindemiae per domum celebrabat. urgeri prela, fluere lacus; et feminae pellibus accinctae adsultabant ut sacrificantes vel insanientes Bacchae; ipsa crine fluxo thyrsum quatiens, iuxtaque Silius hedera vinctus, gerere cothurnos, iacere caput, strepente circum procaci choro. ferunt Vettium Valentem lascivia in praealtam arborem conisum, interrogantibus quid aspiceret, respondisse tempestatem ab Ostia atrocem, sive coeperat ea species, seu forte lapsa vox in praesagium vertit.
>
> Meanwhile Messalina, never before more unrestrained in her debauchery, was celebrating a mock-vintage in the house at the height of autumn. The wine presses were being trodden, the vats were overflowing, and women girt in animal skins were leaping about like maenads sacrificing or out of their minds. Messalina herself was shaking the thyrsus with her hair flowing, Silius beside her wreathed in ivy, wearing tragic buskins, tossing his head about, a wanton chorus shrieking around them. The story goes that Vettius Valens climbed up a very tall tree as a joke. When asked what he could see, he replied "a frightful storm from Ostia." So either something resembling a storm was on the horizon, or maybe a chance word let fall turned into a prophecy.

The passage intervenes between Messalina's 'marriage' to her lover Silius and her downfall.[42] The excessive Dionysian scenario, a perversion of what might have been a benign vintage celebration, characterizes Messalina as depraved, licentious and transgressing the boundaries of her sex.[43] Tacitus introduced the sequence of the 'marriage' between Messalina and Silius as 'like a drama' (*fabulosum*, 11.27.1), and there is a cluster of theatrical motifs, notably Silius' buskins and the shrieking chorus. The first words of the paragraph, *At Messalina*, have a stagey quality to them, as if marking the empress' entry.[44] While the Julio-Claudian court was no stranger to performances formal or metaphorical,[45] there is specific recollection here of *Bacchae* as Vettius Valens climbs up the tree, re-enacting Pentheus' spying on the maenads.[46] He exclaims that there is a storm on the horizon, which may look to the onrush of the maenads from *Bacchae* 1088–95 as

42 On the passage, see most recently Alonso Fernández 2013, 188–91.

43 Santoro L'hoir 2006, 234–37; Stackelberg 2009, 615–19.

44 See Quinn 1968, 135 on *At Regina*, which occurs three times in *Aeneid* 4 (1, 296, 504), like a stage direction marking the queen's entry.

45 Bartsch 1994.

46 La Penna 1975; Henrichs 1978, 159.

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Agave and her sisters close in on Pentheus.[47] Allusion to the *Bacchae* is an enriching element in the story, whether or not Tacitus found it in his sources.[48] It contributes to the censorious Roman tone, which resonates with other instances of Roman antipathy to maenadism or Dionysian swagger as expressions of political evil – from Livy's critique of the Bacchanalia to hostile accounts of Mark Antony's theatrical Bacchism.[49] We may conclude that performances of various kinds have thematised cultural attitudes to Bacchus as well as the philosophical and metatheatrical dimensions of Euripides' *Bacchae*.

Narratives

Bacchae proved a fertile source of inspiration for authors writing in narrative modes, whether epic or epyllion, the mythical digression in didactic poetry, or prose chronicle. Narrative retellings focussed on some of the same aspects of *Bacchae* that were emphasized in accounts of the play's performance, including the conjuring of the god's presence and the phenomenology of Dionysian possession. All of the narratives which we consider here are to a greater or lesser extent exercised by the justice and morality of the killing of Pentheus, and may be seen as engaging in a debate about the most problematic aspect of the play. In each case there is some response to the *sparagmos* of Pentheus, a motif which also made its way into the Euripidean biographical tradition.[50]

The earliest surviving retelling is Theocritus' twenty-sixth poem, titled 'Lenae, or Bacchae' in the MSS and the Antinoe papyrus. This brief epyllion narrates the commencement of Bacchic ritual by Ino, Autonoe and Agave, followed by

47 So, La Penna 1975, 122–23.

48 Malloch 2013, 432 suggests Tacitus may not have made it up.

49 See Jaccottet 2008, 204.

50 On sparagmos in Euripides' biography see Lefkowitz 2012, 93, and Billings 2018, 68–70 for Nietzsche's reception of this idea. The sparagmos in fragment 33v of Dionysius' *Bassarica* may allude to Euripides' *Bacchae*; see Benaissa 2018, 180–83. Lucian relates an anecdote about Demetrius the Cynic at *Adv. Ind.* 19, "Once in Corinth Demetrius the Cynic found some illiterate person reading aloud from a very handsome volume, the *Bacchae* of Euripides, I think it was. He had got to the place where the messenger is relating the destruction of Pentheus by Agave, when Demetrius snatched the book from him and tore it in two: 'Better,' he exclaimed, 'that Pentheus should suffer one rending at my hands than many at yours.'" (tr. Fowler and Fowler)

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Pentheus' *sparagmos* at their hands, and concluding with a moralizing intervention in the poet's voice.[51] The poem's debt to *Bacchae* is clear, even though Theocritus omits a great deal, and scholarly expressions of the allusive relationship vary.[52] The poem re-uses Euripides' pun on the name Pentheus[53] as the women carry the dismembered man back to Thebes:

> ἐς Θήβας δ' ἀφίκοντο πεφυρμέναι αἵματι πᾶσαι,
> ἐξ ὄρεος πένθημα καὶ οὐ Πενθῆα φέροισαι. (25–26)
>
> They all arrive in Thebes bepurpled with blood,
> carrying pain and not Pentheus from the mountain.

The major apparent addition is the poet's moralizing (and textually uncertain)[54] reflection on the story before concluding with a hymnic farewell to Dionysos, Semele, and her sisters:

> Οὐκ ἀλέγω· μηδ' ἄλλος ἀπεχθομένω Διονύσῳ
> φροντίζοι, μηδ' εἰ χαλεπώτερα τῶνδε μογήσαι,
> εἴη ἐνναετὴς ἢ καὶ δεκάτω ἐπιβαίνοι·
> αὐτὸς δ' εὐαγέοιμι καὶ εὐαγέεσσιν ἅδοιμι. 30
> ἐκ Διὸς αἰγιόχω τιμὰν ἔχει αἰετὸς οὕτως.
> εὐσεβέων παίδεσσι τὰ λώια, δυσσεβέων δ' οὔ.
> Χαίροι μὲν Διόνυσος, ὃν ἐν Δρακάνῳ νιφόεντι
> Ζεὺς ὕπατος μεγάλαν ἐπιγουνίδα κάτθετο λύσας·
> χαίροι δ' εὐειδὴς Σεμέλα καὶ ἀδελφεαὶ αὐτᾶς, 35
> Καδμεῖαι πολλαῖς μεμελημέναι ἡρωίναις,
> αἳ τόδε ἔργον ἔρεξαν ὀρίναντος Διονύσω
> οὐκ ἐπιμωματόν. μηδεὶς τὰ θεῶν ὀνόσαιτο.
>
> I care not. And let not another care for an enemy of Dionysus—not though he suffer a fate more grievous than this and be in his ninth year or entering on his tenth. But for myself may I be pure and pleasing in the eyes of the pure. So has the eagle honour of aegis-bearing Zeus. To the children of the righteous, not of the unrighteous, comes the better fate. Farewell to Dionysus, whom Lord Zeus set down on snowy Dracanus when he had opened his mighty

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51 On this poem see Van Groningen 1963; Griffiths 1979, 98–104; Cairns 1992; Cusset 1997 and 2001; Sistakou 2016, 115–21. Cusset 2001 reads the sparagmos of Pentheus in metapoetic terms as the evil lot in store for a bad poet.

52 Gow 1952 II: 476, 'There are verbal reminiscences of the *Bacchae*, but the story is differently set … and the debt to Euripides is slight.' Contrast Dover 1971, 263–64; Cairns 1992, 5–8; Cusset 1997, 455; Friesen 2015, 76–81.

53 Eur. *Ba*. 367–8, 508, 1244.

54 See Gow 1952 II, xxx.

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thigh. Farewell to comely Semela and her sisters, Cadmean dames honoured of many a heroine, who, at Dionysus' instigation, did this deed, wherein is no blame. At the acts of gods let no man cavil. (tr. Gow)

The poet's asseveration of loyalty to Dionysus in the face of a cruel kin killing at the god's bidding seems to respond to the end of *Bacchae*. Cadmus criticizes Dionysus, telling him that he goes too far, and that gods should not resemble mortals in their anger: ἀλλ' ἐπεξέρχηι λίαν ... ὀργὰς πρέπει θεοὺς οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοῖς. (1346–8). Dionysus' response, that Zeus ordained these things long ago (1394), may inform Theocritus' appeal in 26.31 to Zeus as the overseer of piety. The poem, then, takes Dionysus' side against Pentheus and the Thebans, a stance which may be read in line with Ptolemaic religious politics and in the context of Ptolemaic patronage of Theocritus.[55] Nonetheless, we find Hunter's suggestion, that the end of Theocritus 26 reflects ongoing debate about the meaning of *Bacchae*, persuasive.[56]

Theocritus' partisan reading seems to have provoked a response in the *Cynegetica*, a poem attributed to Oppian, but in fact penned by a different poet in second-century CE Syria.[57] The story of Dionysus and Pentheus is rewritten within a digression at *Cynegetica* 4.230–353, the aetiology for the practice whereby hunters befuddle panthers by mixing wine with their water; within this digression, a substantial narrative runs from Dionysus' Theban homecoming to Pentheus' death (4.287–319). Pentheus ignores the advice of Cadmus and Agave (292) and orders the imprisonment of the god. In a wild mythological innovation, the maenads, but apparently not including Agave, pray that Dionysus will turn them into raw-meat-eating beasts, and Pentheus of ill-omened name (Πενθῆα δυσώνυμον, 4.305 – that pun again) into a bull, so that they can eat the young king. He does so, and they 'divide' Pentheus among themselves: δάσαντο, 4.315 – the word has echoes of feasting, as well as of divvying up spoils. There is, again as in Theocritus 26, a concluding moral from the narrator:

τοιάδ' ἀείδοιμεν, τοῖα φρεσὶ πιστεύοιμεν·
ὅσσα Κιθαιρῶνος δὲ κατὰ πτύχας ἔργα γυναικῶν,
ἢ μυσαρὰς κείνας, τὰς ἀλλοτρίας Διονύσου,
μητέρας οὐχ ὁσίως ψευδηγορέουσιν ἀοιδοί.

55 Cusset 2001, 15–18; Friesen 2015, 81–84.
56 Hunter 2006, 47.
57 Hopkinson 1994, 197–204; Englhofer 1995, 169–73; Bartley 2003, 129–49; Sestili 2010, 275–77. Hopkinson 1994, 198, pointing out similarities with epyllia like Theocritus 26, suggests the possibility of a lost Hellenistic original.

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> This is the sort of thing we should sing about; this is the sort of thing we should believe in our hearts.
> Those deeds of women in the valleys of Mount Cithaeron,
> Or those loathsome mothers, alien to Dionysus –
> Those are impure lies told by poets. (4.316–9)

This is a marked intervention in the reception of *Bacchae*. The phrase Κιθαιρῶνος … κατὰ πτύχας would seem to signal *Bacchae*, and Euripides and Theocritus are obvious candidates for the ἀοιδοί.[58] The poet has also extended the *sparagmos*, drawing on the Pentheus-as-if-animal theme in *Bacchae*, by means of a double metamorphosis – it is not quite the same thing for panthers to kill a bull as for maenads to kill Pentheus – and removed Agave from the killing, while still making Dionysus' transformative power supply the proximate means of sparagmos. In tragedy and especially in *Bacchae*, Dionysus is often represented, addressed, or imagined as a bull.[59] Pentheus himself does so in his first lines of the cross-dressing scene (920–2). Pentheus-as-an-actual-bull in the *Cynegetica* thus performs both a rewriting of myth and an interpretative rereading of Euripides' play *qua* Dionysiac text; ritual echoes are decoded back into mythical narrative, as Dionysus transforms Pentheus – literally, this time – into a sacrificial animal. And yet, in an ironic reversal of Dionysiac purity (ὅσιος and ὁσία are frequent in the *Bacchae*), the old, *Euripidean* story is an impure one for bards to tell (οὐχ ὁσίως). The poet of the *Cynegetica*, then, has capped Theocritus, implying that it is impious to reproduce the Euripidean version, let alone endorse its morality.[60] The *Cynegetica* poet performs what the narrator of Theocritus 26 only suggests: a pro-Dionysian rereading of *Bacchae* which sanitizes the myth without hobbling Dionysus. As such, the *Cynegetica* bears witness to the enduring pull of *sparagmos*, but also to the well-established notion that *Bacchae* is a locus for religious controversies.

Ovid's retelling of the *Bacchae* (*Met.* 3.511–733) during his Theban history works off multiple sources including the *Bacchae* itself, but also the Homeric

58 *Ba*. 62 ἐς Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχὰς; 797 ἐν Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχαῖς; 945 τὰς Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχὰς; 1219 ἐν Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχαῖς.

59 *Ba*. 100, 1017, 1159 (Chorus); Pentheus himself mistakes a bull for Dionysus (618) and vice versa (920–22); Agaue mistakes Pentheus' head for that of a bullock (μόσχος, 1185). Seaford 1996 *ad* 920–22 sees a ritual element in Pentheus' vision of Dionysus-as-bull.

60 Bartley 2003 on *Cyn*. 316, these final lines 'could almost be read as a direct answer to Theocritus 26.27–32'.

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Hymn (7) to Dionysus, prose mythography, Virgil's reworking of Euripides' *Bacchae*, and perhaps Pacuvius' *Pentheus* (if indeed this play existed).[61] It shares with *Bacchae* themes of vision and spectatorship, which in Ovid stretch from Tiresias' inner vision to the visual dynamics of the killing of Pentheus.[62] Ovid's main structural coup is to replace the dialogue scenes between Pentheus and the Stranger of the *Bacchae* with an interview between Pentheus and Acoetes, in which Acoetes relates the story of the Tyrrhenian pirates from the Homeric hymn as a cautionary tale. The pirates are metamorphosed into dolphins, in line with the binding principle of Ovid's epic. This splicing of *Bacchae* and the hymn points up similarities between them: they hinge mainly on theodicy, but after the pirates have been metamorphosed into dolphins, they gambol about as if forming a chorus (*inque chori ludunt speciem*, 3.685), perhaps a nod to the Bacchic chorus of Euripides' play. Acoetes is ostensibly a devotee of the god, but there is a hint that he is Dionysus in disguise when he quips that no god is more present than he (*nec enim praesentior illo | est deus*, 3.658–9); this in turn may point to the ultimate indeterminacy of the identity of the Stranger in *Bacchae*, who purports to be a devotee of the god, but whom we assume to be Dionysus in disguise.[63] Ovid's Pentheus echoes Euripides', most notably the charge that the rites of Dionysus are fake (*commentaque sacra*, 3.558 ~ πλασταῖσι βακχείαισιν, *Ba*. 218), but his anti-Dionysian rhetoric also has a distinctly Roman feel: he echoes the xenophobic taunts of Virgil's Latins,[64] and even some of the criticisms of the Bacchic cult found in Livy's Bacchanalian narrative, which are themselves indebted to Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*.[65] When the inevitable sparagmos happens, it fulfils an expectation created by Tiresias' pun earlier in the episode: he warns Pentheus that unless he bows to the god: *mille lacer spargere locis* (3.522), 'you will be scattered about in a thousand places'. The sparagmos itself is predicated on a perceptual metamorphosis which Ovid found ready-made in Euripides: the god makes Agave mistake Pentheus for a wild beast. But while the killing of Pentheus is the devastating climax of the *Bacchae*, Ovid reduces it to a scene of almost comic bathos.

61 On the episode see Feldherr 1997, Keith 2002 (sources), Barchiesi 2007 and Godwin 2014 (commentaries), Janan 2009 (Lacanian study), Miller 2016 (mythographic source). For Virgil's use of *Bacchae* see Mac Góráin 2013. On Pacuvius' *Pentheus* see Schierl 2006, 418–22.

62 See Feldherr 1997, 28 and Hardie 2002, 166–72.

63 Much to the derision of Dodds 1960, xlviii–l, Norwood and Verrall believed that the stranger was in fact a devotee of the god.

64 At 3.531–63 he gives a cartoon version of an already cartoonish speech by Numanus at *Aen.* 9.598–620.

65 For correspondences between Ovid, *Met.* 3.511ff. and Livy 39.10–16, see Freyburger 2013, 99.

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saucius ille tamen 'fer opem, matertera' dixit
'Autonoe! moveant animos Actaeonis umbrae!' 720
illa, quis Actaeon, nescit dextramque precanti
abstulit, Inoo lacerata est altera raptu.
non habet infelix quae matri bracchia tendat,
trunca sed ostendens dereptis vulnera membris
'adspice, mater!' ait. visis ululavit Agaue 725
collaque iactavit movitque per aera crinem
avulsumque caput digitis conplexa cruentis
clamat: 'io comites, opus hoc victoria nostra est!'

Stricken, he still shouts 'Help me, aunt Autonoë! Let Actaeon's shade move your spirit!
She, not remembering Actaeon, tears away the suppliant's right arm. Ino, in frenzy, rips off the other. Now the unhappy man has no limbs to hold out to his mother, but, showing his wounded trunk shorn of its members, he cries 'Mother, see!' Agave howls, and twists her neck about, and thrashes her hair in the air, and tearing off his head, holding it in her bloody hands, shouts 'Behold, sisters, this act marks our victory!' (tr. Kline)

The link with the killing of Actaeon is familiar from *Bacchae* – it may have been in Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia*[66] – and Nonnus will later re-use it, but the darkly comic touch comes in lines 723–25: Pentheus cannot perform a supplication since he has no arms and instead shows the wounds where his arms once were; Agave shrieks and rips off his head. Ovid's aesthetic choice may be a response to the grave tone of the tragic scenes involving Dionysian madness in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Antiquity's last epic retelling of the story was by Nonnus, who devoted three books (44–46) of his forty-eight book *Dionysiaca* to the 'Pentheid.' The debt to *Bacchae* is clear, even though Nonnus makes the story entirely his own with significant additions and variations.[67] As in Ovid's version, the story of the Tyrrhenian pirates is told to warn Pentheus about the risks of impiety, this time by Tiresias (45.105–68). As to the justice of the dénouement, one major difference is that Nonnus' Pentheus is more evil and less balanced a character than Euripides'. Early on in the story, we learn that he seized the ancestral throne (κοιρανίην πατρώιον ἥρπασε, 44.50), which prompts Agave to have a disturbing dream about his *sparagmos*, though she does not recognize herself as the wild beast in it. In a confrontation with the disguised Dionysus, Pentheus himself insists that the story of Dionysus' parentage from Zeus is a lie, but says that he wishes it were true so that he could have the son of Zeus as his prey (44.49–51). Alongside the

66 See Sommerstein 2016.
67 *Bacchae* and the 'Pentheid': Tissoni 1998, 63–71; Shorrock 2001, 195; Simon 2004, 130–32; Perris 2015, 509–11; Friesen 2015, 238–50; see also Accorinti 2016, index s.v. 'Pentheus'.

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accentuation of Pentheus' hybris, Nonnus' Dionysus feels pity for human suffering, in a marked departure from Euripides' Dionysus.[68] 'Dionysus felt respect (ᾐδέσσατο) for old Kadmos in his grief. With a face/mask free of sadness (ἀπενθήτου[69] δὲ προσώπου), he mixed a tear with a smile and brought Agave back to her senses' (46.268–70). And then: 'So the women, downcast, mourned, while lord Bacchus, looking on, felt pity (ἐλέαιρε) for them' (46.357). This newfound mercy on the part of Dionysus is one of several elements in the *Dionysiaca* which have led scholars to a Christian(izing) reading of the poem and its protagonist.[70] If we accept these Christianizing readings, then we may see Nonnus' retelling pulling *Bacchae* into a Christian story, and thus into a Roman story, perhaps in response to the literary strategies of New Testament authors (see the next section).

One of the most fascinating ancient retellings of *Bacchae* is also one of the latest. Johannes Malalas' *Chronographia* (sixth century CE), a Greek prose chronicle, retells world history from the creation of Adam to the reign of Justinian; the fifteenth chapter of Book Two tells the story of Pentheus from the betrothal of Agave to the deaths of Pentheus and Dionysus.[71] Malalas' is a late-Roman, Antiochene-Constantinopolitan, Christian worldview, in which the Incarnation is the turning-point in world history, secular history is Romanized, mythical gods and heroes are rationalized as kings, and, most saliently, Olympian gods are dehellenized.[72] Malalas' mythographic *modus scribendi* can broadly be described as euhemeristic.[73] Polymedon, a man of the senatorial class descended from Picus Zeus, seduces Semele, and she gives birth prematurely to a mortal son: Dionysus, later to be deified for discovering grapevines. Jealous of Pentheus' position as de facto ruler of the Theban empire (βασιλεία), Dionysus returns from the East to Thebes with an army, works miracles, teaches mysteries (to his female relatives),

68 Tissoni 1998, 335–36; Friesen 2015, 247–49. Simon 2004, 253 notes, but does not comment on, Dionysus' pity. Perris 2011 addresses pity and audience response in *Bacchae*.

69 The Pentheus/penthos pun has been faithfully reproduced at 46.73–74.

70 See Tissoni 1998, 71–79, prefigured to some extent by Bowersock 1994, 156–66, and followed by Friesen 2015, 238–50. See also Shorrock 2007; Hernández de la Fuente 2013; and some of the essays in Accorinti 2016.

71 Edition: Thurn 2000. References are to book/chapter and page/line of Thurn's edition. English translation: Jeffreys *et al.* 1986 (pp. 20–22 for Pentheus and Dionysus). General discussion: Jeffreys 2003. Euripides in Malalas: D'Alfonso 2006, esp. pp. 14–16 on *Bacchae*. Dionysus in Malalas: Reinert 1985.

72 Hörling 1980; Scott 1990; Jeffreys 1990a.

73 Hörling 1980, 57–63; Garstad 2016. D'Alfonso 2006, 1 treats euhemerism as part and parcel of Malalas' *interpretatio christiana*. Reinert 1985, 1, 26 specifically addresses Malalas' rationalization of Dionysus.

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and introduces sun-worship. He is captured in battle and imprisoned, but Agave persuades Pentheus to release him; the cousins eventually agree to reconcile and go to Cadmus, accompanied by Agave, for mediation. After the reconciliation, however, Dionysus ambushes Pentheus and has him beheaded, giving the head to Agave. Dionysus himself is then driven out of Thebes, at the citizens' and senators' behest, by Lycurgus, before dying in Delphi, where his tomb can still be seen (Malalas, *Chr.* 2.15; 29.56–32.39 Th). Malalas signals his source explicitly, with a garbled quotation:

> But Dionysus was angry with Pentheus for imprisoning and insulting him: Pentheus told everyone that Dionysus was illegitimate. This is the reason why Euripides, after he had discovered writing to this effect some years later, composed a play about the Bacchae in the poetic manner (ποιητικῶς) and gave Pentheus these words: 'Semele, pregnant to some mortal, placed the blame for the affair on Zeus' (Σεμέλη δὲ λοχευθεῖσα ἐκ βροτοῦ τινος εἰς Ζῆνα φέρουσα τὴν ἁμαρτίαν λέχους) (*Chr.* 31.7–12 Th).[74]

Above all, Malalas is interested in the mythic content of Euripides' plots.[75] Euripides is cited by name in the *Chronographia* more often than any other ancient poet, typically as an authoritative witness to the false, pagan, 'poetic' version of a given myth – often by way of the adverb ποιητικῶς ('poetically'), which for Malalas connotes a sort of poetic license. Malalas never mentions the Hellenistic Theocritus; cites Ovid only once, in a vague reference to the 'poetic' version of the Phaethon myth (*Chr.* 1.3; 5.42–44 Th); and never mentions Nonnus. On the other hand, he was most likely working from memory or at best from an intermediary rather than from a text of Euripides' play.[76] Malalas' Pentheus story thus reads as a wholesale reworking – Reinert calls it a 'historiographic exegesis' – of Euripides' *mythos* from a post-tragic angle.[77]

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74 See D'Alfonso 2006, 14–16. ποιητικῶς is Thurn's supplement from the Slavic version. Compare *Bacch.* 28–29 and, especially, Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' at *Bacch.* 2.

75 Jeffreys 1990a, 215; D'Alfonso 2006, 1.

76 D'Alfonso 2006, 14, 16 ('citazione a memoria'). Contrast Reinert 1985, 4. Indirect access to Euripides: Jeffreys 1990b, 179. Indirect access to Latin authors and, perhaps, limited knowledge of Latin: Jeffreys 1990a, 60, 1990a, 171–72. E. Patzig, in a 1901 review (of Bourier's *Über die Quellen der ersten vierzehn Bücher des Johannes Malalas*) cited in Jeffreys 1990b, 179, argues for direct use of Euripides. Carrara 1987, 23 n. 20 emphatically asserts that Malalas could have read, but did not in fact read, Euripides while writing the *Chronographia*. D'Alfonso 2006, 3–7 is cautiously optimistic about the prospect of direct use for *some* plays. See Reinert 1985, 31 n. 8 for further bibliography. On Malalas' immediate Greek sources, see Jeffreys 1990b, 196–97, 216. For a controversial dissenting view, see Treadgold 2007, 235–56, 311–29; and the response in Garstad 2016.

77 Reinert 1985, 4.

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Malalas' narrative is animated by a series of tensions between euhemerized mortality and Dionysiac myth and cult, particularly in its theomachic, Orphic, epiphanic, and magical aspects. Malalas' Dionysus is a human being, and in this he is just like any other Olympian god in the *Chronographia*.[78] As an illegitimate pretender to the throne, however, he holds a secular position somewhat analogous to that of Euripides' Dionysus. Lycurgus, mentioned only in this episode and described merely as a 'knowledgeable man' (ἄνδρα σοφόν, 31.27 Th), effectively reprises his theomachic role from *Iliad* 6 to oust Dionysus on the bidding of the senate and citizens.[79] Malalas also strips away the epiphanic element which is so fundamental to *Bacchae*.[80] Dionysus is, however, a magician who teaches the Thebans 'Bacchic' rituals and prayers to the sun, and is ultimately deified (30.70–75 Th), all in keeping with Malalas' interests in gnosticism, Orphism, and theurgy.[81] At the same time, he is a rival claimant to empire returning west after a successful eastern campaign, 'an aristocratic youth with swashbuckling tendencies not dissimilar to those of Perseus'.[82] In this, Malalas' eminently capable Dionysus reflects a late-antique spin on the long-established tendency to present pagan heroes in the guise of generals, as indeed Nonnus and Lucian (*Bacchus*) had done with Dionysus himself.[83]

The main target for explicit exoneration is Agave, who caused her son's death (31.95–96 Th) but is not to blame for it, and who certainly did *not* behead him (31.21–3 Th).[84] (Remember that both Theocritus 26 and the *Cynegetica* focus squarely on the Theban women's part in Pentheus' *sparagmos*.) Like the *Theotokos* Mary in the *Christus Patiens* (see below) – and unlike Medea in Euripides' play, an important source for the *Chr. Pat.* – Agave is a grieving, sympathetic mother who did not kill her child. In effect, Malalas flips Euripides' plot on its head so that what was in *Bacchae* a scurrilous rumour of infidelity and secret childbirth is now the true story, and what was in *Bacchae* the true story is in fact a pagan, 'poetic' fiction retailed by the great man, Euripides.

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78 See Hörling 1980, 55–57 and Reinert 1985 on Dionysus in the *Chronographia*. According to Hörling 1980, 58, ἀνήρ is a significant rubric in the *Chronographia* when it describes a pagan god; Dionysus furnishes one such example (*Chr.* 2.15; 30.73 Th.).

79 Reinert 1985, 20, 'the entire episode is obviously contrived to terminate Dionysus' career as a tyrannos in Boeotia—since no ancient source ever posited Dionysus as a king of Thebes.'

80 Epiphany in *Bacchae*: Bierl 1991, 181; Segal 1997, 231–38; Perris 2016, 21–26.

81 Jeffreys 1990a, 63–65.

82 Jeffreys 1990a, 62.

83 Reinert 1985, 9–10; Garstad 2014.

84 Reinert 1985, 19 compares Malalas' rehabilitation of Agave to that of Phaedra. See also D'Alfonso 2006, 15.

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Christian discourse

This section overlaps with the previous one to the extent that with Nonnus and Malalas we have already entered the realm of Christianity, while some of the texts treated in this section are also narrative in form. Echoes of *Bacchae* in Christian texts may be seen in the context of the similarities between Jesus and Dionysus, and of the broader presence of Dionysian motifs in Christian discourse. As early as the second century CE, Justin the Martyr pointed out that Dionysus was the son of God (υἱὸν τοῦ Διός) and the inventor of wine, which he used in his mysteries (ἐν τοῖς μυστηρίοις), and that he was torn apart (διασπαραχθέντα) and ascended to heaven.[85] Stimulated, perhaps, by Hölderlin's 'Brod und Wein,' which was written around 1801, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers vigorously pursued analogies between Christ and Dionysus, in some cases with a view to establishing the genetic dependence of Christianity on pagan cult.[86] Some of the best recent work on Jesus-Dionysus correspondences focuses not on genetic relations, however, but on rhetorical expressions of comparison or contrast between the two figures.[87] Two recent monographs were produced independently of one another, but at times deal with the same material. Francesco Massa has thoroughly examined references to Dionysus in literary and figurative Christian discourse of the third and fourth centuries CE.[88] In relation to textual sources, Massa demonstrates how Christian apologists including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Firmicus Maternus, and the author of the *Christus Patiens*, sometimes exploit and at other times seek to downplay similarities between Jesus and Dionysus, often appealing in sophisticated ways to Euripides' *Bacchae*, which becomes a central point of reference for Christians to talk about Dionysus. Another recent monograph, by Courtney Friesen, explores the 'cultural contestations' between Greeks, Jews, Romans and Christians by tracking the reception of Euripides' *Bacchae* from third-century Alexandria to the time of the *Christus Patiens*, which may be as late as the twelfth century CE.[89] Ambiguities and interpretative questions already present in the master-text are worked out in the cultural contestations of

85 *Apol.* 1.54.
86 See Massa 2012.
87 See Wacht and Rickert 2010; Seaford 2012, 120–30; Hernández de la Fuente 2013.
88 Massa 2014.
89 Friesen 2015. He covers: Theocritus 26; Ezekiel, *Exagoge*; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*; Horace, *Epistles* 1.16; Clement of Alexandria; Artapanus, the 'Moses fragment'; Celsus, *Alethes Logos* and Origen, *Contra Celsum*; the Wisdom of Solomon; Dio Chrysostom, *Alexandrian Oration* (*Or.* 32); Philo, *De ebrietate*; the Acts of the Apostles; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*; and *Christus Patiens*.

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the book's subtitle. Form, meaning, abstraction, and reinterpretation combine in the ancient reception of the play. Ancient society replays the conflict staged in the tragedy through its reception.[90] At first glance, this view accords well with the play's reception elsewhere.[91] Both separately and between them, these two monographs attest to the importance of *Bacchae* in Christian and contiguous discourses, and we refer the reader to them for extensive coverage of the texts in this section.[92]

Contested territory in the debate on Jesus-Dionysus correspondences is the New Testament. It has been argued that *Bacchae*, specifically, resonates with the passion narrative and with the *Acts of the Apostles*, and that the echo of *Bacchae* in Luke-*Acts* was perceived by Origen (*Contra Celsum* 2.34). These resonances have proven crucial to the play's reception in modern times.[93] There appear to be both verbal and structural echoes. One verbal echo is found in Luke's use of the word θεομάχος at *Acts* 5:39. Another, more famous example is Luke's use of the 'don't kick against the pricks' proverb. Euripides' Dionysus says, 'I would rather sacrifice to him [i.e. Dionysus] than, human against god, angrily kick against the goad (πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζοιμι)' (*Ba.* 794–95). Paul, in his defence speech to the governor Festus, retells the story of his conversion, adding a detail not found in the other accounts in *Acts*: 'We all fell down on the ground and I heard a voice saying to me, in the Hebrew dialect [i.e. Aramaic], "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It's hard for you to kick against the goad (πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν)" (*Acts* 26.14; cf. 9:4, 22:7).

On the one hand, this proverb was widely used in Greek poetry before *Bacchae* (e.g. Pi. *Pyth.* 2.94–6, Aesch. *Ag.* 1624) and may also have been found in Jewish tradition. On the other hand, *Bacchae* is the closest extant Greek predecessor, and a well-known tragedy to boot; there are broader thematic parallels (e.g. *mania* vs. *sōphrosunē*; conversion and epiphany) at work; and the context within Paul's epiphany–conversion narrative resonates with Euripides' play. Seaford thus argues that extensive and striking parallels between *Bacchae*, Paul's conversion narrative, and Paul and Silas' prison escape are so egregious as to point

90 Friesen 2015, 265.

91 On abstraction (especially 'the Dionysiac') in the modern reception of *Bacchae*, see e.g. Perris 2016, 163–70.

92 See also Massa in this volume.

93 See e.g. Seaver 1912/1914; Seaford 1996 and 1997; Weaver 2004; Moles 2006; Friesen 2015, 207–35, with bibliography at 207 n. 3; Perris 2016, 59–78. Sceptical about Acts and *Bacchae*: Massa 2014, 72–77. On Origen and the comparison see Friesen 2015, 169; less committal is Massa 2014, 78.

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to a shared ancestor: mystic initiation as a rite of passage.[94] What is more, we can see that Luke, through ironic inversion, uses Dionysian motifs such as drunkenness and madness to emphasize how unlike Dionysiac religion Christianity – even including glossolalia – really is.[95]

Among all these echoes, however, only the goads proverb and the word *theomachos* are explicit, and neither is unique to *Bacchae* in the first place. At most, these echoes allow the attentive reader of *Acts* to frame typological parallels as putative reminiscences of Euripides' play. So, ultimately, argues Friesen: 'My contention, rather, is that the *Bacchae* illuminates the literary context of Acts in ways that have not been sufficiently appreciated.'[96] Moles goes further, arguing passionately for Luke's deliberate use of *Bacchae*.[97]

Both *Bacchae* and Acts are incredibly influential master-texts; it is to be expected that ancient and modern readers would read one in light of the other and vice versa; *Bacchae* has been worked into the fabric of the reception of *Acts* just as *Acts* has been worked into the fabric of the reception of *Bacchae*.[98] Broadly speaking, *Acts* narrates the earliest engagement of Christianity, a Near Eastern mystery cult, with the Roman world. Luke's narrative activates Euripides' play as a telling intertext, and speaks to the capacity of Dionysus, and *Bacchae* more specifically, to address Roman anxieties about mystery religions as well as to address Christian anxieties about Roman political geography.

Friesen's 'receptions' vary in their degree of closeness to Euripides' play, and while all are very much πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον, as perceived echoes of Euripides, some are in the eye of the beholder. There are two main sub-categories: sources that quote or reference *Bacchae* directly are incontrovertible receptions. For example, Celsus' *Alethes Logos*, the fragments of which are preserved and discussed in Origen's *Contra Celsum*, uses a sequence of *Bacchae* quotations as grounds for an argument about the plausibility of the incarnation (*Cels.* 2.33–5). For his part, Celsus uses Dionysus as a parallel for Christ, quoting (once) from and alluding

94 Seaford 1997.
95 Friesen 2015, 221–34. On Luke and the Classics in general see MacDonald 2015.
96 Friesen 2015, 212. Also, at p. 219, there is a 'cumulative effect of suggesting that Paul's former madness and his epiphany and conversion in Acts 26 should be understood in relation to Euripides' narrative.'
97 Moles 2006, 65, 'a maximalist case'. On Paul and *Bacchae* see also Cover 2018.
98 See the works of Dormeyer and Ziegler cited by Friesen 212 n. 27 for accounts of how *Bacchae* frames ancient reader-reception of Acts.

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(once) to Euripides' *Bacchae* within an argument that the incarnation was rationally impossible.[99] Origen, in his rebuttal, works through Celsus' points one by one, with the key point being that Jesus suffered willingly, that the passion was part of the divine plan, and that, accordingly, Celsus' argument is wrong because true virtue can embrace death.[100]

Clement of Alexandria, the subject of extensive discussion in both Massa's and Friesen's monographs, provides many examples of clever repurposing of lines from the *Bacchae* for a Christian apologetic agenda, and he quotes *Bacchae* in each of his three works, *Protrepticus*, *Paedogogus*, and *Stromateis*).[101] In his *Protrepticus*, or exhortation to the Greeks to convert to Christianity, Clement takes a dim view of Dionysian and other pagan cults. In the concluding chapter 12, however, he uses Dionysiac religion as an analogical foil for Christianity, and offers a Christianized *Bacchae*: he urges first Pentheus and then Tiresias to turn away from Dionysian religion; he associates Cithaeron with Zion; compares chaste Christian women to maenads; applies mystery cult terminology to Christianity, and radically reinterprets the Dionysiac experience to subordinate it to Christian experience. In *Stromateis* 4, he quotes five lines of *Bacchae* in a discussion of martyrdom and Christian mysticism.[102] According to Friesen, Clement's use of *Bacchae* – specifically Dionysus' comments on night-time ritual at *Ba.* 470–76 – in *Stromateis* 4 is a 'most remarkable literary move', by which he ironically and explicitly (κατὰ τὴν τραγῳδίαν, 'according to the tragedy') repurposes the words of the 'Greek god of sensuality' to adumbrate an account of Christian virtue: martyrdom, the ultimate expression of Christian gnosticism, entails the separation of the body; mystic initiation is a form of ritual death in which the soul is separated from the body; Christ channels the Euripidean Dionysus a kind of mystagogue.[103]

A second category of examples in Friesen's monograph encompasses prose works or passages which make sense more as receptions of Dionysus rather than as responses to *Bacchae* specifically. Philo, for example, twice uses Dionysiac tropes for corrective purposes. In the *Legatio ad Gaium*, the figure of Dionysus

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99 Friesen 2015, 161–64 claims that Celsus' engagement with *Bacchae* extends much further than this. But only fragments 2 and 3 (as numbered by Friesen) are clear quotations or references by name; other correspondences, from the themes of demonstration/epiphany and divine vengeance, to the idea of Pilate as Pentheus, and so on, are arguably typological.

100 Friesen 2015, 164–72. See also Massa 2014, 106–13.

101 See Massa 2010 and 2011, reworked at Massa 2014, esp. 161–89; Friesen 2015, 118–33; see esp. 118 n. 2 drawing on Stählin's index.

102 See Massa 2014, 185–89.

103 Massa 2014, 186; Friesen 2015, 128–33, quoted at 133.

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exemplifies Gaius' pretensions and aspirations; in *De ebrietate*, the image of drunken maenadism, as put in the mouth of Eli's servant in 1 Samuel 1, exemplifies common misconceptions about Jewish mysticism and true union with the divine.[104] Each is more or less concerned with Dionysus, or at least the Dionysiac, but *Bacchae* is conspicuously absent from both. The so-called 'Moses fragment' of Artapanus' *Concerning the Jews* – preserved, along with fragments concerning Abraham and Joseph, in Eusebius and Clement – has been said to share with the story of Pentheus and Dionysus certain narrative tropes and other elements not in the LXX account, in particular magical doors and a well-timed earthquake.[105] The 'Wisdom of Solomon', finally, denounces Canaanite ritual in language reminiscent of Dionysiac cult, using words like *thiasos*, *teletē*, and *mustēs*; at the same time, there are shared motifs such as child-killing, indigeneity, and holiness.[106] But there is nothing to point unambiguously to *Bacchae*.[107]

This cannot be said of the *Christus Patiens*, our concluding example, a dramatic cento which recycles lines from Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Medea* and *Hippolytus* (and other sources) to retell, in three sections, the passion and crucifixion; the burial; and the resurrection of Christ.[108] Much scholarship on this work has been concerned with dating and authorship (it has been ascribed to Gregory of Naziansus).[109] More recent work has examined the Euripidean intertextuality from a literary point of view.[110] *Christus Patiens* may be read as a Christianization of *Bacchae*, one which interrogates the relations between Bacchic cult and Christianity.[111] By virtue of its very nature as a passion play made up of pagan verses, the *Christus Patiens* tests the notion of Christian tragedy.[112] And by virtue of specific parallels between the myth of Pentheus and the passion narrative, it echoes –

104 Friesen 2015, 86–93, 197–206.
105 Friesen 2015, 146–8. *Il.* 5.749 = 8.393, not cited by Friesen, is an important pre-Euripidean parallel for *automatos* being used to describe magically opening doors.
106 Friesen 2015, 176–86.
107 In this category one might also group 3 Maccabees, in which Cousland 2001 discerns echoes of *Bacchae*; López Salvá 2013 notes correspondences with *Bacchae* but does not insist on dependence. See Friesen 2015, 87 with n. 8.
108 Tuilier 1969, 19–26 outlines the contents.
109 Edition: Tuilier 1969. On the vexed questions of authenticity, authorship, and date, see Tuilier's edition but also e.g. Trisoglio 1996 (and the review in Tuilier 1997); Most 2008; Massa 2014, 263–67.
110 See most recently Bryant Davies 2017; Pollmann 2017, 140–57 = Pollmann 1997.
111 See Massa 2014, 263–77; Friesen 2015, 251–60.
112 Friesen 2015, 255; 'anti-tragedy', Pollmann 2017, 156.

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quotes, ventriloquizes – *Bacchae* not only textually but also, in fact, conceptually; Christ is associated with both Pentheus and Dionysus.[113] Thus the controversy over theodicy in *Bacchae* (explicitly addressed at *Ba*. 1349) is here resolved in an all-encompassing Christology, whereby the resurrected god is both sacrificial victim and triumphant saviour, and both Dionysus and Pentheus are (arguably) Christianized. This ultimate Dionysian–Christian 'crossover', then, illustrates how a mimetic literary production could, in a Christian context, activate the unique status of Dionysus and of *Bacchae* in the pagan milieu.

The advent of Christianity constitutes a major watershed in the play's reception, as the way in which some Christian texts appeal to the *Bacchae* accords it an authoritative status, although one which falls short of the status of religious or liturgical text in its own right.[114] By a process of bi-directional influence, *Bacchae* was Christianized and Christianity, in its own way, mysticized such that, by the time of Nonnus and (pseudo-) Gregory, perhaps the most surprising thing of all is that a Christianized Dionysus could be relatively straightforward. Interestingly, Christianization of *Bacchae* was to be a highly significant dimension of the play's modern reception in the 'long sixties' (that is, 1958–1973).[115]

Conclusions

This chapter has traced the *Bacchae*'s complex reception history across performance, narrative retellings, and Christian discourse. We add some additional material in summary form in the appendix which follows, including some putative echoes and reworkings of *Bacchae* in literary texts, as well as some candidates for reception in visual media. Several points may be made by way of conclusion. The sheer number and diffusion of citations, echoes, and reworkings attest to the enduring popularity of the play and its appeal as a poetic artefact that inspired later poets. Examination of the play's reception often allows us to chart cultural relations, especially between Greece and Rome, paganism and Christianity, and (in line with this volume's orientation towards Rome and Italy) many of the cases studied point to or express specifically Roman attitudes. Beyond primarily 'literary' and 'cultural' receptions, engagements with *Bacchae* very often involved

113 Massa 2014, 267–76; Friesen 2015, 259–60. Of course, the shady presence of Medea (by way of lines from *Medea*), the archetypal child-killing mother, problematizes the Dionysus–Christ/Pentheus–Pilate/Agave–Mary complex; on Mary see Bryant Davies 2017.

114 On religious texts in Dionysian cult see Massa 2013.

115 On which see e.g. Perris 2016, 48–58.

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participating in a debate on Dionysian cult, whether Theocritus' Ptolemaic endorsement or Clement's sophisticated Christian polemic. *Bacchae* becomes analogous to a religious text in its own right, and we conclude that receptions of the play do in fact tell us much about attitudes to Dionysus.

Appendix: Receptions of *Bacchae* until the twelfth century CE

What follows here is a conspectus of possible receptions of *Bacchae*. Where practical, we provide primary sources accompanied by a basic description and references to secondary literature. We do not catalogue the numerous direct quotations in, say, Athenaeus or Plutarch. (As Dodds 1960, xxix n. 1 observes, *Bacchae* 'was widely quoted and excerpted in the Roman period, as may be seen from the "testimonia" cited in Kirchhoff's [1885] *apparatus*'.) Where a source has been discussed above, we provide a cross-reference.

Background: Pentheus, Euripides, and *Bacchae*

Gantz 1993, 481–83 addresses the origins of the Dionysus-Pentheus myth.

Ancient biographies of Euripides: Suda, *s.v.* 'Euripides'; *Vita Euripidea*. See Lefkowitz 2012, 87–103; Scullion 2003; Revermann 2000; Easterling 1997, 211–27. In particular, the story of Euripides being torn apart clearly echoes *Bacchae*; see Lefkowitz 2012, 93.

Σ Ar. *Ran.* 67, 'The Didascaliae record that after Euripides' death his son, Euripides, produced *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Alcmaeon*, and *Bacchae* in the city.'

Hall 2016 and Wyles 2016 address the first performance and early reception of *Bacchae*.

Aristophanes: *Frogs* (405 BCE)

Aristophanes' *Frogs* (Lenaea 405) is arguably the earliest and best-known example of the reception of *Bacchae*. Wyles 2016, 69 assumes that *Frogs* must predate *Bacchae*, with the likeliest date for *Bacchae* being the standard date of 405 (City Dionysia, *after* the Lenaea). Hall 2016, 17, while preferring 405, allows 406 'at a pinch'. Either way, *Frogs* is vital to the later reception of Dionysus/Bacchus. See

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Lada-Richards 1999 on Dionysus in *Frogs*; Carpenter 1997 on the comic Dionysus versus the Dionysus of myth.

Wall painting, sanctuary of Dionysus in Athens (6th? to 4th? century BCE)

Pausanias 1.20.3 describes a painting of 'Pentheus and Lycurgus being punished for the violent things they did to Dionysus' in situ in the sanctuary of Dionysus. No painter is mentioned; the location of the paintings is merely 'there' (αὐτόθι, i.e. in the precinct). This gives us a *terminus post quem* of the mid-sixth century for the older temple; the heyday of Athenian wall-painting was the fourth century.

Iophon: *Pentheus*, ?*Bacchae*? (late 5th century BCE)

Only fragments survive of this play by Sophocles' son, which may be the same as the *Bacchae* attributed to him.

Dionysius of Syracuse, Plato and Aristippus (early 4th century BCE)

See pp. 45–46.

Chaeremon: *Dionysus*, *Oeneus* (mid-4th century BCE)

Bacchae may have influenced two plays by Chaeremon. See *Dionysus* F4 and *Oeneus* F14 *TrGF*; Collard 1970; Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980, 77–79.

Philodamus of Scarphaea: Paean to Dionysus (late 4th century BCE)

Furley and Bremer 2001, II.64 read intertextuality with the *Bacchae* in Philodamus' hymn; see especially line 1, 14–17, 56.

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Apulian Phiale, in the style of the Thyrsus Painter (mid-4th century BCE)

BM F133, *RVAp* 10/190; Taplin 2004, 2007, 156–58 with fig. 51. Of extant vases, this is the only serious candidate for being a reception of *Bacchae*; the interpretation depends on identifying the central figure as Pentheus in disguise, and on attributing to Euripides the cross-dressing element. See also Philippart 1930 for images of the myth, eschewing (despite his title) a strict distinction between Euripidean and non-Euripidean versions. On visual representations of Dionysus generally, see Gasparri 1986a, 1986b; Carpenter 1986, 1997; Isler-Kerényi 2007, 2015. Pentheus: Tomasello 1958; March 1989; Bažant and Berger-Doer 1994; Weaver 2009, 17–29.

Alexander the Great (mid-4th century BCE)

See p. 43.

Lycophron: *Pentheus* (3rd century BCE)

Only the title of this play survives (F6 *TrGF*).

Theocritus: *Idyll* 26 (3rd century BCE)

See pp. 51–53.

Callimachus (3rd century BCE): *Hymn* 5, *Epigram* 48

Hunter 2006, 46 argues that the Actaeon paradigm from *Bacchae* underlies Callimachus' *Hymn* 5. See pp. 43–44 on *Ep.* 48 (Pfeiffer).

Plautus: *Amphitruo* (3rd–2nd centuries BCE)

Scholars have read this play as a reworking of *Bacchae*, with a focus on metatheatre. See Stewart 1958; Slater 1990; Schiesaro 2016, 30; contrast Christenson 2000, 54–55.

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Greek Anthology 7.105, 9.248, 16.289, 16.290 (3rd–2nd centuries BCE)

AP 7.105.3–4 alludes to *Bacch.* 300:

> Διόνυσος ὅταν πολὺς ἐς δέμας ἔλθῃ,
> λῦσε μέλη·

> Whenever Dionysus enters someone's body in full force (πολύς), he loosens their limbs.

See pp. 48–49 on 16.289 (anon.), and 16.290 (Antipater of Thessalonica); see also *AP* 9.248 (Boëthus).

Ezekiel: *Exagoge* (3rd–2nd centuries BCE)

The *Exagoge*, a dramatization of Moses' life in Greek trimeters probably composed in Alexandria, contains one or two textual echoes of *Bacchae*. Compare *Ex.* 234–35/*Bacch.* 1077–83, *Ex.* 235–36/*Bacch.* 274. There are also typological parallels in the Red Sea narrative, the burning bush scene, and the overall theomachy plot. Text: *TrGF* I, 288–301. Text, translation, and commentary: Jacobson 1983; Lanfranchi 2006; Kotlińska-Toma 2015, 202–33. See also Xanthakis-Karamanos 2001; Whitmarsh 2013, 211–27, especially 218–19 on tragic hypotexts (including *Bacchae*).

*SIG*³ 648B, Delphi (early 2nd century BCE)

This inscription records that in 194 BCE, Satyrus of Samos won the pipe-playing competition without a contest and then, in the stadium, performed a lyre solo from Euripides' *Bacchae* and a choral song entitled 'Dionysus'.

See p. 46.

Pacuvius: *Pentheus* (2nd century BCE)

On Pacuvius' *Pentheus* see Schierl 2006, 418–22.

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Accius: *Bacchae* (late 2nd century BCE)

See p. 44.

Alexander Comicus: *Dionysus* (2nd–1st centuries BCE)

Just one fragment (F1 K-A) survives of Alexander's comedy; the deictic mention of a mirror (κάτοπτρον) appears to refer to women-only Dionysiac rituals and thus to recall the cross-dressing scene in *Bacchae*; cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 140 for use of κάτοπτρον. On Dionysus in Greek comedy, see Lada-Richards 1999; Revermann 2014, 280.

Crassus and the Parthians (53 BCE)

See pp. 46–47.

Catullus 63, 64 (mid-1st century BCE)

Catullus 64.257 is almost a translation of *Bacchae* 739; the surrounding lines are also resonant. Harrison 2004 discerns the influence of *Bacchae* on Catullus 63, mostly as a source of conventional ritual details. For Catullus 63 as 'a kind of reversal of Euripides' *Bacchae*', see Hunter and Fantuzzi 2004, 479–80.

Propertius 3.17, 3.22 (1st century BCE)

Propertius 3.17 (*nunc, o Bacchae*) places Pentheus' death, including the three *thiasoi* led by his mother and aunts, in the god's aretalogy: *Pentheos in triplices funera grata greges* ('Pentheus' death, welcomed by three gangs', 3.17.24). In 3.17 (*frigida tam multos placuit*), while enumerating reasons why Tullus should return to Italy, the poet observes that *Penthea non saevae venantur in arbore Bacchae* ('[here] the savage Bacchants do not pursue Pentheus in his tree', 3.22.33); see *Bacch.* 1061–64 for the tree.

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Horace (1st century BCE)

The Bacchus ode, 2.19 (*Bacchum in remotis*) contains many details present in the *Bacchae*, and the phrase *tectaque Penthei / disiecta non leni ruina* (14–15) in the god's aretalogy may refer to the palace miracle in the play, or to the myth more generally. At *Ep*. 1.16.73–79 Horace adapts *Bacchae* 492–98, casting the disguised Dionysus as *vir bonus et sapiens*; Mayer 1994 suggests that he may have been using Accius' *Bacchae*; see Friesen 2015, 96–117. Further allusions appear at *Sat*. 2.2.2 (Orestes and Agave) and 2.3.3.3–4 (Agave's madness). Hunter 2006, 48ff. reads allusions to the *Bacchae* in *Odes* 1.37; see Hardie 1977.

Virgil: *Aeneid* (1st century BCE)

For a structural reworking of *Bacchae* in the *Aeneid* see Mac Góráin 2013. See Giusti 2018, 91, 98, 133, 143–45 for Virgil's use of *Bacchae* in constructing Carthage.

Hyginus: *Fabulae* 184, 239 (1st century BCE)

Fabula 184, 'Pentheus and Agave', condenses the Euripidean plot: Agave, together with Ino, and Autonoe, maddened by Liber, tore Pentheus limb from limb (*membratim laniauit*). *Fabula* 239, a catalogue of 'Mothers who killed their sons', includes Agave.

Livy: *Ab Urbe Condita* 39 (1st century BCE–1st century CE)

Schiesaro 2016, 31 sees echoes of *Bacchae* in Livy's Bacchanalian narrative.

See pp. 40–41, and Introduction, pp. 13–17.

Strabo: *Geography* (1st century BCE–1st century CE)

Strabo quotes *Bacchae* in discussions of Homer (1.2.20; *Bacch*. 13ff.), poetics (10.3.13; *Bacch*. 55ff., 72ff.), and India (15.1.7; *Bacch*. 13ff.).

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Ovid: 'Pentheus and Bacchus' (1st century BCE–1st century CE)

See pp. 54–56 on *Met.* 3.511–733. Parallels with *Bacchae* have also been read in 'Tereus and Procne' (*Met.* 6.424–674) by Siegel 1994.

3 Maccabees (1st century BCE–1st century CE)

Cousland 2001 makes a case for reception of *Bacchae* in 3 Maccabees. There is no intertextuality, as such, but there are typological overlaps; allusions to common themes such as theomachy and divine retribution are strongly suggestive of literary echoes.

pseudo-Vergilian *Culex* (1st century CE)

An aside in the *Culex* mentions Agave hiding in a cave after killing Pentheus (*Cul.* 110–14).

Porta Maggiore relief (1st century CE)

A sculptural relief in the Porta Maggiore basilica (*LIMC* 'Pentheus' 7.61, first century CE) depicts a pantomime scene from some kind of Pentheus-related performance. Agave, flanked by two maenads, dances with a mask of Pentheus (i.e. his head) in one hand and a sword in the other. In its emphasis on histrionics and theatricality, on family dynamics, and on Agave herself, this image can be said to be working in a Euripidean mode. See Sauron 2007, 253–54, citing G. Bendinelli, 'Il monumento sotterraneo di Porta Maggiore in Roma', *Monumenti Antichi* 21 (1926): 729 with plate 39, 2.

Messalina (mid-1st century CE)

See pp. 50–51.

Nero (mid-1st century CE)

Nero is said by Dio to have 'performed some *Atthis* or *Bacchae* on the lyre' (61.20); see Suet. *Nero* 21–25 for his musical and theatrical performances.

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Seneca the Younger (1st century CE)

Atreus as stage-director in *Thyestes* has been read as a response to Dionysus playing an equivalent role in the *Bacchae*; see Schiesaro 2003, 153–58.

Two passages in *Oedipus* seem to play on the sparagmos of Pentheus in Euripides; see 436–44 and 515–18. On Bacchus and *Bacchae* in this play, see Boyle 2012, esp. notes on the Ode to Bacchus at 110–201; and on 436–44 he notes that "Agave functions both as a paradigm of the 'impious' mother who 'unknowingly' destroys her son (a paradigm already fixed in the past of the Theban royal house and now realized as present by Jocasta ... and as family precedent for Oedipus. Her 'unknowing' filicide is clearly intended to prefigure Oedipus' 'unknowing' parricide."

Valerius Flaccus: *Argonautica* (1st century CE)

Two similes in the *Argonautica* recall moments from *Bacchae*. At 3.263–66, the Argonauts at Cyzicus, realizing what they have done, are compared to a maenad (*Thyias*, either Agave or a generalizing singular) who, deserted by Bacchus, finally recognizes Pentheus' head. At 7.300–6, Medea, tasked with following Venus out of the palace, is compared to Pentheus, left in the palace at Thebes by Bacchus, putting on his Bacchic costume: *pudibundaque tegmina matris / tympanaque et mollem subito miser accipit hastam* ('the poor boy suddenly takes his mother's shameful clothes, the drum, and the soft spear', 303–4).

Statius: *Achilleid*, *Agave* (1st century CE)

Juvenal mentions Statius' lost pantomime *Agave* (*Sat*. 7.82–87). The *Achilleid* is replete with references to *Bacchae* (compare, for instance, the cattle *sparagmos* at *Bacch*. 734–36 with the maenadic ritual described at *Ach*. 1.596). See Heslin 2005, 237–57, esp. 243–45.

Plutarch: *On the Glory of the Athenians* (1st–early-2nd–centuries CE)

See p. 43.

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Dio Chrysostom, *Alexandrian Oration* (1st–early-2nd centuries CE)

In this oration (*Or.* 32) delivered in the theatre at Alexandria, Dio criticizes the Alexandrians for unruly public behaviour. In particular, he compares them to a chorus of maenads and quotes *Bacch.* 709, 'scratching the ground with their fingertips' (*Or.* 32.59.3–4). See Gangloff 2006, 276–77; Friesen 2015, 187–96.

Ps.-Apollodorus: *Bibliotheca* 3.36 (1st–2nd centuries CE)

The relevant section of the *Bibliotheca* retells the story of *Bacchae* from Dionysus' return to Thebes and the Theban women's revels to Pentheus' spying, Agave's madness, and the *sparagmos*.

The New Testament (1st–2nd centuries CE)

See pp. 61–62.

Aristides, *Apology* (2nd century CE)

In his invective against pagan gods, Aristides mentions Semele's birth (*Ap.* fr. 9.7) and the madness that Dionysus causes his followers to undergo (*Ap.* fr. 10.9). See Funke 1965–66, 255.

Lucian (2nd century CE)

In *Adversus Indoctum*, Demetrius the Cynic mocks a poorly educated Corinthian for his poor reading of 'the bit where the messenger narrates what happens to Pentheus and what Agave does' (19). In *Bacchus* (1–2), Dionysus' armies are described ripping up India's herds, while the Indian spies' report recalls the first messenger speech of *Bacchae*. And in *De morte Peregrini* (2.10–13), Lucian recalls what happened when he criticized Peregrinus' self-immolation right by the pyre: 'I was almost torn to shreds by the Cynics, like Actaeon torn apart by his dogs, or his cousin Pentheus torn apart by the Maenads' (2.10–13). See Funke 1965–66, 244 on *Salt.* 41.10 and Sauron 2009, 255–56 on *Cal.* 16 for less certain examples.

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Aulus Gellius: *Attic Nights* (2nd century CE)

Favorinus quotes *Bacch*. 386–88 at *Attic Nights* 1.15.17.1.

Clement of Alexandria (2nd–3rd centuries CE)

See p. 63.

Celsus: *Alethes Logos* (late-2nd century CE)

See pp. 62–63.

Pseudo-Oppian: *Cynegetica* (early 3rd century CE)

See pp. 53–54.

Origen: *Contra Celsum* (mid-3rd century CE)

See pp. 62–63.

Pseudo-Callisthenes: *Alexander Romance* (4th century CE?)

The so-called *Alexander Romance* (i.e. the *Historia Alexandri Magni*, recension α, 1.46a.8.42–44) refers to the tree from which Pentheus fell.

Basil of Caesarea (4th century CE)

In an imploring letter to Martinianus, Basil compares Cappadocia's troubles to Pentheus' *sparagmos* (*Ep*. 74.1.19–21).

Julian: Seventh Oration (4th century CE)

Julian quotes *Bacchae* 370–71 while praising Ὁσία (Holiness) in his oration 'To the Cynic Heraclius, about how to be a Cynic and whether a Cynic should make up stories'.

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Firmicus Maternus: *On the Errors of Pagan Religions* (4th century CE)

Firmicus' euhemerizing, critical description of Liber in Thebes alludes to Pentheus, and makes pointed reference to the history of Dionysiac tragedies: 'There was also another Liber, a tyrant in Thebes, famous for his magical powers. Such crimes (*scelera*) as he committed, the great sin (*facinus*) he ordered a mother to do to her son or sisters to their brother: every day these are passed down, on the stage, by the authors of tragic poetry' (*De errore* 6.6). On Firmicus see also Massa in this volume.

Synesius: *On Providence* (4th–5th centuries CE)

Synesius' *On Providence* (2.5) arguably alludes to *Bacchae* 485–86, where it is established that mysteries are best performed at night: ἀγνωσία σεμνότης ἐπὶ τελετῶν, καὶ νὺξ διὰ τοῦτο πιστεύεται τὰ μυστήρια ('ignorance means seriousness as far as initiation rituals go, and it is for this reason that the mysteries are entrusted to the night', *De prov*. 2.5.8–9). See Funke 1965–66, 273.

Theodoretus, *Cure of Greek Maladies* (5th century CE)

Theodoretus quotes *Bacchae* 472, '[the rituals are] forbidden for the uninitiated to know' (*Graec. aff. cur*. 1.86.3–4).

Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* (5th century CE)

See pp. 56–57.

Timotheus of Gaza, *On Animals* (5th–6th centuries CE)

In a section headed 'About the leopard' Timotheus retells the story from the *Cynegetica* in which Dionysus' followers (here τροφοί, nurses) willingly transform into leopards and kill Pentheus (*De animalibus* 11.5–8). Notably, the following section (11.9–11) describes the same wine-based leopard-trapping technique detailed in ps.-Oppian's *Cynegetica*.

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Ioannes Malalas, *Chronographia* (6th century CE)

See pp. 57–59.

Ioannes Lydus, On the Offices of the Roman State (6th century CE)

John the Lydian quotes *Bacchae* 13 ('the gold-rich lands of Lydia') when recounting John the Cappadocian's greed in Lydia (*De magistratibus* 224.4–7 Bandy).

Ioannes Antiochenus, *Historia Chronica* (7th century CE)

In a brief fragment (F14 Roberto = F7 *FHG*), John of Antioch condenses Malalas' account from the *Chronographia* (see pp. 57–59).

George Cedrenus, *Compendium Historiarum* (11th century CE)

Cedrenus paraphrases Malalas' account (see pp. 57–59) at *Compendium Historiarum* 1.43.

Ioannes Tzetzes (12th century CE)

In *Histories* 61 (= *Chil*. 6. 556–86), John Tzetzes explicitly cites and paraphrases both Euripides' mythical (μυθικῶς) story from *Bacchae* as well as the allegorical (ἀλληγορῶν) account of 'John'. And in a letter addressed to 'Isaac Comnenus', while discussing famous figures who betrayed their family, Tzetzes mentions 'The Antiochean [and his account of] Agave betraying her son to death' (*Ep*. 6.14.1–2 Leone). *FHG* includes the Tzetzes passage as a testimonium to John of Antioch (*Hist. Chr*. F7, see above); Roberto's new edition does not. Tzetzes does use 'John the Antiochean' to refer to either John of Antioch *or* John Malalas. Based on narrative details, however, it seems more likely that Tzetzes refers here to John of Antioch's *Historia Chronica*, which in any case made much use of Malalas' *Chronographia*.

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Christus Patiens = Χριστός Πάσχων, (4th? 12th? century CE)

See pp. 64–65.

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