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MEDIATING AND MEDITATING DISASTER:

TIRESIAS, KADMOS AND OLD AGE IN THE BAKKHAI

by

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Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
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Introduction

Ancient and modern critics have noted the social focus of Euripides' tragedies in comparison to his predecessors Aeschylus and Sophokles. Euripides draws his characters from a diversity of social classes and in so doing, expands the number of social interactions the audience sees on stage. Euripides' Athenian audience must have recognized this focus, as can be seen in the well-known competition between the characters of Euripides and Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*:

Euripides: I wouldn't have any character idle, I'd have the wife speak, and the slave just as much, and the master, and the maiden, and the old lady.

Aeschylus: And for such audacity you deserve the death penalty!

Euripides: No, by Apollo, it was a democratic act!¹

This short comic interchange suggests humorously that underlying Euripides' choice of a broad range of characters is a difference in agenda from Aeschylus. Thus Aristophanes depicts the earlier tragedian archaic and more elitist in contrast with the younger democrat Euripides.

Even if we would not call his shift in focus "democratic," a real shift of social focus is born out in reading Euripides plays. His tragedies show concern for the social

¹ **Euripides:** ἐπειτ' ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων ἐπῶν οὐδένα παρήκ' ἄν ἀργὸν
ἀλλ' ἔλεγεν ἡ γυνὴ τέ μοι χῶ δοῦλος οὐδὲν ἦττον
τοῦ δεσπότης χὴ παρθένος χὴ γραῦς ἄν.

Aeschylus: εἶτα δῆτα
οὐκ ἀποθανεῖν σε ταῦτ' ἐχρῆν τολμῶντα;

Euripides: μὰ τὸν Ἀπόλλω·
δημοκρατικὸν γὰρ αὐτ' ἔδρων.

Frogs, 948-51, trans. Henderson. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. The Greek text is taken from the OCT. OCT used for the *Bakkhai* is Diggle's .

repercussions of tragedy. Euripides' peer Sophokles focuses in his tragedies on the individual, his or her stubborn refusal to yield to necessity, and consequent tragic destruction in isolation from community. The spotlight, so to speak, in a Sophoclean play is on individual tragedy. H.D.F. Kitto also draws the following comparison between Sophokles and Euripides, whose "tragic theme is, if we may so generalize it, the social suffering which follows social wrong-doing – the dramatic antithesis to Sophokles' method, an individual fault which leads to individual suffering."² Euripides' plays emphasize the social ripples of an individual's tragedy.

This emphasis is evident in Euripides' use of aged characters in his plays, and specifically in his depiction of their relationship to the younger generations, who are usually at the center of the tragedy. All but two of Euripides' tragedies include an old man.³ Even excluding the many more peripheral characters, such as old tutors, there are nine old men in Euripides' plays who have significant (if secondary) roles.⁴ There has been no holistic study of these old men of Euripides, but instance by instance, scholars have very often interpreted the presence of old men on the stage as comic caricature.

Euripides' use of comedy in tragedy is also a topic which has attracted a great amount of discussion of the genre of his plays.⁵ The discussion of comic elements in Euripides has often focused on some of Euripides' old men: Peleus, Iolaus, Kadmos and Tiresias and Pheres. The activity of all these old men has been characterized as comic or

² H.D.F. Kitto. *Greek Tragedy* (New York: Methuen, 1939), 252.

³ Thomas Falkner points out this figure. These two are the *Iphigenia at Tauris* and the *Rhesus*. *The Poetics of Old Age in Greek Epic, Lyric, and Tragedy*, (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

⁴ Pheres (*Alkestis*), Iolaus (*Herakleidae*), Peleus (*Andromache*), Teiresias and Kadmos (*Bakkhai*), Amphitryon (*Herakles*), Oidipous and Teiresias (*Phoinissai*), and Iphis (*Suppliant Women*).

⁵ Donald Mastronarde goes over most of this discussion in his most recent monograph. He argues convincingly for understanding a good amount of flexibility in genre as regards Euripides plays. *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context* (Cambridge: 2010), 52-62.

ridiculous. Bernard Knox, for instance, summarized some of these discussions of Euripides' old men in general terms, in order to contrast Sophokles' portrayal of Oidipous in his *Oidipous at Kolonos*:

[O]ld men, in Greek tragedy, are not treated too kindly. With the single conspicuous exception of the prophet Tiresias (and even he is treated with a certain measure of cynical irreverence in the *Bakkhai* of Euripides), they are always portrayed with a keen eye for the foibles of old age. Officious and complacent like the Corinthian messenger in the *Oidipous Tyrannus*, weak and pathetic like Amphytrion in the *Heracles* or Peleus in the *Andromache*, cynical and selfish like Pheres in the *Alkestis* or Cadmus in the *Bakkhai*, garrulous like Tyndareus in the *Orestes*, filled with impotent, bloodthirsty spite like the old servant in the *Ion* – they are usually either slightly ridiculous or sinister.⁶

Yet although characterizations like Knox's may be true at one level, such a summary does not suffice to capture Euripides' use of the old men in his tragedies. Euripides portrays these older male characters as very often possessing a unique set of significant traits in common. These include first of all a unique wisdom or insight into the situation of the younger generation. Their efforts to mediate the oncoming disaster of the central characters, though always futile, are emphasized. Finally, their experience of the surviving and surveying the ultimate tragedy of the younger generation displays a unique and vivid sense of loss and mourning.

This coincidence of ridicule and respect in representations of old men ought not to be too disconcerting since a variety of comic and even derisive attitudes towards aging are to be found in the literature of ancient societies, even in social contexts where elderly men enjoyed positions of tremendous societal and political respect. Thus in the literary corpus of Sparta, a *polis* which indeed could fairly be characterized as gerontocratic, are a number of harsh words. But in Classical Athens, we see an even

⁶ Bernard Knox. *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley:1964), 145.

more blatant ridicule for the elderly. Attic tragedy is by no means a reliable lens through which to understand the social reality of Athens. Nevertheless, in order to understand the meaning of Kadmos and Tiresias in the *Bakkhai*, especially in terms of their relationship with Pentheus, the reader must try to understand contemporary attitudes towards the elderly and the aging process. Especially he must understand the ability of ancient societies and audiences to hold both reverential and jocose or derisive attitudes at the same times towards a figure of the elderly. Moreover, the strong generational tensions of Euripides' Athens invite the reader to ask important questions, perhaps the right ones, of this drama.

Even from the very earliest literary sources, we can see both positive and negative descriptions of the aging process, and depictions of both passive and active elders. Thus, both *liparon* and *stugeron* are commonly used by Homer to describe the physical experience of old age. Priam and Nestor exemplify two different types of elderly leaders, for instance. Priam is depicted as passive and inactive, for instance letting the younger men make significant decisions for Troy. In the familiar *teichoskopia* of Book Three, the Trojan king needs Helen to point out and name the younger men on the battlefield.⁷ Nestor plays an authoritative role among the ranks of the Greeks, even pointing this out explicitly in a rebuke to Diomedes:

Son of Tydeus, beyond others you are strong in battle,
And in counsel also are boldest among all men of your own age. ...
... Yet you have not made complete your argument,
Since you are a young man still and could be my own son, ...
But let me speak, since I can call myself older than you are.⁸

⁷ *Iliad* 3.121-244.

⁸ *Iliad* 9.53-62: tr. Lattimore.

Nestor holds authority on the basis of his wisdom and counsel. The association of elderly male with wisdom continues; in the Spartan context it is formalized so that Spartan elders held significant political authority. In Athens this association continues; in the Classical period, however there is no evidence in her formal structures which give authoritative place to the elderly, and patterns of intergenerational tension contribute further to a decided lack of expressed respect.

In the fifth century, Athens contrasted in many ways with her southern rival Sparta; contrasting attitudes towards the elderly offer yet more variety of those to which Euripides may be compared. No doubt many of these contrasts stem from the Athenian perspective through which we view an idealized Sparta. Nonetheless, in the very governmental structures, the status of the elderly appears to have been quite different in the two *poleis*. The seventh century poet Tyrtaeus depicts old age as ugly in contrast with an idealized youth characterized by martial valor. Despite this poetic description, no doubt aimed towards encouraging bravery in the ranks, the social and political status of the elderly appears to be quite high in Sparta. Participation in the *gerousia*, one of Sparta's central governing institutions, was limited by age. Speech was perhaps the most significantly respected aspect of Spartan old men. Strict rules of deference to elders were held by the Spartiates; Spartan ephebes were to remain silent as a token of respect to their elders.⁹ Ephraim David points out that the old men of Sparta were exempted from the famous general Spartan rules of laconic speech and abstention from shows of emotion. Sparta provides an example of a gerontocratic society and the authority and reverence

⁹ Ephraim David. *Old Age in Sparta*. (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1991), 66.

given old men in this society reflects her priorities of maintaining and conserving certain norms and values through a hierarchical government and complex initiatory practices.

Cicero gives a well-known anecdote in his *De Senectute* that contrasts this Spartan gerontocracy with a much different Athenian attitude. He tells the story that during a play at the theater of Dionysos, an old man was looking for a seat.¹⁰ No Athenian rose to give him a place, but a group of Spartans in attendance immediately offered the elder theirs. Cicero says that the Athenians knew that this was the right thing to do, but did not do it. Despite certain evidence for respect of the elderly (for instance in Plato) we see in Classical Athens that tensions have developed between the generations to the point that significant signals of respect for the elderly are absent. Athens in this period was an extremely litigious society. Oratory, among other sources, presents numerous instances of domestic suits. The obligations of parents to children and children to parents became formalized, as fathers sued their sons for withholding support or *threpteria*, and sons brought their fathers to court to be judged senile (*graphe paranoias* – if successfully argued, the father would have to hand over his estate before decease). Cicero says that the sons of Sophokles once brought their father to court to be declared senile. He comments on the legal system of Classical Athens, which provided this recourse, “in the same way as it is customary by our law for property to be withheld from

¹⁰ 18.63. *Moreover, Lysander, the Spartan, of whom I just now spoke, is reported to have said more than once that in Sparta old age has its most fitting abode; because nowhere else is so much deference paid to age and nowhere else is it more honoured. For example, there is a story that when an old man entered the theatre at Athens during the dramatic performances, not one of his countrymen in that vast crowd offered him a place; but when he came to the special seats occupied by the Lacedaemonians and assigned to them because they were ambassadors, all of them arose, it is said, and invited him to sit down. After this action had been greeted by the whole audience with repeated applause, one of the Spartans remarked: "These Athenians know what politeness is, but they won't practise it."*

aged parents.”¹¹ Old Comedy offers further evidence of disrespect from the younger generations. Aristophanes commonly describes members of the younger generation abusing and beating their parents, though the author definitely conveys disapproval in his depiction. While his portrayal does not prove the social reality at Athens, it does indicate a level of tension and disrespect.

The sophist Thrasymachus suggests that this situation in Classical Athens was a shift away from an archaic ideal of formal reverence for the older generation: “I could wish, men of Athens, to have belonged to that long-past time when young men were content to remain silent, and when events did not compel them to speak in public, while the older men were correctly supervising the city.”¹² Such an ideal of elderly authority was preserved, more or less, in Sparta. But in Athens, when Plato and Aristotle argue that respect and reverence be given to the elderly, their arguments demonstrate by contrast what appears to be a flagrant pattern of disrespect and focus on youth. Reasons for the change center on Athens’ democratization and individualization in the fifth century not only in the political but intellectual sphere. Meyer Reinhold makes the insightful point that “it was above all the growth in respect for reason that increasingly led to the “de-authoritization” of the fathers and the older generation,” as is expressed by Aristotle’s statement “In general all men seek not their forefathers’ way, but what is good.”¹³ Politically, Athens’ transformation into a democracy was brought about through

¹¹ *Quem ad modum nostro more male rem gerentibus patribus bonis interdici solet.* Sophokles, Cicero tells us, countered this charge by reciting one of his own plays, the *Oidipous at Kolonos* from memory. After this he asked, “whether it appeared the poem of a senile man.” (*num illud carmen desipientis videretur.*) *De Senectute* 7.22-23.

¹² “On the Constitution” H Diels *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. W Krans (Berlin: Walther Kranz, 1903), 322-24.

¹³ Meyer Reinhold “The Generation Gap in Antiquity” in *The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Stephen Bertman (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner, 1976,:15-54. *Politics* 1269A.29-30.

the younger generation overturning institutions which were based on status and age and replacing them with institutions which functioned on the basis of merit and public consideration and judgment.

In literature, the tension of generations appears to ease as Athens' golden age progresses into Hellenistic period. New Comedy gives one indication of this, displaying the stock characters the "Good Son" and the "Good old Man" in contrast with Aristophanes' depiction of father- and mother beating. Nor do we see much evidence in the political sphere of tension or name calling between the younger and older.

This discussion of the evidence of the social attitudes towards and experience of demonstrates the importance of my current study. First of it should point out the necessity to closely examine literary sources. It is mistaken to extrapolate from the stage to society, but recognizing trends in society helps one to ask the right questions of literature. Furthermore, the paucity of primary sources makes the literary sources more significant. It should also be clear that there was a unique strain on generational relations in Classical Athens which in turn obfuscates evidence for respectful and reverential attitudes towards aging and the position of old men within the society.

Despite the complexities of aging in ancient Greece, there has been remarkably little scholarship either on aging as a social process in the Greek context, or on the depiction of old age in drama and certain other literary contexts.

Perhaps this paucity of scholarship on aging as a social process in antiquity can be attributed to a similarly small number of primary sources. But, as Moses Finley (1981) points out, old age is a frequent theme in Greek literature, but has not received a great deal of scholarly attention. Benjamin Richardson (1933), now almost a century old,

wrote the only book that addresses Greek geriatrics generally. His work is largely a survey of the ancient evidence rather than an interpretation of it. Robert Garland (1991) in *The Greek Way of Life from Conception to Old Age*, and Ephraim David (1991) on old age in Sparta both address old age as a social issue. The topic of intergenerational conflict in antiquity relates to the subject of old age and is especially pertinent to the plots of many Euripidean plays; Euripides' old men themselves become actively involved in this conflict between the two generations below them, or as in Pheres' case, find themselves in conflict with their own sons. Stephen Bertman (1976) has edited a collection of papers on this topic, which address the issue in literary and historical contexts.

Thomas Falkner (1995) and Fritz Preisshofen (1977) both examine the poetics of old age. Preisshofen's study focuses much more on language and expression in the description of old age. His work treats Greek poetry from Homer until Pindar comprehensively, though it does not touch upon drama.¹⁴ Falkner approaches the same texts selectively, including chapters on Euripides and Sophokles. His purpose is to pursue the meaning of old age in these works and the cultural concerns to which they speak. Falkner's discussion of old age as a theme in the *Odyssey* draws an especially interesting contrast between the different age categories. The characterizations and caricatures of old men and of old women which takes place in Greek comedy are discussed, respectively, by Thomas Hubbard (1989) and Jeffrey Henderson (1987).

I have chosen to focus on the *Bakkhai* because interpretation of this play hinges in many ways on how one interprets the relationship between the older generation, Kadmos

¹⁴ Fritz Preisshofen includes as an appendix a very handy run-down of the descriptions and attributes of old age attested in each of the poets' works. *Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Greisenalters in der fruehgriechische Dichtung*, in *Hermes* Einselschr 34 (Wiesbaden,1977):111-18.

and Tiresias, with the younger, Pentheus. While Kadmos and Tiresias are well within the oldest age bracket, Pentheus is clearly a young man coming of age. Pentheus rejects the advice and world view of his elders, and this rejection is also the reason for his downfall. If on the one hand, one interprets the two old men as caricatures, one may see Kadmos and Tiresias as figures who serve to isolate Pentheus in his rational stance against the dangerous threat of religious fervor, symbolized by Dionysos. However, by interpreting Kadmos and Tiresias as venerable Theban authorities depicted seriously, one can see Pentheus' rejection as a flippant rejection of religion which Euripides views with piety. Between these two extremes of interpretation lie a variety of subtleties which are bound up in the fascinating disconnect between the oldest generation, and the younger.

In this paper, I will focus on Euripides' presentation of two old men, Tiresias and Kadmos in the *Bakkhai*. I will point out the comic, caricature-like and effeminate aspects of their portrayal, but argue, ultimately, that these are balanced by the insight, attitude and values embraced by the old men. The portrayal of these two old men contrasts starkly with that of Pentheus, and this contrast is created to suggest where the young man fails. I will first examine the characterization of Kadmos and Tiresias in their first encounter with Pentheus and their portrayal as serious authorities and somewhat comic figures. Next I will examine what the content of their insight is. Finally, I will examine the role of gender as a characterization of the old men, and as a way of understanding their mediating and expedient world view.

While I have limited my study to one play, the *Bakkhai*, I believe that many of the elements which characterize Kadmos and Tiresias apply also to Euripides old men. I have tried to point out some of these places. Such likenesses between plays strengthen

my argument that Euripides means to convey the experience of old age, and its relation to tragedy in a specific way. The subject of old women in Euripides can be saved for another paper. The depiction of age is highly gendered, and so my study is confined to the male experience of old age, which itself involves an experience of the feminine.

Chapter 1

The Characterization of Tiresias and Kadmos

Tiresias and Kadmos both appear on stage before the main action of the *Bakkhai*, and Kadmos reappears after Pentheus' death. Despite their absence from the majority of the play, these two characters play a central role in framing major themes of the drama. In this chapter, I will analyze the participation of Tiresias and Kadmos in two important and overlapping themes of the *Bakkhai*, sight and integration (both of state and self). The conflict of Pentheus and Dionysos is the center of the *Bakkhai*. Pentheus, the young king of Thebes, is not able to integrate Dionysos successfully into his polis Thebes. Pentheus' own identity as well as his ability to rule manifest a fragmentation, in the form of the paradigmatic Theban ruler whom Froma Zeitlin describes, who desires at first "to exercise single hegemony over others Yet confronted with the limitations he has never acknowledged ... he discovers that he cannot rule himself, cannot maintain an unequivocal identity. ... he must surrender the political kingship."¹⁵ In the *Bakkhai*, his interaction with the god causes Pentheus' own disintegration of identity, emotional state and finally, the disintegration of his physical body, when he is torn limb from limb by his mother. Within Pentheus' disintegration comes also the disintegration of Thebes. The disintegration of Pentheus is related thematically to his inability to clearly see (and therefore deal with) Dionysos. It is a significant choice on Euripides' part to contrast Pentheus' disintegration and myopia with the two old men, Tiresias and Kadmos.

¹⁵ Froma Zeitlin. "Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama." In *Nothing To Do With Dionysos*, ed. John Winkler and Froma Zeitlin (Princeton: 1990), 149.

In his introductory monody, Dionysos introduces the theme of sight which fills the *Bakkhai*;

I see the memorial (μνημα) of my mother struck by lighting here, close by, the ruins of her house and home smoldering with the still-living flame of Zeus' fire the immortal injury of Hera against my mother.¹⁶

In his description of Semele's monument on the Kadmeia (at the site where Zeus' thunderbolt struck his unfortunate lover), the disguised god interprets the physical remnants in terms of the meaning and background of the unusual memorial.¹⁷ Themes of sight and understanding characterize the interaction between the two principal characters of the *Bakkhai*, Pentheus and Dionysos.¹⁸ Pentheus' fall is characterized by his inability to see clearly, both physically and intellectually. Helene Foley points out the significance of sign and sight to Pentheus' story, "Pentheus is destroyed through his confinement to one level of language and sight ... He repeatedly seems unable to see - or hear - the implication of the speeches, sound or images presented to him."¹⁹ Pentheus' scene of recognition, his *anagnoresis*, emphasizes this theme of sight. Leading up to this crescendo, the primary cause of Pentheus' myopia is the god Dionysos, who is also the main object which Pentheus is not able to understand and see clearly.

The theme of sight is not confined to the character of Pentheus. Because Dionysos is not only a divinity on the stage, but is patron god of the festival hosting the

¹⁶ ὄρω δὲ μητρὸς μνημα τῆς κεραυνίας
Τὸδ' ἐγγύς οἰκῶν καὶ δόμων ερείπια
Τυφόμενα Δίου πυρὸς ἔτι ζῶσαν φλόγα,
ἀθάνατον Ἥρας μητέρ' εἰς ἐμὴν ὕβριν. (6-9)

¹⁷ It is unusual that the smoldering earth would be the birthplace of a vegetation god. This thus even gets into the complicated nature of Dionysos as an object of sight and understanding.

¹⁸ Charles Segal. *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bakkhai*. Princeton University Press: 1997a. 221.

¹⁹ Helene Foley, "The Masque of Dionysos" in *TAPA 110* (1980): 124.

drama, the god's control over *opsis* and illusion extends beyond Pentheus and not only to all the other Theban actors: Agave, Kadmos, Tiresias and the chorus, but also to his entire Athenian audience in the theater. In his analysis of the *Bakchai* as meta-tragedy, Charles Segal suggests that two scenes in particular, the "palace miracle" scene (585-646)²⁰ and Pentheus' robing scene (826-917),²¹ bring out the power of illusion which Dionysos wields not only over Pentheus, but also the audience.²² For example, the chorus describes the destruction of the palace in definite, physical terms. But Segal, arguing that the palace set must have remained standing on stage despite the chorus' description, suggests that a contradiction arises between what the audience knows and what it is able to see. Moreover, Dionysos' possession and transformation of Pentheus as θεόςτης accentuates this theme of his illusory power over actor and audience member alike.

Dionysos affects Pentheus, Agave, Tiresias and Kadmos as individuals each in a different way. These differing effects stem from differences in character and in attitude towards the god, in which age definitely plays a part. Pentheus is not simply a victim of Dionysos; even though unforeseen misfortune falls upon him, it is his own inability to accept and see Dionysos which precedes the god's actions upon the young Theban king.

²⁰ Pentheus has taken Dionysos away and bound him. Dionysos calls to the chorus, which respond and react as though the walls of Thebes are being torn asunder. Dionysos appears on stage, in the guise of the stranger, and explains how the god has freed him, confused Pentheus, and destroyed the palace.

²¹ Pentheus arms himself, preparing to round up the Bacchantes in the country, having heard that of their violence against troops and civilians. Dionysos, after cautioning against military action against the Bacchantes asks whether Pentheus would like to see the women (810). This begins a line of questioning through which Dionysos convinces Pentheus to disguise himself. Pentheus asks a series of questions about the elements of his dress and its female attributes. Pentheus leaves the stage (844) to actually get dressed, at which point Dionysos reveals his plan for the Theban king (848-861). Dionysos calls Pentheus back out after a song by the chorus (917). He is dressed in the costume of the Bacchant and immediately shows signs of confusion, seeing two suns and two Thebes (918-922).

²² Segal 1997, 221.

The detailed characterization of Pentheus from the beginning of the play reveals Pentheus' myopia to be partially innate, as well as partially the work of the god.

The sight and comprehension of Kadmos and Tiresias are central to the theme of sight in the *Bakkhai*. Their ability to see and understand is characterized by contrast with Pentheus' sight, or lack thereof. First, their sight is characterized as accurate. Kadmos and Tiresias insightfully approach the god Dionysos in a nuanced way, understanding in him more than one meaning and responding to multiple implications of his presence in Thebes. In this way, their vision contrasts with Pentheus', who "fails to see and interpret symbols, ..." and "remains unaware or fatally resistant to the fact that linguistic signs can refer to more than one valid level of meaning at once."²³ Secondly, the sight of Kadmos and Tiresias has a temporal dimension; it is both forward-looking and prescient while at the same time backward looking. Tiresias with his prophetic nature is not the only one of the two old men who embodies this "diachronic" sight. Kadmos not only shares Tiresias' understanding and sight, but takes an active role to join Tiresias in advising Pentheus. Kadmos' back story with Semele and his experience as king and founder of Thebes also suggest a source for his understanding and foresight in Pentheus' situation. Finally, at the end of the play, Kadmos' hindsight as he surveys the spectacle of his dismembered grandson and maddened, blood-drenched daughter, magnifies the preceding tragedy, and anticipates the future and the consequences for Thebes. This second characteristic of Tiresias' and Pentheus' sight owes directly to their age and experience and creates a contrast between them and Pentheus, who is making the transition from youth into maturity.

²³ Foley 1980, 124.

Tiresias and Kadmos submit to the influence of Dionysos, which is unavoidably aggressive and ecstatic in nature. Nonetheless, many indications are given by the two old men that they continue to hold their wits about them, despite two compromising influences: Dionysos' influence and both men's advanced old age.

When Tiresias arrives at the palace to meet with Kadmos so that they may travel to the mountain together, he calls for the gatekeeper to get Kadmos (170-174). Kadmos enters the stage to greet his friend, "O great friend, even from within the house, hearing, I recognized your talking, wise speech from a wise man."²⁴ Kadmos' immediate appearance (which may be assumed, *sans* stage direction), and his own description of hearing the voice of Tiresias, emphasize Kadmos' ability to hear and recognize his friend. The old man's description of himself, ἐν δόμοισιν ὦν, further suggests a keen and heightened sense of hearing and listening. Kadmos uses γῆρυν at first to describe what he heard and recognized as Tiresias, thus describing the sound of Tiresias' voice. But Kadmos goes on to describe the voice of Tiresias as wise and describes Tiresias as a "wise man." By shifting in his description from the sound to the content of Tiresias, Kadmos highlights the mental acuity of the two old men as well as sharpness of his hearing and attention.

This first indication of mental fitness and attention is not the only one; it is suggested throughout the dialogue of the two old men, it is demonstrated in their argument with Pentheus, and is highlighted at the end of the play when Kadmos deals capably with the aftermath of Pentheus' tragedy. Kadmos voices a concern that they will

²⁴ ὦ φίλταθ, ὡς σὴν γῆρυν ἠσθήμεν κλύων
σοφὴν σοφοῦ παρ' ἀνδρός, ἐν δόμοισιν ὦν. (188-9)

be the only Theban males participating in Dionysos' rites, "we alone of the city will dance for Bacchus."²⁵ Tiresias replies that when they take part, they will demonstrate themselves to be the only men who "are thinking sanely, the others think improperly."²⁶ Tiresias and Kadmos continue to represent themselves with sagacity during their argument with Pentheus, in which both old men demonstrate shrewd observation of Dionysos, of the young Theban king and his situation and perspective. Kadmos' keen sense perception is highlighted again before this encounter, when he spots Pentheus' approach and informs the blind Tiresias, whose ability to "see" the truth will stand out all the more for his inability to "see the light" as Kadmos says.²⁷

It is necessary before examining how Tiresias and Kadmos envision and understand the meaning of Dionysos to consider how the tone of their first appearance (170-369) characterizes the two old men and affects how the audience would perceive the seriousness and reality of their clear sight into Pentheus' situation. The tone of this scene (commonly termed the "Kadmos-Tiresias scene") has received much discussion because of the comedic elements in the characterization of the two old men, especially the contrast between the indications of their great old age and an emphatically youthful *joie de vivre* in joining the other Theban bacchants.

²⁵ μόνοι δὲ πόλεως Βακχίῳ χορεύσομεν. 195. The use of the masculine adjective by Kadmos here, and by Tiresias in the next line to describe "the others" suggests that Kadmos' comment refers to the male population of Thebes. Further more, the inclusion of πόλεως suggests a reference to men. Finally as there is an entire chorus of Dionysian followers, and many Theban women have already joined, Kadmos must be referring to their isolation from the other Theban males.

²⁶ μόνοι γὰρ εὖ φρονεοῦμεν, οἱ ἄλλοι κακῶς. 196. εὖ φρονεῖν can mean "to think favorably" but also "to think rightly" or "to be sane." See LSJ φρονέω 2. WJ Verdenius also chooses this latter option, "As a true worshipper of Bacchus Tiresias believes that mental sanity (cf. 329 σωφρονεῖς) consists in surrendering oneself to an overwhelming power (cf. 272 μέγεθος): see above on 179 σοφὴν σοφῶ). [Kadmos and Tiresias] are inspired by reverence, not by fear." Verdenius 245.

²⁷ ἔπειθ' ἐπεὶ σὺ θεῖος, Τειρεσίᾳ, τόδ' οὐχ ὄρας,
ἔγὼ προφήτης σοὶ λόγοις γενήσομαι. (210-11)

A main function of the Kadmos-Tiresias scene is to introduce the character of Pentheus in parallel fashion to the way the young female chorus of maenads introduced Dionysos' monologue.²⁸ But scholars have disagreed about the emotional tone of the introductory scene, which hinges on the characterization of the elderly Kadmos and Tiresias. The presentation of the two old men, whether humorous, serious, ridiculous or dark, will affect in turn the characterization of Pentheus, who rejects their message and laughs at them as a "great joke."²⁹ There have been two foci of discussion of this scene. The first is a debate about whether a miraculous physical rejuvenation of the two elderly men takes place, while the second focus is the several levels of comedic interpretation of the scene. On both issues, scholars have wrestled to decide whether or not the scene is presented with gravity. Scholars who suggest that the vigor of Kadmos and Tiresias is evidence of a divine miracle of rejuvenation, need not take the miracle or the characters of the two old men completely seriously, though they may. Nor by accepting comedic elements in the scene need the reader envision the two old men as completely ridiculous, although some suggest this.

Several scholars have interpreted the spirit and energy of Kadmos and Teiresias as evidence of a miraculous rejuvenation of the two old men through Dionysos' agency.³⁰ If the scene is a miracle, then Tiresias and Kadmos must be seen as the cronies or instruments of Dionysos, like the Theban women who act under the completely dominating influence the god.³¹ Such a reading may lead one to attribute the agency of Tiresias and Kadmos to the god Dionysos. As a consequence the two elderly figures

²⁸ E.R. Dodds. Euripides; *Bakkhai* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 89-90.

²⁹ πολὺν γέλωσιν 250

³⁰ The major proponents are Murray, Nihard, Roux and Steidle.

³¹ Indeed Froma Zeitlin 1990b (Thebes) points out that "as figurations of madness, Bacchantes and Erinyes are often interchangeable in tragic diction." 137

become much less intrinsically interesting, but are rather reduced to comic versions of the preceding maenad chorus. One piece of evidence presented for this interpretation is that there is no indication of an actor who supports the blind Tiresias as he makes his entrance on stage, as he is usually attended in other plays of Euripides and Sophokles.³² Also, both old men talk as if they have forgotten their old age. Kadmos exclaims “We gladly forget that we are old.”³³ Tiresias responds, “Then you are enjoying the same things as I, for I am young and I am going to make an attempt to dance with the chorus.”³⁴ Their refusal to ride to the mountain, and their decision rather to walk, further emphasize a surprising vitality (189-91). These indications of youthfulness have suggested to some readers an explicit Dionysian miracle taking place on stage.

René Nihard compares the energy of Kadmos and Tiresias in this scene with the *bona fide* miracle and subsequent *aristeia* of Iolaus in the *Herakleidae*.³⁵ His analogy suggests that The strength of Kadmos and Tiresias’ comes in consequence of their full and pious faith in Dionysos. Jeanne Roux would accept Nihard’s analogy, as he states in his commentary on the play that a serious miracle takes place in this scene. This miracle, he suggests, demonstrates two ancient moral authorities of Thebes formally backing the Dionysian cult. Roux reads a very serious quality in the energy of the two old men, describing the tone of the scene with the phrase *gravité solennelle*.³⁶ The necessary conclusion of this interpretation is, as Steidle states, that the main focus of the passage

³² *Phoenissai* 834, Sophokles’ *Antigone* 989, *Oidipous Tyrannus*. 297. Dodds, 1960, accumulated these examples, pg. 90. Roux (303) and Steidle (34) interpret this as evidence for a miraculous rejuvenation.

³³ ...ἐπιλήσμεθ ἠδέως / γέροντες ὄντες. 188-9.

³⁴ ταῦτ’ ἐμοὶ πάσχεις ἄρα·
κἀγὼ γὰρ ἤβῳ κἀπιχειρήσω χοροῖς. (189-90)

³⁵ René Nihard. “Le *Probleme des Bacchantes* d’Euripide,” in *Musee Belge* 16 (1912): 44.

³⁶ “le culte nouveau recoit ici la caution de deux plus hautes auctorites morales de Thebes.” *Euripide Les Bacchantes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1970), 301.

becomes the effect of Dionysos' agency. This interpretation removes any independent agency, intention or voice of the two old men.³⁷

There are several structural and formal reasons to reject the interpretation of Dionysiac rejuvenation. First of all, as W J Verdenius and Bernd Seidensticker points out, even if Tiresias had entered the stage without assistance he exits supported by Kadmos.³⁸ Tiresias also remains blind throughout; his sight is certainly not restored through any miracle. Both Tiresias and Kadmos feel the need to apologize for their behavior in following Dionysos into the country, recognizing and drawing attention to their age and limitations. These statements reveal a certain insecurity even in the geriatric bacchants themselves, which suggests that they have not undergone an absolute transformation. Thus Kadmos states that "I do not *καταφρονῶ* the gods", and Tiresias makes a fuller argument that Dionysos requires the worship of young and old alike, and questioning who would say of them when they pay due worship that they "bring shame to old age."³⁹ ER. Dodds identifies the most significant obstacle to interpreting the Kadmos-Tiresias scene as rejuvenation when he points out that, "if the old men are filled with power, it should be because they are filled with faith."⁴⁰ But they are not full of religious piety or fervor, or at least their belief in the divinity of Dionysos is alloyed with certain pragmatism in becoming his followers and admonishing Pentheus to do the same.

³⁷ "durchaus ernstgemeinte Folge der Einwirkung des Gottes" Steidle, 34.

³⁸ W J Verdenius, "Kadmos, Tiresias, Pentheus: Notes on Euripides' 'Bakkhai' 170-369," in *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 41 (1988): 241- 268. Bernd Seidensticker. "Comic Elements in Euripides' Bakkhai" in *AJP*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (Autumn, 1978): 303-320.

³⁹ Κ: οὐ καταφρονῶ γὰρ τῶν θεῶν θνητὸς γεγώς

...
Τ: ἔρει τις ὡς τὸ γῆρας οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι,
μέλλων χορεύειν κρᾶτα κισσώσας ἑμόν; (200; 204-5)

⁴⁰ Dodds 1960, 90.

Pentheus ridicules the old men without any reservation, and points out their age.⁴¹ This reaction also suggests that they have not been transformed through a formal miracles, into youths, but rather appear as rejuvenated old men.⁴²

If the two old men are understood to undergo a real rejuvenation in this interchange, one must also interpret in it a fairly serious tone, but many more readers have focused on the comic elements of the scene, which are almost undeniable. However, it is nearly impossible to judge the precise reaction which the play may have elicited and was meant to elicit from the audience. Even in comedy, where humor is assumed, tone is difficult to pin down. The role of comedy in tragedy then presents an even more delicate issue for the critic.

Even if one does not interpret the Kadmos-Tiresias scene as a literal miracle of rejuvenation, the energy and liveliness of Kadmos and Tiresias must be dealt with by any interpreter of this passage, specifically with regard to its comic or serious tone. The vigor of the two old men may be understood to demonstrate the emotional effect of participation in Dionysian cult, which Dodds argues had an infectious quality.⁴³ Or their

⁴¹ ἀναίνομαι, πάτερ,
τὸ γέρας ὑμῶν εἰσορῶν νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον. 251-2.

εἰ μή σε γῆρας πολιδὸν ἐξερρέυετο,
καθῆσ' ἄν ἐν Βάχκαιοσι δέσμιος μέσαις,
τελετᾶς πονηρᾶς εἰσάγων. 258-60.

⁴² It would seem to be quite a stretch to suggest that this is an early instance of Pentheus' own myopia, because the "miracle" would have to be so subtly conveyed. We would expect more concrete evidence for a miracle if the audience is meant to see Pentheus actively denying what is plainly visible to others.

⁴³ Dodds 1960, xv. Dodds compares the ecstatic component of Dionysiac cult, which "induces a sense of being possessed by an alien personality" and the phenomenon of "dancing madness" in Renaissance Europe, "when people danced until they dropped and lay unconscious." See also E R Dodds, "Maenadism in the Bakkhai," *HTHR* 33:155-76.

enthusiasm may, as some scholars have suggested, strike a ridiculous or ironic tone.⁴⁴ Some texts roughly contemporary to the *Bakkhai* suggest a special connection between the elderly and Dionysian ritual. These offer a useful comparison with Euripides' treatment of old age and Dionysos, and offer evidence that there existed outside of Euripides a complicated association between the elderly and bacchic rites. A brief analysis of this connection as drawn in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (performed at the Lenaian festival in 405) and Plato's *Laws* (mid fourth century) will open and contextualize my discussion of the comic characterization of the elderly Tiresias and Kadmos in their relationship with the god Dionysos. These texts admit both serious and comic interpretations of elderly men as Dionysian revelers and therefore suggest that in the *Bakkhai* Euripides is drawing upon an association between the elderly and Dionysos that was already complicated in nature, rather than that the playwright must have meant to cast the two men as either blatantly ridiculous or strictly serious and pious old men.

In the *Bakkhai*, the juxtaposition of the rigid physical, social and emotional status of the elderly with their participation in an activity that is fluid in all those three senses of the word prompts both comic and serious interpretations. It is striking that Aristophanes in the *Frogs* and Plato the *Laws* choose to include descriptions of Dionysian rejuvenation of the elderly. These descriptions play precisely on this contrast and also depict it as polyvalent, both comic and demonstrating practical concern for the polis.

In the *Frogs*, Aristophanes' chorus of initiates describe the rejuvenation of old men who participate in night-time rites in a song which first lauds the celebration of the ritual and then connects it to the performance of comedy, making argument for this

⁴⁴ E.g. Seidensticker, Deichgraeber,

genre's important function within the polis and excluding and vilifying those who oppose it (354-371). Their description of the elderly is similar to that in the *Bakkhai* in emphasizing a shift in physical activity as well as demeanor: "the knees of the old men swing, they shake off pains and long spans of ancient years through [their] holy worship."⁴⁵ The chorus stresses the youthful character of their activity: "lead onwards... youth the chorus leader (χοροποιόν)."⁴⁶ The description which contrasts old age and youthful ritual is preceded by a particularly rough sexual joke by Dionysos and Xanthias,⁴⁷ and followed by a zealous apology for the genre of comedy.

Frogs is comedy and thus one may interpret the chorus' description of the rites as purely comedic. Yet in this song the chorus seems to convey some serious points about the genre of comedy and its value to the polis. By making this apology, the chorus connects their genre of performance with religious rituals, both the Eleusinian mysteries, of which they are devotees, but also Dionysos' cult. Though they appear to be Eleusinian followers, the chorus leader especially refers very strongly to the god Dionysos. Just as he received cult worship in the forms of song and dance, Dionysos was also the patron divinity of tragedy and comedy, which were themselves part of his worship in Athens. The chorus leader, in anapests, goes on to abuse all types of persons who threaten the existence of comedy within the polis, now referring explicitly to Bacchic rituals (357, 368). In his continued mockery both of the "Bacchic rites which

⁴⁵ γόνυ πάλλεται γερόντων ·
 ἀποσεύονται δὲ λύπας
 χρονίους δ' ἔτων παλαιῶν
 ἱεράς ὑπὸ τιμῆς. *Frogs* 344-349.

⁴⁶ προβάδην ἔξαγ' ἐπ' ἀνθηρὸν ἔλειον
 δάπεδον χοροποιόν, μάκαρ, ἦβην. *Frogs* 351-2.

⁴⁷ Dover, 237-8

old bull-eating Cratinus' words supply," the chorus leader appears to make a serious charge against those who would "keep nibbling away the Comedians' pay" (369).⁴⁸ Thus Aristophanes suggests a special connection between old age and Dionysos' genre of comedy.

In the second book of *Laws*, Plato's character the Athenian suggests an association between old men and Dionysian rites. The topic of discussion in this book is the function of holidays and ritual music as moral re-education for the polis. The main interlocutor, the Athenian states:

Now this education which consists in correctly trained pleasures and pains tends to slacken in human beings, and in the course of a lifetime becomes corrupted to a great extent. So the gods, taking pity on this suffering that is natural to the human race, have ordained the periods of holidays as times of rest from labor (ἀναπαύλας τῶν πονῶν) (653c7-d5).⁴⁹

But as Christopher Bobonich points out, these rests are scarcely vacations or meant for relaxation. Instead they are intended by the citizen for the reeducation and re-ordering of men in the polis.⁵⁰ Thus he continues, "They have given as fellow celebrants the Muses, with their leader Apollo, and Dionysos – in order that these divinities might set humans right again."⁵¹ The Athenian's proposal for the composition of these choruses reflects his concerns for the reeducation of the citizens who participate in each respective chorus as well as the polis as a whole. He separates the citizen body into three choirs dedicated to

⁴⁹ Trans. Bury. Καλῶς τοίνων. Τούτων γὰρ δὴ τῶν ὀρθῶς τεθραμμένων ἡδονῶν καὶ λυπῶν παιδειῶν οὐσῶν χαλᾶται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ διαφθείρεται κατὰ πολλὰ ἐν τῷ βίῳ, θεοὶ δὲ οἰκτίραντες τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπίπονον πεφυκὸς γένος, ἀναπαύλας τε αὐτοῖς τῶν πόνων ἐτάξαντο τὰς τῶν ἑορτῶν ἀμοιβὰς τοῖς θεοῖς

⁵⁰ Christopher Bobonich. *Plato's 'Laws': A Critical Guide* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵¹ καὶ Μούσας ἅπασι τὴν μουσικήν τε καὶ Διόνυσον συνεορταστὰς ἔδωσαν, ἵνα ἐπανορθῶνται,

the worship of the three mentioned gods and assigns the oldest men of the polis to the third god Dionysos' choir.

He asserts that the ideal body of citizen choristers to make up Dionysos' choir is made up of elderly men because this is the best way for the polis to incorporate the elderly in worshipful music. Old men do not participate in the chorus of other gods because of their shame/pride/honor and also because of their inability to sustain the rigors of strict choir practice. However as the whole polis ought to participate, the god Dionysos' cult provides a lower level of hard practice and a higher level of shame-ridding intoxication for the oldest segment. The argument also suggests that the elderly are most capable of absorbing the wine and seductive potential of Dionysos' worship, as the Athenian suggests that a law be passed that "no children under eighteen may touch any wine at all, teaching that it is wrong to pour fire upon fire either in body or in soul before they set about their real work, and thus guarding against the excitable disposition of the young? And next, we shall rule that the young man under thirty may take wine in moderation, but that he must entirely abstain from intoxication and heaving drinking."⁵² These precautions suggest not only that the wine is needed by the older men, but that its effects overpower the younger men. Thus Dionysos' closest association, wine, offers a danger to the younger constitutions.

On the other hand, the Athenian explains that wine creates a softening in older men that allows them to take on a worshipful attitude and participate in the reeducation of

⁵² Trans. Bury. *Laws* 2 666A.3-B.2. Πρώτον μὲν τοὺς παῖδας μέχρι ἑτῶν ὀκτωκαίδεκα τὸ παράπαν οἴνου μὴ γεύεσθαι, διδάσκοντες ὡς οὐ χρή πῦρ ἐπὶ πῦρ ὀχετεύειν εἰς τε τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, πρὶν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόνους ἐγχειρεῖν πορεύεσθαι, τὴν ἔμμανη εὐλαβούμενοι ἕξιν τῶν νέων· μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο οἴνου μὲν δὴ γεύεσθαι τοῦ μετρίου μέχρι τριάχοντα ἑτῶν μέθης δὲ καὶ πολυοινίας τὸ παράπαν τὸν νέον ἀπέχεσθαι·

the polis. Thus he says, “[Dionysos] inviting his presence at the rite (which is also recreation) of the elder, which he bestowed on mankind as a medicine potent against the crabbedness of old age, that thereby we men may renew our youth, and that, through forgetfulness of care, the temper of our souls may lose its hardness and become softer and more ductile, even as iron when it has been forged in the fire. ... will not this softer disposition, render each one of them more ready and less ashamed to sing chants and incantations (as we have often called them), in the presence, not of a large company of strangers, but of a small number of intimate friends?”⁵³

While couched in terms of serious reasoning about the best way to encourage a pious and worshipful civic body, and to include the god Dionysos, the Athenian’s plan has an unavoidably comic dimension. For while he states of belief that the elderly are the most noble and proud segment of society, he connects them with the least noble form of singing and with a need for loosening and ridding of shame in order to join the rest of the citizen body in sung praise. His interlocutor actually points out this humor, saying, “what is this? Explain, for it is jarring to one hearing it at first, a chorus of Dionysos made up of old men, if indeed men of over thirty and fifty and even almost sixty years are going to dance in chorus for him [Dionysos].”⁵⁴ The Citizen argues that the wine associated with Dionysos’ rites is most needed by the elderly in order to overcome their pride and shame. Thus he suggests a need for role reversal, which is innately comic.

⁵³ Trans. Bury. Διόνυσον παρακαλεῖν εἰς τὴν τῶν πρεσβυτῶν τελετὴν ἅμα καὶ παιδιάν, ἣν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐπικούρον τῆς τοῦ γήρως ἀστηρότητος ἐδωρήσατο τὸν οἶνον φάρμακον ὡστ’ ἀνηβᾶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ δυσθυμίας λήθη γίνεσθαι μαλακώτερον ἐκ σκληροτέρου τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἦθος, καθάπερ εἰς πῦρ σίδηρον ἐντεθέντα τηκόμενον, καὶ οὕτως εὐπλαστότερον εἶναι; πρῶτον μὲν δὴ διατεθεῖς οὕτως ἕκαστος ἄρ’ οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλοι προθυμότερον γε, ἥττον αἰσχυρόμενος, οὐκ ἐν πολλοῖς ἀλλ’ ἐν μετρίοις, καὶ οὐκ ἐν ἀλλοτρίοις ἀλλ’ ἐν οἰκείοις, ἄδειν τε καὶ ὄ πολλὰκις εἰρήκαμεν ἐπάδειν;

⁵⁴ My own translation. Πῶς δὴ λέγε· μάλα γὰρ ἄτοπος γίγνοιτ’ ἂν ὡς ὕ ἐξαίφνης ἀκούσαντι Διόνυσου πρεσβυτῶν χορός, εἰ ἄρα οἱ ὑπὲρ τριάκοντα καὶ πενήκοντα δὲ γεγονότες ἔτη μέχρι ἑξήκοντα αὐτῶν χορεύσουσιν. *Laws* Book 2 665B.2-6.

Although this is the case, the Athenian's reasoning also implies a serious concern for controlling the possibly subversive effects of the wine. Thus he suggests keeping wine away from the younger members of society, suggesting possibly negative results. The Athenian touches upon a range of attitudes that is very similar to those highlighted by Kadmos and Tiresias in the *Bakkhai*: the seductive power of Dionysos's wine, the necessity for the state to incorporate his cult, the role of the elderly as the safest "civic integrators" of this god, and finally the rejuvenating effects of the wine on the elderly.

This brief examination of passages from Aristophanes and Plato has demonstrated that (rough) peers of Euripides observed the participation of the elderly in Bacchic rites to provide easy opportunity for comic presentation. Yet these two presentations of the situation are not merely ridiculous. Rather, in as much as the authors appear to perceive a practical efficacy in the participation of the elderly, they depict these older characters in a more serious tone. These comparandi provide important parallels for Euripides' presentation of Kadmos and Tiresias, since there is in all three a tension between comic and reverential tones.

As has already been stated, the comedic element in the Tiresias-Kadmos scene (with some consensus) stems from the contrast between the age of the two old men and their behavior. Their role in framing Pentheus' introduction sets Tiresias and Kadmos in contrast with the young female chorus of maenads who accompany Pentheus' divine counterpart Dionysos. Pentheus ridicules the two old men and calls them a "great joke."⁵⁵ Because of this reaction from Pentheus, it is important in order to understand his character to first consider exactly how humorous the two men are meant to be. The

⁵⁵ πολὺν γέλωσιν (250)

humorous elements of the scene are numerous. For instance, Tiresias' entrance, which directly follows the departure of the young female chorus, must have elicited laughter from the audience because of the contrast, no matter how it was staged.⁵⁶ The humorous contrast of his entrance, and later Kadmos', first visually strikes the audience, and later Pentheus through the dress of the two old men. Tiresias describes his costume which includes a bacchic thyrsus, fawn skin clothing, and ivy garlands in his hair.⁵⁷ Tiresias and Kadmos' costume not only contrasts with their age, but with their gender. The indulgence and relish with which both old men anticipate their new identity contrast humorously with their admitted insecurity with the proposition. Given the staged and innately humorous elements of the scene, several scholars have gravitated to drastically comic, derisive interpretations of the tone.⁵⁸

The *Bakkhai* is not the only Euripidean play in which the critic must square the genre of tragedy with distinct comedic elements; this issue has attracted quite a bit of scholarship to the concept of tragicomedy. Bernd Seidensticker, in his latter monograph suggested a broad understanding of tragicomedy, as Mastronarde summarizes: "in the tragicomic, the tragic and comic elements may be either simultaneous or juxtaposed, and the effect may be either heightening of the tragic through the comic or a mutual enhancement of the effects of both."⁵⁹ In his treatment of the Kadmos-Tiresias scene (in an earlier article), Seidensticker uses the porter scene in *Macbeth* as a heuristic device to understand the function of the *Bakkhai* scene. He argues that the scene portrays the two old men as ridiculous, since they clearly are presented with humorous elements, and

⁵⁶ Seidensticker 1978, 313.

⁵⁷ θύρσους ἀνάπτειν καὶ νεβρῶν δορὰς ἔχειν
στεφανοῦν τε κράτα κισσίνοις βλαστήμασιν (176-7)

⁵⁸ Deichgraeber, Winington-Ingram, Kitto, Norwood.

⁵⁹ Mastronarde 2010, 59. See Seidensticker 1982, 27-45, especially 36-7.

because Pentheus also laughs at them. Seidensticker proposes that this contributes to the darker themes of the tragedy because, “the spectator of the scene (170ff.), seeing the old king and father and the distinguished prophet, the two main authorities of the city, the representatives of state, family, and official religion, as ridiculous victims and proselytes of the new god, will consequently begin to recognize the tragic isolation of Pentheus.”⁶⁰ Part of the reason that Seidensticker believes we must see Tiresias and Kadmos as “ridiculous victims and proselytes” is that he wants to see Pentheus as a less troubled figure, who is rather isolated by ridiculous elders and does not have positive support in his problem. Seidensticker clearly states that one must accept his interpretation of Kadmos and Tiresias so as not to “entirely rob Pentheus of the audience’s understanding and sympathy and hence already destroy the delicate balance between the two antagonists at the beginning even before their first meeting.”⁶¹

Seidensticker makes the valuable suggestion that the Kadmos-Tiresias scene actually helps to heighten the building tragedy of the *Bakkhai* through its comedic aspects. However his argument as to how this is done contains two flaws: first, the inapplicability of the porter scene and secondly an overly positive understanding of Pentheus’ position.⁶²

The comic elements of Kadmos and Tiresias actually carry a tragic tone within the Kadmos-Tiresias scene, and not only in its effect later in the play. Kadmos and Tiresias are themselves able to engage in the comic rites, as Foley says, keeping the tragedy at a “comic remove,” but their ability to do so only draws out the more tragically

⁶⁰ Seidensticker 1978, 316.

⁶¹ Seidensticker 1978, 314.

⁶² It appears to me that Seidensticker is trying to make too strong of an argument and finesses the text more than it can allow.

Pentheus' inability to buy into this attitude of the older generation. Kadmos and Tiresias' ability to do this, as I show, relies upon their own age and experience, and their particular tragedy is their inability to prevent Pentheus' downfall, as though they are confined in an alternate "comic" universe.

The preceding discussion has centered on the question of the tone of the Kadmos-Tiresias scene. Although I have argued that there are undoubtedly humorous elements in the dramatization of Kadmos and Tiresias, it also has a decidedly somber overtone: not only does the scene heighten the tragic effect of the following action, but the two old men communicate to the audience a real understanding of the situation, though they do not communicate it successfully to Pentheus. The final evidence for their serious and real insight is Kadmos' stance at the end of the play. Just as in the early scene, Kadmos' sight is contrasted with his grandson Pentheus' and his daughter Agave's. Kadmos is unable to help Pentheus, whom Dionysos has deftly manipulated, and was significantly compromised in terms of his vision and understanding when he saw Dionysus as a bull and two suns and two Thebes(918-922). These events have now culminated in his gruesome demise (1043-1152) which the old man surveys. Kadmos displays sanity and clear sight at the end of the play, despite the blurred vision of Pentheus, Agave and her companions. His own sobriety and accurate vision is perhaps most clearly demonstrated when Kadmos helps his daughter to see once more by asking her a series of questions in order to bring her back her to sanity and to recognize the reality of her situation.

Chapter 2

The Insight of Kadmos and Tiresias

In the discussion up to this point, I have considered how Kadmos and Tiresias are depicted as possessing clear sight and understanding but I have not examined the content of their understanding, that is, how they envision Dionysos. In this next section I will examine the multiple dimensions of Dionysos' character which they are able to see. Kadmos and Tiresias are able to see Dionysos in a way Pentheus is not, in two lights: both as a positive, orderly and civilizing deity and as a dangerous force, which poses a threat to Pentheus. Further, I will argue that their insight derives from their past experiences which play a role in defining them as "old" and create a temporal dimension of their vision.

Dionysos exists as a duality in many respects: Olympian and chthonic, male and female, civic deity and ecstatic daimon. These dualities of the god play a large part in the *Bakkhai*, where the theme of appearance versus reality is central. It is for this reason that a good amount of discussion has been had about meta-tragedy in the *Bakkhai*. Such theories, discussed most thoroughly by Charles Segal and Helene Foley, probe yet another duality of Dionysos: he is an actor on the stage, and producer of his own meta-drama in Thebes.

Tiresias and Kadmos are able at once to envision Dionysos as a civic, ordering deity and also as a destructive force. Perhaps Dionysos held a stronger association with social dissolution, being especially tied with earth fertility, wine and ecstasy. But he also

had a civilizing side; even wine, with its disordering and dangerous elements, is a cultivated product of which Dionysos is the inventor. More broadly as an agricultural deity, Dionysos hold sway over this civilized activity.⁶³ Tiresias and Kadmos recognize the god in both of these identities.

Through their own action of following Dionysos, Tiresias and Kadmos demonstrate their vision of Dionysos as a civilizing deity. As they anticipate participating in the festivities of Dionysos, the pair appears to overturn all the expectations which Pentheus voices. Pentheus presents a picture where the god Dionysos does not control his own followers, suggesting instead that “they prefer Aphrodite over Bacchus,” and use the title of Bacchiac as a pretext, πρόφασιν (224), for sex. He describes the women sneaking off individually to sleep with men in the mountains, suggesting that they leave the service of the god. Tiresias and Kadmos are old men, not young women, nor is there any suggestion that these two most famous Theban authorities would participate in such a loose and uncontrolled activity. Even Pentheus never suggests this; he finds the participation of Tiresias and Kadmos πολὺν γέλω (250). Pentheus states that “if your grey old age hadn’t saved you, you would sit in the midst of the Bacchiacs in prison.”⁶⁴ On the one hand, this statement suggests that Pentheus chooses not to imprison his grandfather and the prophet in regard for their old age (if not their authority). It also suggests that Pentheus cannot conceive of the sexually deviant female bacchantes as belonging to the same category as the two old men. It defies his own expectation of what Dionysos’ worship entails. To the extent that they follow

⁶³ See Moses Finley, *Ancient Economy*, updated edition (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 123.

Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1999), 29-33.

⁶⁴ εἰ μή σε γῆρας πολὺν ἐξερρύετο,
καθῆσθαι ἂν ἐν βράκχαισι δέσμιος μέσαις (258-9)

Dionysos in an orderly fashion, Tiresias and Kadmos recognize the god of ecstasy also as a stable civilizing authority.

The two old men do not only implicitly recognize Dionysos as a god of order, but depict him in this way explicitly, each explaining the god's authority in the realm in which each is himself an authority. Kadmos, the first and former Theban king, depicts Dionysos as a legitimate authority in the royal Theban household. Tiresias the seer describes the civilizing elements of Dionysian cult and worship.

Kadmos, both at the beginning and end of the drama, explicitly describes Dionysos' place within the household of Thebes, as the son of Semele, and the justice of his claims in Thebes. "I come" he replies to Tiresias at the door, "ready, wearing the garments of the god, for it is necessary that he be magnified as much we are able, since he is the child of my daughter [Dionysos who is revealed as god to men]."⁶⁵ Kadmos recalls this description of Dionysos at the end of the play, in explaining the god's retribution. Thus he exclaims "how the god, lord Bromius has justly but too excessively destroyed us, being of our own household (οἰκείος γεγώς)."⁶⁶ Again in response to Agave's complaint that Dionysos brought "injury to the household," Kadmos emphasizes the injury the god had received from the Thebans themselves, implying the debt of honor they owed him as one of the Theban household. Much of Kadmos' understanding of

⁶⁵ ἤκω δ' ἔτοιμος τήνδ' ἔχων σκευὴν θεοῦ
δεῖ γάρ νιν ὄντα παῖδα θυγατρὸς ἐξ' ἐμῆς
Διόνυσον ὅς πέφηεν ἀνθρώποις θεὸς
ὅσον καθ' ἡμᾶς δυνατὸν αὐξεσθαι μέγαν. (180-3)

⁶⁶ ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἐνδίκως μὲν ἀλλ' ἄγαν
Βρόμιος ἄναξ ἀπώλεσ' οἰκείος γεγώς. (1249-50)

Dionysos' rightful domestic authority in Thebes is brought out in comparison with Pentheus', just as the two young men embody doubles of many characteristics.

Tiresias, in his role as prophet and seer, defends the character and legitimacy of the god's cult, characterizing it as civilized and defending it against the wilder accusations of Kadmos. Definite cultured and civilizing aspects of Dionysos include his invention of tools, agriculture and music.⁶⁷ Tiresias explains the significance of Dionysos as inventor of wine: "the offspring of Semele invented the liquid drink, counterpart (to Demeter's wheat) of grape and presented it to mortal men."⁶⁸

Tiresias and Kadmos not only recognize Dionysos as a civilizing deity, but recognize his destructive force and identity. Both old men recognize this potential in advance of Pentheus' tragedy. They reveal this "dark" understanding of Dionysos most explicitly in their warnings to Pentheus. Kadmos alludes to it very directly through the story of Aktaion in a warning to Pentheus.⁶⁹ Aphrodite destroyed Aktaion, Kadmos' youthful grandson (by his daughter Autonoe) when the goddess turned Aktaion's own dogs upon their master. According to Kadmos, the young man's boast that he excelled the goddess at hunting prompted her disastrous wrath. Kadmos' reference to Aktaion's tragedy draws a comparison between his two young grandsons. He explicitly suggests that Pentheus' rivalry with Dionysos may meet a similar end as Aktaion's challenge to the divine huntress: you see the wretched doom of Aktaion, whom his own flesh eating dogs dismembered, dogs he raised, he bragged in the glades that he was greater than

⁶⁷ Segal 1997, 55-80.

⁶⁸ ..., αντίπαλον ὁ Σεμέλης γόνος
βότρυος ὑγρὸν πῶμ' ἦρε κάσηνέγκατο
θνητοῖς ... (278-80)

⁶⁹ 337-41.

Artemis at the dog hunts. May you not suffer that!”⁷⁰ His suggestion shows an understanding of the wildest and darkest side of the god, since Aktaion’s death, being torn to shreds by wild beasts in the woods, strongly evokes the earlier references of the chorus to the Dionysian “omophagia” (138-40).

Tiresias shows a pragmatic spirit towards Pentheus when he suggests to Kadmos that they need to pray for Pentheus and Thebes: “let us pray on behalf of him, even though he is wild, and also on behalf of the city, that the god does no harm.”⁷¹ Tiresias’ prayer shows that the two old men are not simply antagonizing Pentheus, nor are they swept away in an uncontrolled Dionysian frenzy. Rather, their attempt to avert Pentheus’ tragedy shows that they understand the real possibility that the god’s destructive wrath will be the king’s demise. They also understand that the best way to avert this disaster is for the civic body to incorporate the cult of this new god peacefully. Tiresias’ prayer is similar that of the old servant in *Hippolytus*, who, after warning the chaste young man not to offend Aphrodite, offers a prayer on behalf of his young master.⁷² The similarities in location and stance of Hippolytos’ tutor and Tiresias and Kadmos suggest/indicate/ frame a similarity between the central characters of the two plays, young men who slight divinities. Both Pentheus and Hippolytos are depicted as rejecting the rather pragmatic advice proffered by the older generation.

⁷⁰ ὄρᾳς τὸν Αἰκταίωνος ἄθλον μόνον
ὄν ὠμόσιτοι σκύλακες ἄς ἐθρέψατο
διεσπάσαντο κρείσσον ἐν κυναίαις
Ἄρτεμιδος εἶναι κομπάσαντ ἐν ὀργάσιν.
ὁ μὴ πάθης συ: ... 337-341.

⁷¹ ..., κάξαι τώμεθα
ὑπὲρ τε πόλεως τὸν θεὸν μηδὲν νέον
δρᾶν. (360-2)

⁷² *Hippolytos* 91-120.

Having discussed the presentation and content of Kadmos' and Tiresias' insight, I will now consider its temporal dimensions, in order to assert that their sight is both forward looking and backward facing. As I will show, this dual orientation reflects a cyclical experience of tragedy for the two figures, which extends back and forwards from the space of the *Bakkhai*. This insightful relationship to Pentheus' tragedy displays the identity of Tiresias and Kadmos as old men, a category not defined only by their number of years, but by the experiences which they have seen and survived.

In a comparative study of the idea of "tragic over-living," Emily Wilson suggests that in Greek tragedy (and perhaps more widely in Greek society) there is a pattern of experiences where an adult character who has survived an experience or period of time feels that he should or ought to have died.⁷³ This possibility arises especially in the circumstances of war or tragedy, and especially for members of the older generations, whose see younger men or women destroyed. I will come back to the idea that such living is tragic or should be termed over-living, and would right now like to focus on how experience and survival define Kadmos and Tiresias' status and insight. After this, I will be able to discuss the tragic element of their survival and how this affects their position relative to the tragic event of the *Bakkhai*.

As has already been discussed Tiresias and Kadmos demonstrate their physical age through self-description as well as their costume and staging. However, even without these indicators, their long back history identifies both men as old. When Tiresias and Kadmos enter the stage, they may have surprised the audience a bit, since this is not the story with which Tiresias or Kadmos is most closely associated, although, of course, the

⁷³ Emily Wilson, *Mocked With Death* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press: 2004).

creative adaptation of myth was the technique and license of the tragedian. The late fifth century audience would have been familiar with Euripides' special tendency to populate the stage with secondary characters. In several other plays he includes mythological characters in old age, whose presence is unexpected. For instance, we see in *Phoenissae* an aged Iokaste who has not committed suicide (which was traditional), in *Herakleidae* we see a vulnerable old Iolaus who is best known, and only known in extant texts, for his youthful exploits with Herakles, and in *Andromache* we see Peleus taking an active role, despite the retired status in which he is familiarly located. In each of these plays the elderly character is largely defined by his or her past history, with which the audience would be familiar.

Tiresias and Kadmos certainly had history, which only not demonstrates their age in this play, but frames their special insight towards the advent of Dionysos. Both have been present in other tragedies. Tiresias appears in several other extant plays: Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, Sophokles' *Oidipous Tyrannos* and *Antigone*, and in Euripides' *Phoenecian Women* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Kadmos no doubt appeared in other Theban plays which are now lost; there were most probably plays treating the story of Semele and of Aktaion in which he would have appeared.⁷⁴ Both old men and multiple stories surrounding them would have been recognizable. Tiresias was a renowned Greek prophet, while Kadmos was known as the founder of Thebes in the very early periods of Greece and was also credited by some with bringing the alphabet to the Greeks.⁷⁵

Kadmos' experiences and history bear pertinently upon the issues facing Pentheus in *Bakkhai*. Kadmos' most famous accomplishment was his founding of Thebes. The

⁷⁴ For instance, Aeschylus' *Semele*. Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1993), 475.

⁷⁵ Hard, 296.

tradition surrounding this foundation stresses Kadmos' role in integrating the chthonic and Olympian, wild and civic. Thus the story is told (probably carried over from the Argonaut story) that Kadmos sowed the teeth of a dragon to create the citizens of his new city. Several authors associate Athena with the founding.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Kadmos had to reconcile his new city with Ares, whose dragon he had killed, through service for eight years.⁷⁷ The other experience of Kadmos that bears directly on the advent of Dionysos is that of the god's mother Semele, Kadmos' daughter which of course is directly connected to the plot of this drama.

Each of Kadmos' five daughters was associated with a tragic destruction. Semele's story forms the background for the *Bakkhai*, which itself shows the tragedy of Agave and her son. Aktaion was Kadmos' grandson by his daughter Autonoe. As has been discussed, Aktaion's story is heavily alluded to in the *Bakkhai*. These allusions, especially the one which Kadmos makes, appear to manipulate Aktaion's story so as to make it even more relevant to Pentheus' situation.

The story of Aktaion which in later sources became widespread indicates that Aktaion was punished by Artemis for coming upon the goddess while she was bathing and watching her. However, some earlier accounts suggest a different reason for Aphrodites' retribution: that Aktaion had tried to marry his aunt, Dionysos' mother, Semele.⁷⁸ In this narrative, Zeus set Aphrodite upon the young man in order to prevent this. Although it is lost, Aeschylus wrote a tragedy which focused on Aktaion, which

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Apollodorus 3.4.1. Rose, 296-7.

⁷⁸ The mythographer Acusilaus (2F33) gives this reason, and Robin Hard surmises that the Hesiodic Catalogue (fr. 217A) would have given the same account. Pausanias (9.2.3=Stes. 236) also describes Stesichorus as narrating that Artemis prevented Aktaion from taking Semele as wife. Hard, 299.

Hard suggests perhaps dramatized this story. But Euripides in the *Bakkhai* is the first author that we know of to claim a third story, that Aktaion slighted the goddess, claiming that he was a better hunter than she. Although it is impossible to prove the artistic choice that he made here, it is significant that Euripides chooses to explore the Aktaion story as a parallel to Pentheus' tragedy.

Charles Segal emphasizes the similarities between the stories: faithful dogs on the one hand and family members on the other turn on their own, to tear apart or eat his raw flesh.⁷⁹ Aktaion was a hunter who became the hunted prey. In a similar way Euripides describes Pentheus first as hunting Dionysos' followers, his own mother and aunts: "I will hunt (θηράσομαι) out of the mountain the women who are absent."⁸⁰ Kadmos' reference to Aktaion's fate is our first extant narration of this story that suggests that Aktaion's offence was to slight the goddess Artemis.⁸¹ "You see the wretched (ἄθλιον) doom of Aktaion, whom (his own) flesh-eating dogs, which he raised, torn up. He bragged that he was greater in dog-hunting than Artemis in the mountain glades. May you not suffer that. (Come) hither, I will wrap your head with the garland."⁸² Kadmos' version of the Aktaion story is much closer to Pentheus' than other versions. Kadmos' use of this story, then, to warn Pentheus shows him to possess a clear and prophetic insight of his own, apart from the seer Tiresias.

⁷⁹ Segal 1997a, 33.

⁸⁰ ὅσαι δ' ἄπεισιν, ἐξ ὄρου θηράσομαι (228)

⁸¹ For more on this, see the next section, where I will discuss the sources of Kadmos and Tiresias' insight.

⁸² ὄρᾳς τὸν Αἰκταίωνος ἄθλιον μόρον,
ὃν ὠμόσιτοι σκύλακες ἄς ἐθρέψατο
διεσπάσαντο, κρείσσον' ἐν κυναγίαις
Ἄρτεμιδος εἶναι κοπάσαντ' ἐν ὀργάσιν.
ὃ μὴ πάθῃς σύ· δεῦρό σου στέψω κάρα κισσῶ.

Tiresias' experiences cover a vast spread of time before and after the action of the *Bakkhai*. Sophokles' depicts him at Oidipous' side in a later period of the house of Thebes, and while some events of Tiresias' life may be placed in chronological order, in large part his experiences are timeless. The Hesiodic *Melampodeia* is the first to include an account of Tiresias' experience before his time as a prophet. He was supposed to have been transformed into a woman and then back to a male, through a mysterious encounter with snakes.⁸³ After consulting with Zeus and Hera on the matter of which sex derived more pleasure from sex, Hesiod says that Zeus granted him a lifetime seven times that of a normal human.⁸⁴ Indeed Tiresias turns up in human affairs over and over in his role of prophet. It seems likely that when Tiresias appeared on stage, the audience immediately would have thought of all the stories in which he participated, whether they took place before or after the fall of Pentheus. In *Bakkhai*, Tiresias is certainly shown as an old man physically. To a large degree, Tiresias' literal age alone does not define his status in *Bakkhai* since his very name connotes old age; he is defined by the many experiences through which he has lived. These previous experiences of Tiresias and Kadmos define and constitute their insight into Dionysos' advent.

Kadmos' former experience of his daughter Semele's death pertains directly to Dionysos' current advent in Thebes. The god is Kadmos' grandchild, and his reason for coming is because of his mother's tragedy. Kadmos' founding of Thebes relates to the duality of Dionysus who is both a god of loosening and civic order. This dichotomy and its relation to sight are accentuated in the play. Dionysos is associated with wildness, a characterization which his lines and the song of the bacchants bring out. Yet as a god of

⁸³ Hard 329.

⁸⁴ Hesiod fr. 275&276.

agriculture, associated with viniculture and animal breeding, he also possesses attributes which are associated with the integration of the wild into the civic, including Kadmos' foundation of Thebes.

Tiresias brings a more general insight to the situation. He appears in many tragedies in his capacity as a prophet. In these plays, Tiresias acts as an interpreter of divine intentions and a mediator between the gods and humans, who often act in resistance to the divine will. As will be discussed in my section on integration and gender, Tiresias, having experienced a sex-transformation, integrates masculine and feminine characteristics to an unparalleled degree. Pentheus lacks exactly such integration, and thus Tiresias provides an especially telling contrast with the immature young Theban king.

In the *Bakkhai*, Tiresias' and Kadmos' life experiences translate into an integrated insight into the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysos. Emily Wilson suggests that tragic overliving, which she defines as the experience of continuing to live while believing that one should have died, can convert into the experience of survival. Both old men have experienced numerous tragedies which involved men and women of the younger generations (e.g. Semele, Aktaion, Oidipous, Antigone and Iphigenia). Participating in the *Bakkhai*, both Kadmos and Tiresias attempt to provide a mediating influence to Pentheus, drawing upon, sometimes explicitly, and more often implicitly, their past experience.⁸⁵ Despite their efforts, they are unable protect Pentheus and Agave from catastrophe, and both old men experience, over-live and survive yet another tragedy.

⁸⁵ For instance, Kadmos' reference to Aktaion.

This cycle of experienced tragedy evokes a slightly earlier author who was active in Athens, Herodotus. No figure presents the spectacle of a cyclical survival of tragedy better than the Lydian king Croesus in the *Histories*. Introduced at the very beginning of Herodotus' work, Croesus can be seen as a framing persona for the histories. The first tragedies Croesus experiences are his own: the death of his son and his fall to the Persians. Both subplots within the larger narrative of the *Histories* have been seen as especially tragic in form. Though many subplots, or story arcs, within the *Histories* display tragic content, elements and form, these two early stories, as several scholars suggest, demonstrate a conscious use of Attic tragic form.⁸⁶ Croesus survives his own son and survives his own tragic fall through divine intervention. This plot turn not only suggests tragedies where in the end disaster is averted (*Choephoroi*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Alkestis*), but also the experience of Kadmos and Tiresias in the *Bakkhai* who survive a younger person's tragedy.⁸⁷

Croesus' Lydian story may end in Book One of the *Histories*, but his experience of tragedies as a liminal figure continues. He is present during the tragedies of two Persian kings, Cyrus the Great and Cambyses II. The stories of both figures display a rise to greatness, involving personal *hubris*, and a tragic fall. Croesus advises both Cyrus (although Croesus' advice is questionable) and Cambyses II (with rather more insight and directness) on the basis of his own tragedy, and its illumination through Solon. Croesus' longevity in the narrative is impressive, and brings about a certain amount of continuity between narrative arcs. Many story arcs in Herodotus seem tragic in form because they

⁸⁶ Charles Chiasson, "Herodotus' Use of Attic Tragedy in the Lydian 'Logos.'" *Classical Antiquity* 22.1 (2003):5-35. Suzanne Said, "Herodotus and Tragedy" in *The Brill Companion to Herodotus*, ed. EG Bakker and IJF De Jong (Brill: 2002): 117-147.

⁸⁷ And, for that matter, Iolaus in the *Herakleidae*, Peleus in the *Andromache* and Pheres in the *Alkestis*.

show complete reversals of fortune motivated by both human motivation and what is fated. These tragic *logoi* may also “orchestrate many ... tragic motifs into a tightly constructed narrative,” such as anagnoresis and plot reversals.⁸⁸ It is important to recognize that there were other influences for Herodotus’ art and his theme of the instability in human affairs, for instance, epic poetry.⁸⁹ But Attic tragedy should be recognized as one important influence in Herodotus’ construction of these narratives. Croesus’ presence throughout the Histories displays an individual’s experience of cyclical tragedy, with an emphasis upon the learning and wisdom that may be derived therefrom. It also demonstrates however the inability of one individual to directly infuse another with his own wisdom. Croesus’ advice to Cyrus regarding the Massegetai shows a misunderstanding of his own tragedy,⁹⁰ and Cambyses ignores Croesus’ advice to him in Egypt. Only shortly after this the king recognizes the truth of Croesus’ words in his own dramatic *anagnoresis* at Ekbatana, but he is already on his deathbed.⁹¹

In several ways Croesus’ location within the “tragedies” of Cyrus and Cambyses is similar to that of Tiresias and Kadmos in the *Bakkhai*.⁹² The cyclical experience of tragedy affords each of these men a panoptic view of the situation; by comparing the current event to past experiences, he is able to visualize the possible consequences for the central figure. This wisdom, which is given as advice and mediation, is prophetic. In Euripides’ *Bakkhai*, there is a stark contrast between the characters of Kadmos and Tiresias on the one hand and Pentheus on the other, which is defined by their age and

⁸⁸ Thomas Rosenmeyer, “History or Poetry? The Example of Herodotus,” in *Clio* 11 (1982): 245.

⁸⁹ Said, 129-142.

⁹⁰ Christopher Pelling. “Educating Croesus: Talking and Learning in Herodotus’ Lydian Logos” in *Classical Antiquity* 25.1 (2006), 152.

⁹¹ *Histories* 3. 66.

⁹² I will also argue that it is similar to the location of other elderly men in other Euripidean plays.

experience. The distance between the two undermines the ability of the two old men to transmit their message to the younger one. Thus these two old characters and their role in Pentheus' tragedy evokes the same prophetic and cyclical aspects of Herodotus' Croesus.

Helene Foley describes Kadmos and Tiresias as participating at a comic remove in Pentheus' tragedy.⁹³ This remove creates a significant contrast between the characters, but, I would add to Foley's analysis, also a barrier between the two generations, which frames the foreseeable tragic experience of the two old men. Foley admits in a note that despite his first entrance in what she deems a comic role, Kadmos must at the end of the play deal with the tragic consequences of his earlier role, but she does not discuss the relationship between these two instances.⁹⁴ By the term "comic remove," Foley refers to the metatragedy which she reads in the *Bakkhai*. Dionysos, she argues, orchestrates his own play within a play, which is a comedy on one level involving Kadmos, Tiresias, the chorus and Dionysos himself, but a tragedy for Pentheus. The action is experienced as comedy by those characters who are willing to "role play" under Dionysos' sway. Foley's analysis hits on an important quality of the location of Kadmos and Tiresias in the play; they occupy a space separate from Pentheus' sphere of action, which is in many ways buffered from his tragedy. I would point out that from the first entrance of Kadmos and Tiresias in the *Bakkhai*, the audience knows that they will survive the tragedy. Therefore, their comic portrayal serves as a signpost for their relationship to Pentheus' tragedy.

Yet, I can only accept this description of the comic relationship of Kadmos and Tiresias to Pentheus' tragedy, if it is noted how this distance foresees and heightens

⁹³ Foley 1980, 115.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Pentheus' own tragedy, as well as the second hand tragedy as experienced by the old men, unable as they have been to avert the tragedy.⁹⁵ For, while the audience can foresee that the old men will survive the tragedy, they can also foresee that their efforts to mediate the disaster will fall short and that they will be left to deal with the aftermath of inevitable tragedy.

The location of Kadmos and Tiresias in relation to the central tragedy is comparable to that of the audience, sitting in the theater. Those studying the metatragic characteristics of the play have made a similar comparison: Dionysos asks Pentheus, "Aren't you desirous to be a spectator (θεατῆς) of the maenads?"⁹⁶ θεατῆς is the same word used to describe audience members in the theater.⁹⁷ And yet while Pentheus may be likened to the spectator at this point in the play, roles are soon reversed and Pentheus becomes spectacle himself for Thebes, Dionysos and the audience. Like the two old men, the audience is familiar with both comic and tragic displays in the theater of Dionysos which exist in accordance with the dual nature of the overseeing god.

⁹⁵ Indeed, I would extend this argument to most other of Euripides' old men.

⁹⁶ οὐκέτι θεατῆς μαινάδων πρόθυμος εἶ; 829.

⁹⁷ Segal 1997, 225.

Section 3:

Gender and Integration of Kadmos and Tiresias

Issues of gender characterize Kadmos and Tiresias' portrayal in the *Bakkhai*. Nicole Loraux wrote that, "an entire range of Greek thought focused on sexual differences (or, at least, that the Greeks thought a great deal about them)." ⁹⁸ Generally, old men on the tragic stage are very obviously associated with the *oikos* and with women and children, far more frequently than are ephebic or mature males. Kadmos and Tiresias not only dress in the fashion of the female bacchants, but join this group of female Dionysian worshipers which is explicitly described as exclusive of the Theban male population. ⁹⁹ Furthermore, Kadmos and Tiresias in this play demonstrate values which have a decidedly female association in the Greek mind: they take a mediating stance, yielding to and accepting the god Dionysus. Their experience with suffering before and within the play, more over, is an experience and emotion that has discernible female attributes.

Yet as much as this feminine portrayal makes the two old men seem comical, or perhaps even effeminate, it is cast in an all too serious light by its direct contrasts with Pentheus' inability to approach women and sexuality. Pentheus' mockery and violent reaction to the two old men (i.e. the great joke), reveals exactly the root of his ultimate destruction. Analyzing Pentheus' sexual profile as immature and ephebic, Charles Segal

⁹⁸ Nicole Loraux, *The Experiences of Tiresias. The Feminine and the Greek Man* (Princeton, 1995), 3.

⁹⁹ Cf. above, pg. 17. μόνοι δὲ πόλεως Βακχίῳ χορεύσομεν. 195

describes the play as a “failed initiatory rite” of Pentheus.¹⁰⁰ Pentheus’ inability to enter mature manhood from his ephebic position can be seen first in his unwillingness to accept the feminine attributes of Dionysos’ worship, and then his inability to do so, when he robes himself in the feminine fashion, only to be led by the god to his death. Segal does not extend his discussion to the special contrast offered by Kadmos and Tiresias in terms of sex roles and maturity.

Charles Segal and Pierre Vidal-Naquet together have demonstrated a strong connection between Dionysos’ and Pentheus’ conflict and Athenian rituals associated with coming of age or initiation rituals for ephebes. Furthermore, the rituals appear themselves quite clearly to incorporate the idea of integrating the two genders, and are associated with the androgynous figure of Dionysos.

Segal, in analyzing Pentheus’ tragedy as an unsuccessful Athenian initiatory rite, applies Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s analysis to the *Bakkhai*.¹⁰¹ Vidal-Naquet brings together the mythic boundary conflict between the Boeotian Xanthus (fair one) and Athenian Melanthios (black one) with elements of the initiation process of the ephebe entering full manhood and hoplite status, and with Dionysos’ identity as the Dionysos of the black goatskin (*melanagis*). Vidal-Naquet depicts the ephebe as the “anti-hoplite,” who appears to have been posted at the peripheries of the polis and in the myths of Orion, Atalanta and others is associated with the wild and with solitary, night-time hunting.¹⁰² The trick - *apate* - of Melanthos, correlates to the possible etymology of the Apatouria (a festival which included the entry of the ephebe into the phratry) and to a position for the

¹⁰⁰ Segal 1997, 158-214.

¹⁰¹ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “The Black Hunter and the Origin of the Athenian Ephebia” in *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World* (John Hopkins Press, Baltimore: 1986), 106-128.

¹⁰² Vidal-Naquet 1986. 120.

ephebe that possibly depended on his native cunning along the lines of the Spartan *krypteia*. Dionysus' similar connotations of wild and liberating god likewise fit with this ceremony. Vidal-Naquet and Segal both interpret conflict between dark and light as important, leading to the participant's integration with the community.

Pentheus and Dionysos could both be described as ephebic characters, seeking to enter the realm of mature adulthood and to situate themselves in positions of authority within society. In fact, the ambitions of the two young characters causes their conflict, a clash which Pentheus does not survive but through which Dionysos establishes his cult in Thebes. Segal points out the symmetry of the two figures, describing them as "doubles."¹⁰³ For instance, Pentheus and Dionysos both go on the hunt in the play; Pentheus sets out to hunt out the bacchantes in the beginning of the play as well as Dionysos but in the end Dionysos choreograph's Pentheus demise as the hunted prey of the Theban bacchantes.

Dionysos' association with the initiation rite alone indicates the sexually integrated dimension of the process, since the god is widely depicted as androgynous, incorporating the feminine in his own identity and his followers'. In the *Bakkhai* also, this aspect of his identity is emphasized. Segal points out in evidence that cross-dressing was an integral element of ephebic initiatory rite which connects to the role of the ephebe as wild. Thus, Pentheus' rejection of the feminine, not only as embraced by the women, but by Dionysos and by Kadmos and Tiresias, demonstrates his inability to achieve the integration necessary for entrance into society.

¹⁰³ Segal 1997, 166.

If Pentheus' tragedy is, in some respect, a type of failed initiatory rite, it is necessary to consider how the group into which he tries to enter is presented by Euripides. Tiresias and Kadmos serve as the sole representatives of the group (or the closest to the set, since they have passed into old age), of adult males, into which Pentheus is trying to enter. The example which they provide to Pentheus' indicates how the integration and acceptance of certain female attributes, which he so violently rejects, may actually be positive attributes, even within the male centered sphere of the polis. Additionally, their accepting attitude and integration is bound up with their experience, second-hand, of Pentheus' destruction. The female aspect of suffering, pity and pathos, which permeates and is actually the *raison d'être* of tragedy,¹⁰⁴ thus, is specially embodied by Tiresias and Kadmos, who in some sense at least, sit along side the Athenian audience.

The gendering of Kadmos and Tiresias begins with their physical description. In the very first words spoken by either of the two old men, Tiresias refers to their dress: "to fasten together thyrsos, wear the fawns' skins, and crown our heads with ivy shoots."¹⁰⁵ The items Tiresias mentions associate the two old men with the female chorus of bacchantes, who had just previously described the very same items.¹⁰⁶ Another association with the female chorus is Tiresias' statement that "I am young and will try to participate in the choruses (χοροῖς)."¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Kadmos and Tiresias explicitly point out their participation as males in an otherwise female group. The female chorus

¹⁰⁴ "We assume that, for the finest form of Tragedy, the Plot must be not simple but complex; and further, that it must imitate actions arousing fear and pity, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation." Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452b.30-33. Trans. Bywater.

¹⁰⁵ θύρσους ἀνάπτειν καὶ νεβρῶν δορὰς ἔχειν
στεφανοῦν τε κράτα κισίνοις βλαστήμασιν. 176-7.

¹⁰⁶ They mention the thyrsus (80), fawnskin garments (111), and ivy (106).

¹⁰⁷ κἀγὼ γὰρ ἦβῶ κἀπιχειρήσω χοροῖς (190)

and the activity of Pentheus' female relatives gender the group of Dionysian followers clearly, while the two old men contrast their own sex. Kadmos points out that they will be the only ones of the city dancing, using the masculine pronoun to point out the exclusion of men. Tiresias answers in the affirmative.¹⁰⁸

The physical weakness of both Kadmos and Tiresias and their association with the domestic sphere contribute to their participation in a feminine characterization. Considerable emphasis is given to physical evidence of their old age. There are several mentions of their grey hair, not only by Pentheus but by Kadmos and Tiresias.¹⁰⁹ As has been discussed earlier,¹¹⁰ both old men bring out the contrast between their rigid physical strength and their participation in the fluid Dionysian rites. The comic elements of this scene, indeed, stem from this contrast. Moreover, the Kadmos-Tiresias scene displays Kadmos, once a primarily political figure, well within the domestic context. Tiresias calls to him within the house, and he comes out.

The association of elderly males with physical weakness and the domestic sphere is found in many of Euripides' other plays. Even without stage directions, elderly characters make their physical weakness explicit through their own description. For instance, many times the old men (and women) will directly address body parts, reproaching them for their inadequacy.¹¹¹ Old male characters in Euripides plays are almost always depicted alongside women and children or within the oikos. The stock figure of the elderly tutor pops up in several plays: *Hippolytos*, *Elektra* and *Medea*. This type of character always plays a domestic function, caring for and advising another

¹⁰⁸ Cf. pg. 17 for more discussion of Kadmos and Tiresias as the sole Theban males participating.

¹⁰⁹ Pentheus: γῆρας πολίων 258

¹¹⁰ Cf. pg. 22.

¹¹¹ Falkner 1995, 172.

character. In addition to this more peripheral figure, many of the more significant old men in Euripides' plays are also associated with women and children. In the *Herakleidai*, Iolaus travels with the three children and their grandmother Alkmena. Amphitryon takes a similar position in the *Herakles*, appearing alongside Megara and her children. Oidipous in the *Phoenissai* is also depicted as well within the domestic sphere, while his wife Jocasta ventures outside. Pheres in the *Alkestis* and Iphis in *Suppliant women* are both depicted exclusively in dialogue with their children.

In his chapter on these figures and the poetics of old age in Euripides, Thomas Falkner chooses to focus on the issue of gender.¹¹² He makes some significant observations about the depiction of gender and elderly males and female characters. However, these ought to be complicated by a wider study of these characters and a broader consideration of the role of these characters in the drama. Falkner focuses on two plays, the *Herakleidai* and the *Phoenissai*. He outlines an opposing symmetry in the portrayal of old age of the two sexes, arguing that while old females tend to be portrayed as more aggressive and independent, old males are depicted as relatively marginalized and effeminate, as for instance Tithonus.¹¹³ Thus he points out the contrasts between Iolaus' milder mindset and Alkmena's bloodthirsty anger, and between Jokasta's active agency on the battlefield, with the decrepit old age of Oidipous who is shown being nursed by his daughter.

Falkner identifies an important element in the characterization of Euripides' old men when he demonstrates that Euripides portrays male old age as effeminate. His description also fits with the trend of scholars to analyze these elderly figures as

¹¹² Falkner 1995, 179-210.

¹¹³ Indeed, Falkner does discuss the story of Tithonus at some length in the context of earlier periods of Greek literature.

caricatures. Yet Faulkner's analysis of old age in Euripides offers only one part of a larger picture. His conclusions come from his specific interest in the *poetics* of old age. Falkner spends quite a bit of time in his monograph on lyric poetry, which chapters precede his discussion of Euripides. Old age is presented by these authors (Sappho, Anacreon) in an erotic context, and it must be understood as an erotic description which is largely concerned with gender and sexual identity. However, in other contexts, such as tragedy, the gendered presentation of the old man (or woman) is one part of a larger depiction, which includes significant social dimensions.

Falkner's observations are insightful, although, given the constraints of his book, they are generalizations. Furthermore, his discussion does not really examine the role of the old man within the play, and his larger role within the dramatic action. Falkner does not focus, for instance, on issues of generational struggle or conflict. Falkner also seems to be outlining a progression, from the lyric authors, to Euripides towards Sophokles' *Oidipous at Colonos*, as the most holistic and balanced vision of the old man. Furthermore, Falkner's choice of two plays is limited. The *Phoenissai* and *Herakleidai* are uniquely suited to displaying Faulkner's point. *Oidipous* is markedly un-important in the *Phoenissai* and in the *Herakleidai*, Alkmena is a remarkably strong character. Falkner's generalization bears more weight in his comparison of the two characters than in looking to characterize any one of them.

For any number of these reasons Falkner's analysis overemphasizes the effeminacy of the portrayal of old men. A fuller discussion of their portrayal would consider their generational location in the play with respect to the main action and other characters. Donald Mastronarde suggests a more socially contextualized understanding

of their depiction, pointing out that the elderly are naturally associated with the domestic sphere: “on a more expansive view of kingship and a pre-democratic polis, males who retire from the youthful activity of war are thrown back on the household and naturally develop sides of their being that were secondary but not necessarily absent, in their prime.”¹¹⁴ Mastronarde argues that overall, old men in Euripides’ plays offered the audience a type of “other” (just as his use of female characters does) and the opportunity to “vicariously experience marginality and vulnerability.”¹¹⁵ However, even Mastronarde’s conclusion (of a 4 page chapter), though more complex than Faulkner’s, does not do justice to the depth of characterization and the positive attributes with which Euripides depicts many of his old men.

In the *Bakkhai*, Kadmos and Tiresias are not depicted exclusively as effeminate or as caricatures. Rather in their incorporation of certain feminine attributes, the two old men suggest an ideal by retaining their masculine rationality and leadership abilities,¹¹⁶ as well as integrating certain feminine qualities and outlooks which allow them to survive the central tragedy.

I will now consider the emotions and values embraced by the two old men which while feminine in a certain sense, can be seen as positive male qualities in Euripides’ depiction. I will first discuss the topic of suffering, then yielding and acceptance. Finally I will discuss the masculine traits which remain for Kadmos and Tiresias, showing that they integrate the two genders, to a remarkable degree.

Feminine and domestic characteristics of Euripides’ old men, and Kadmos and Tiresias specifically, do not only characterize these characters as *effeminate*, if we

¹¹⁴ Mastronarde 2010, 296.

¹¹⁵ Mastronarde 2010, 296-7.

¹¹⁶ See above for a discussion of the participation of Kadmos and Tiresias in the play as leaders.

understand effeminacy to be antithetical to masculinity. Rather, these feminine aspects contribute to a portrayal of persons who are integrated with respect to gender. The suggestion that Euripides may positively portray such a fusion of genders may seem surprising, considering the discernable construction of the genders in literature as polar. But although Attic tragedy can be seen to construct the female gender as “other” than male; it does not seem to see the two genders as exclusive. Froma Zeitlin described this as a, “final paradox . . . that the theater employs the feminine to imagine a more complete model of the masculine self.”¹¹⁷

The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophokles as well as Euripides examine the usually disastrous ramifications of male intrusion or simply approach towards the female, domestic sphere. The construction of the female gender not only in Greek tragedy but more widely in other areas of Greek literature reveals certain anxieties about female activity within the recesses of the *oikos*, specifically with regards to sex, the production of legitimate offspring, and jealousy. Yet, as Zeitlin suggests, despite the construction of a stark opposition between the genders in Greek literature, we also see in tragedy the overlap of the two. In some instances, this can be seen within the play. Certainly an androgynous figure such as Dionysos in the *Bakkhai* offers one exploration of feminine identity. Herakles’ death in the *Trachiniai*, which is portrayed as feminine, similarly focuses on the encounter of one gender with the other.¹¹⁸

On a more meta-theatrical level, tragedy explores the feminine in its focus on suffering. Nicole Loraux states “during dramatic performances the feminine realm is revealed to be essential, for it is there to modulate and at the same time support the

¹¹⁷ Froma Zeitlin, “Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama” in *Representation* 11 (1985): 65.

¹¹⁸ *Trachiniai*, 1071-5.

necessary virility of the andres.”¹¹⁹ While Zeitlin explains that by “playing” the other, female, gender, drama complements masculinity with “the often banished emotions of terror and pity.”¹²⁰

Suffering experienced cyclically, which characterizes Kadmos especially as well as Tiresias, presents one feminine side to these two old male figures. In her book *The Experiences of Tiresias*, Nicole Loraux spends a great amount of time exploring the use of female suffering as a means of conveying male pain. For example, in her first chapter “Bed and War”¹²¹ Loraux demonstrates what she calls “pregnancy envy” how the vocabulary and description of female labor pains are used in Homer and in tragedy to convey men’s physical pain on the battlefield.¹²² Perhaps the suffering of Herakles, not only in Sophokles’ *Trachiniai*, but in mythology generally, provides the example of male exploration of female suffering that is most pertinent to Tiresias and Kadmos. As Loraux points out, the hero, although superhuman in strength and ability, and despite his often misogynistic associations, is perhaps just as much characterized by his “labours” and sufferings, which are most often caused by his associations with females, mortal and divine.¹²³ Loraux also notes that the word used of his labors, *ponos*, is the same as is used for female labor pains.

I have already discussed how both Kadmos and Tiresias have accumulated a collective memory of tragedies, some of which bear upon and give them insight into Pentheus’ situation. The experience of cyclical tragedies likens Kadmos and Tiresias with Herakles. Their suffering is made even more pronounced through their old age.

¹¹⁹ Loraux 1995, 9.

¹²⁰ Zeitlin 1985, 65.

¹²¹ Loraux 1995, 23-43.

¹²² Loraux 1995, 17.

¹²³ Loraux 1995, 118.

This pain, which is mentioned at beginning and end, intensifies the additional weight of Pentheus' tragedy. Like Herakles, who suffers at the hands Hera and in many of his mortal marriages, Kadmos' and Tiresias' suffering stems from interaction with females – the androgynous Dionysos, and his female chorus followers. Further intensifying the suffering and its female aspect is the contrast with their identities as significant and famous Theban authorities, a tension which comes to the fore in the last moments of the play. Kadmos' final suffering evokes the famous trope of Priam – the old man who sees the tragedy of the former generation. Nor does Euripides does not waver from focusing on the suffering of the old man, contrasting his current and former identities.

It is significant that Kadmos and Tiresias both assert authority, and act as independent agents in the male-power sphere. Thus they cannot be seen to surrender their masculine gender for certain female attributes. Although Kadmos has resigned the throne to Pentheus, and Pentheus treats his grandfather as his inferior,¹²⁴ Kadmos is shown to be needed, not only by Pentheus in his issue with Dionysos. Kadmos is also needed to take back his role as Theban leader when the last of his male spawn has died. He first brings Agave back to her senses, and then speaks for his polis in accepting divine punishment.

Kadmos' act in recalling Agave to her senses is made the more masculine by its contrast with the disordering and subversive discourse of the chorus with the blood-smearred mother. In contrast to Kadmos', the bacchant chorus encourages' Agave's skewed perception and misunderstanding (1168-1200) in a line of question and answering. They urge her to continue, repeating her phrases (1176 and 1181), and

¹²⁴ He exerts clear authority over the former king of Thebes and believes Tiresias has manipulated him.

confirm her delusions by asking questions of clarification and by affirming her answers. They ask her questions of location: “from out of where in the wild?”¹²⁵ and identity, “Who struck him?”¹²⁶ and “Who else?”¹²⁷ When Agave describes Pentheus as a young calf:

The young calf, barely
on his jaw beneath a crest of soft hair
is growing a beard.¹²⁸

The chorus responds in the affirmative, playing along with her identification of her son as an animal:

Indeed (his) curls are fitting as a wild beast.¹²⁹

The chorus continues with darkly and ironically true affirmations of Agave’s statements. When Agave calls Dionysos a clever hunter, the chorus, confirms her account by calling Dionysos the “lord hunter.”¹³⁰ They even go so far as to mislead her with false information, starting Agave’s sentences for her. Agave is about to describe the conversion of Thebes to Dionysos’ cult, starting “soon the Thebans (Καδμῆϊοι)...” when the chorus suggests to her “and indeed (your) child Pentheus.” Agave finishes the statement “will praise his mother.”¹³¹

However, the chorus themselves clearly understands the reality of Agave’s situation and indicate so by their reference to Agave as a “poor woman” (1184 and 1200).

¹²⁵ πόθεν ἐρημίας; 1176

¹²⁶ τίς ἄ βαλοῦσα; 1179

¹²⁷ τίς ἄλλα; 1181

¹²⁸ νέος ὁ μόσχος ἄρ-
τι γένυν ὑπὸ κόρυθ ἄπαλότριχα
κατάκομον θάλλει. 1185-7

¹²⁹ πρέπει γ’ ὥστε θῆρ ἄγραυλος φόβαι 1188

¹³⁰ ὁ γὰρ ἀναξ ἀγρεύς 1192

¹³¹ A: τάχα δὲ Καδμῆϊοι
Chorus: καὶ παῖς γε Πενθεύς ... A: ματέρ’ ἐπαινέσεται,
λαβοῦσαν ἄγραν τάνδε λεοντοφυᾶ 1194-6

Agave is clearly affected by their approval, asking for their praise (1192) and mimicking their statement “περισσάν.” with her own “περισσῶς.”¹³²

Kadmos brings Agave into an understanding of the reality of her situation through a similar dialogue. He first asks his daughter the questions, but focuses not on the story of what happened in the countryside, but questions surrounding her ancestry and location in Thebes. First he asks her questions to ascertain her misperception asking her “Does it still seem the same to you, or is there a change?”¹³³ and “is there still a fluttering in your head?”¹³⁴

When Dionysos returns to the stage, manifested in his divine form, he speaks to Thebes as a whole, and Kadmos responds. Despite numerous references to the pitiable sight of Kadmos,¹³⁵ the old man clearly takes a stand as Theban leader. The god explains the punishment for Thebes: “If you had recognized/discerned the wise thinking, when you were not willing, you would rejoice having the son of Zeus as your ally.”¹³⁶ Kadmos answers on behalf of the city, taking up, by necessity his role as leader, using the pronoun “we”: “Oh Dionysos, we pray you, we have done wrong [to you].”¹³⁷ He uses “we” again in his next response to the god’s reprimand, “We recognize this.”¹³⁸ Kadmos not only speaks on behalf of his city, but displays an authoritative tone when he goes further

¹³² 1197.

¹³³ ἔθ' αὐτὸς ἢ σοι μεταβολὰς ἔχειν δοκεῖ; 1266

¹³⁴ τὸ δὲ πτοηθὲν τόδ' ἔτι σῆ ψυχῇ πάρα; 1268

¹³⁵ “but now I am wretched” (νῦν ἄθλιος μὲν εἰμ' ἐγώ) 1323, “I feel grief at your misfortune Kadmos.” (τὸ μὲν σὸν ἀλγῶ, Κάδμε:) 1326, “I an old man, must emigrat to the barbarians” (βαρβάρους ἀφίξομαι / γέρων μέτοικος) 1354-5, “why do you put your arms about me, poor daughter, like a swan embracing its white-haired and decrepit sire? τί μ' ἀμφιβάλλεις χερσίν, ὦ τάλαινα παῖ / ὄρνις ὅπως κηφῆνα πολιούχρων κύκνος;) 1364-5

¹³⁶ ... εἰ δὲ σωφρονεῖν ἔγνωθ', ὅτ' οὐκ ἠθέλετε, τὸν Διὸς γόνον ἠύδαιμονεῖτ' ἂν σύμμαχον κεκτημένοι. 1341-3

¹³⁷ Διόνυσε, λισσόμεσθά σ', ἠδικήκαμεν. 1344

¹³⁸ ἐγνώκαμεν τοῦτ'. 1346

than begging the god for mercy, telling Dionysos, “It is not fitting for gods to be like men in their angers / moods”¹³⁹

The value placed by Kadmos and Tiresias on yielding to the god and to mediating the headstrong attitude of Pentheus, suggests a typically feminine value of peace and acceptance.

Passivity and acquiescence have feminine connotations, while the corresponding attribute of activity was appropriated to the male. *Sophrosune*, or self control, was recognized as the necessary corollary to male activity, to curb excess. Still, we see clearly developed along these lines of passivity and activity, the association of men with martial aggression and female mediation and peace. A similar though not equivalent contrast can be seen between young men and old. Aristotle, for instance, in describing the generations, characterizes the elderly as materialistic, ungenerous and expedient, while the younger generation is rash and intemperate.¹⁴⁰

Females as mediators are ubiquitous in both comedy and tragedy and very often are contrasted specifically with their male counterparts. Perhaps the first example that comes to mind is Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, in which women from different *poleis* collect themselves to go on a unanimous sex strike for peace. In this play, the character Kalonike describes the masculine aggressive spirit: “Clomping round the Market Square in full armor, like lunatics . . . going round the vegetable and pottery stalls armed to the teeth.”¹⁴¹ Vetter describes the moment of this characterization: “Clearly the city is so immersed in war that its men cannot leave battle behind as they reenter their domestic

¹³⁹ ὀργᾶς πρέπει θεοὺς οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοῖς. 1348

¹⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.12.3-16.16.

¹⁴¹ ἦν παύσωμεν πρῶτιστον μὲν ξὺν ὄπλοισιν ἀγοράζοντας καὶ μαινομένους (555-6)

spaces. Again the audience is left to reflect on the extent of its own preoccupation with war at the expense of domestic peace.” Certainly the female impulse towards peace and mediating efforts is just as evident in tragedy. In this genre, as in Homer we see the uniquely pathetic ability of females to mediate and supplicate. Thus Jokasta goes out on the battlefield to make peace between her two sons. For instance, a woman may bear her breast, an action which holds an especially strong influence over her male relations (especially her own sons). When a male takes a stance of supplication before another, in some sense he takes on the position of a woman. The rhetoric of supplication, which is often viewed as seductive or possibly manipulative, has a female association. The sacrifice of virgins (for instance, Iphigenia) is also a type of female mediation, since in these instances, the young woman (with the one exception of Menoeteos) offers herself in order to avoid further bloodshed or loss for the community.

Euripides’ other old men espouse a similar value, countering the heroics and hysterics of the younger generation. Examples include Amphitryon’s argument with Megara, where he tries to prevent her from suicide. Iphis is unable to keep his daughter in law Evadne from throwing herself into the fire after she has lost her husband, but he makes fervent pleas. Phereas, however selfish one understands his stance to be, defends himself against Admetos’ reproaches by stating that he felt no obligation to sacrifice himself. Especially in contrast with Alkmena, Iolaos can be seen to exemplify passivity and acceptance, rather than her reactivity and anger. Old men also take a defensive stance against aggressors who, generally middle aged and in power, act against a member or members of the younger generation. Examples are the interactions of Iolaos and Alkmena, Peleus and Menelaos, Amphitryon and Lykos.

Evident in the drive of these old men to mediate among the younger generations, is a significant value placed on what might be termed expedience. Amphitryon tries to dampen Megara's insistence on heroically embracing death; Cadmus and Tiresias try to convince Pentheus of the expediency of honoring Dionysos, as well as dampening his stubborn opinion and antagonism to the young god; Iphis pleads with Evadne not to embrace a heroic death by suicide following upon her husband's, Pheres explains his own action of expediency in rejecting his son Admetus' proposition that he die in place of his son; Iolaus tempers the vengeful spit of Alcmena, Peleus points out that Menelaus and Hermione's aggression towards Andromache, in as much as it is motivated by sex and revenge, is tantamount to cowardice, Amphitryon tries to dampen Lykos' agenda of revenge and anger.

In the *Bakkhai*, Tiresias and Kadmos attempt to mediate between Pentheus and Dionysos. The pragmatic terms in which they try to convince Pentheus of a course of action, which have even been characterized as sophistic or cynical, demonstrate a clear world view. Paul Roth characterizes Tiresias as a "theological sophist," who is more concerned with eristics than with the normal responsibilities and techniques of a mantis.¹⁴² Tiresias, Roth argues, suggests the type of figure which undermines a common and misleading characterization of "diviners as a reactionary group inexorably opposed to the Athenian Enlightenment." Tiresias then, is both seer and intellectual, and in this identity presents pragmatic arguments for the worship of Dionysos. Kadmos' arguments to Pentheus strike the reader as cynical since they do not depend on faith in Dionysos' divinity. Yet in his presentation of this type of reasoning, Kadmos stresses the expedient

¹⁴²Paul Roth, "Tiresias as Mantis and Intellectual in Euripides' *Bakkhai*" in *TAPA*, Vol.114 (1984): 68.

action which he would have Pentheus do, rather than spending much time laying out the principled reasons. Thus, both Kadmos and Tiresias can be seen to value peace and compromise over conflict to prove a point or establish authority.

Reasons for the association between male old age and mediation are both a greater identification with domestic concerns and a certain change in passions. One example can be found in the dialogue of the opening scene of the *Republic*. Here, Socrates interviews the aged Cephalus about the experience of old age. Cephalus' perspective is positive:

For certainly in old age there comes about a great peace and freedom for such things; when the passions stop grasping and relax, then as to Sophokles a complete release takes place from many raging masters.¹⁴³

Cephalus' report that the passions, including sexual, weaken in old age explain the contrast between the martial impulse of the young men and the more passive and mediating orientation of their elderly counterparts. Plato has Cephalus frame this freedom from passion as a positive thing, at least in theory. Euripides' presentation of the mediating role of his old characters suggests a similar positive tone.

The mediation of these older characters of Euripides displays a consistent insight into the way in which Euripides' world works and how men should act within it. The difference between the Euripidean and Sophoclean cosmos enables a greater role for Euripides' many elderly characters, which is in many cases much fuller than a mere caricature. Sophokles presents a hero of enormous will, whose determination to carry out his *physis* will impel him to "blindly, ferociously, heroically maintain that decision even

¹⁴³ Παντάπασι γὰρ τῶν γε τοιούτων ἐν τῷ γῆρα πολλὴ εἰρήνη γίγνεται καὶ ἐλευθερία· ἐπαδιὰν αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι παύσωνται κατατείνουσαι καὶ χαλάσωσιν, παντάπασιν τὸ τοῦ Σοφοκλέους γίγνεται, δεσποτῶν πάνυ πολλῶν ἔστι καὶ μαινομένων ἀπηλλάχθαι. *Republic* 329c5-d1

to the point of self-destruction.”¹⁴⁴ In his struggle the hero overcomes the limitation of death inasmuch as he becomes an emblem of human greatness and receives *kleos*. The character of Euripides’ heroes is very different; they live subject to chance and fickle deities. Because Euripides’ heroes appear unable to resist, a certain degree of fatalism enters his drama, causing his heroes to appear also as victims. Given this character of Euripides, which is not present in Sophokles’ plays, in his drama there is a greater implicit need for acceptance of fate (rather than resistance) and expediency, two qualities which every one of Euripides’ old men embodies. Old men are more than caricatures; they give voice to a message of men who have learned acceptance of divine will and value expediency. The mindset and values of the aged are especially relevant to the Euripidean cosmos in which the realm of human affairs is affected in unpredictable and often harsh ways by the gods.

More than once in Euripides, characters accuse the gods of carelessness or cruelty. As Justina Gregory points out, this attitude does not so much explicate Euripides’ theological stance. Rather, by separating the human and divine spheres, it calls attention to the interdependence of mortals.¹⁴⁵ Cooperation is shown to be vital in the human sphere. Those who hold this sentiment will value expediency over heroic stubbornness or opinionated agendas, and sympathy and moderation over actions motivated by the emotions of revenge, lust and anger. Every old man who appears in Euripides can be seen making these very evaluations.¹⁴⁶ However, these evaluations are

¹⁴⁴ Knox 1966, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Justina Gregory, “Euripidean Tragedy” in the *Blackwell Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. Justina Gregory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 257.

not always portrayed as honorable. For instance, Pheres declines to offer his own life for his son, and Kadmos tries to convince Pentheus to accept Dionysus for the sake of appearances. While the depiction of the elderly may be comic or negative, their actions taken alone are consistently mediatory and expedient. Despite the fact that old age is consistently described as painful and grievous, those in it possess a certain grain of wisdom. It is true that old men appear as supporting figures in Euripides' tragedies and very often are presented in a humorous and even derisive manner. However, the consistency of their interactions with the other two generations and of the values which they express suggests that they possess a real insight.

The feminine attributes of Cadmus and Tiresias in the *Bakkhai* locate them at a comic remove from the tragedy of Pentheus, but also make them spectators of the tragedy – just like the audience members. Moreover, the focus on their secondhand suffering, an emotion with definite feminine associations in the Greek mind, relates also to the experience of the audience. Indeed, the experience of old man and audience member might likewise be related.

The common use of epehebic heroes in tragedy has been discussed by several scholars.¹⁴⁷ In as much as Tiresias and Kadmos provide a significant contrast with Pentheus and describe some of the boundaries of the sphere he attempts to enter, the two old men show in fact the positive aspects of femininity and vulnerability. Thus just as Zeitlin writes that through the use of female personae, tragedy is able “to imagine a more complete model of the masculine self,”¹⁴⁸ so too Euripides old men do this. Even more so, they explore and demonstrate how a person can incorporate feminine aspects without

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Mastronarde 2010, 285-6

¹⁴⁸ Zeitlin's reference from Loraux, 9.

being effeminate, as they clearly hold onto their male identity. Greeks were very interested in describing things in terms of dichotomies, and specifically in terms of sexual differences. But, as Loraux points out, “one of the definitions of the citizen is to alternate between commander and commanded, without this, however, leading to the feminization of the *aner*.”¹⁴⁹ Tiresias and Kadmos are clearly exploring and integrating the feminine, but this is shown in its positive aspects and does not have the result of effeminizing the two old men, as they retain their ability to function as authoritative males. In so doing they not only emphasize positive attributes of the feminine, but also show how these aspects may be incorporated into the Greek man.

¹⁴⁹ Loraux, 16-7.

Conclusion

Interpretations of the *Bakkhai* are multitudinous and include a wide range of opinions. Even if a critic is not concerned primarily with the figures of Tiresias and Kadmos, each interpretation has important consequences for the reading of these characters, and every interpretation of these two old men has important implications for the reading of the play overall and of Pentheus' character specifically.

One end of the discussion has been led by scholars such as A W Verrall and G Norwood who have seen Dionysos in the *Bakkhai* as “an imposter, the moral prophet of a false religion who brilliantly forces Thebes to his will.” Within this strain of interpretation, many have interpreted Pentheus' figure sympathetically and seen Euripides as a rationalist who is critical of religion in his contemporary society. The interpretation of Karl Deichgraeber fits in here. The general interpretation opposed to this one suggests that the maenadism and following of Dionysos is displayed in the play as a “manifestation of a divine power, which defines the dimensions of human existence, a power which the poet accepts with deep piety.” On the other end, E.R. Dodds has offered a critique of this view, and argued that Euripides was an “irrationalist” because in his plays he suggests a view which denies that reason is the sole vehicle to truth or character of reality.

Analysis of the relationship of the generations - Tiresias and Kadmos on the one side and Pentheus on the other - allows an interpretation of this play which, like Dodd's, clings to neither pole of interpretation, viewing the *Bakkhai* neither as a polemic against religion nor as filled with pious sentiment. Rather, by seeking to

understand exactly what contrast is drawn in the drama between these representatives of two generations, one may see what is being conveyed in Pentheus' understanding of and reaction to Dionysos.

Euripides' development of Tiresias and Kadmos as truly insightful figures contributes to the description of Pentheus' inner struggles as they center around his own maturation, or coming of age, as Segal suggests. When Deichgraeber characterizes the two old men as selfish and ridiculous in their "sophia," he ignores, as does Hans Oranje, the fear that motivates them. Kadmos and Tiresias make expedient arguments to Pentheus because they have an all too clear foresight of the tragedy he is approaching and seek to mediate this. The distance between the two old men on the one hand, and Pentheus on the other carries through the play. It brings a real tension into the play from the beginning of the Kadmos-Tiresias scene to the climax when Kadmos reenters the stage at the end of the play. This remove of Kadmos and Tiresias from the sphere of the younger generation is brought about in part by the comic elements of their scene, which Deichgraeber argues are portrayed with ridicule.

Euripides does not shy away from exploiting and emphasizing the characteristics of Kadmos' or Tiresias' old age for comic and pathetic effect. Nor does he do so with his other old men in other plays. In many ways, old age situates the individual at a liminal position in terms of the definition of the Greek man. The elderly male is more vulnerable, less authoritative, more concerned with domestic affairs than the young or middle aged man. At the same time, not only do Euripides' old men, and Kadmos and Tiresias specifically, involve themselves in the masculine sphere of activity, but they carry with them memorable past experiences which are associated with their names.

The liminal position of Kadmos and Tiresias is emphasized by their distance from the central characters of Pentheus and Dionysos, who are themselves characterized as young. The sense of distance between the generations is strengthened throughout the play. One way this happens is through the comic tones of the early Kadmos-Tiresias scene, which confirm the expectation of audience that however the play is resolved, the two old men will survive and survey it. The futility of the arguments of Kadmos and Tiresias, in some ways solidified by their comic aspects, further widens the gulf between them and the younger generation.

This gap between the elderly and younger generations contributes a sense of frustration to the play. Euripides' audience perhaps might have identified with this frustration. Given the tensions between generations, younger, middle and older, that are visible in Classical Athenian society, such a disconnect in communication, identification and understanding between the generations may have been recognizable. Furthermore, the political reality for Athens in this period was her war with Sparta. In the Peloponnesian war, Athens continually lost large numbers from her younger generations, while the oldest one was indeed consigned to the role of θεαταί. However, the depiction of the older generation is not wholly a caricature in the *Bakkhai*, as I have tried to show. Euripides' description of them as bringing an important insight to the situation of Pentheus is significant, since it displays the tragedy of a futile attempt to mediate the destruction of a younger generation.

It seems that in some respects, Tiresias and Kadmos' location in Pentheus' tragedy is like that of the audience. Both experience and view the tragedy of Pentheus at a distinct remove. Both groups are exempted from the direct effects of the central

danger of the drama. Finally, both Tiresias and Kadmos and the audience of the *Bakkhai* have the ability to foresee the ultimate fate of Pentheus, a recognition which relates to an understanding that they will be present at the end of the tragedy to survey the destruction. Thus, through the two old men, Euripides allows his audience to explore and experience vulnerability. Kadmos and Tiresias not only allow the audience an experience of “otherness,” and marginality, but also demonstrate the two major positive effects of their vulnerability: suffering and wisdom.

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