THREE

Euripides' *Bacchae*

The Spectator in the Text

Visibility is a trap.
Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish

If tragic messengers make claims such as those I have identified, not all critics are seduced by them. In a study examining the various reports from Mt. Cithaeron in Euripides' *Bacchae*, Richard Buxton argues against reading the narratives of Euripidean messengers as impartial or transparent accounts of the events they describe. In concluding his careful analysis of the messengers in this play Buxton claims that "these narrators too stand firmly *within* the drama" (1991, 46).[1] From articulating what distinguishes the narratives of these figures, Buxton proceeds to include the messengers with the other *dramatis personae* in a single category of those

I borrow the felicitous phrase "the spectator in the text" from Browne 1986.

1. Emphasis in the original. Buxton's focus is on the two messengers, but he includes the "narratives" of Dionysos (23–42), Pentheus (215–25), and the servant (434–50) in his discussion. See also Bierl 1991, 193. When I speak of "messengers" here I mean the herdsman who enters at 660 and the servant who enters at 1024.

"within the drama." The narratives of the messengers, like everything else said onstage, Buxton argues, are imbued with their own distinctive emotion and rhetoric: "In no two cases is the relationship between content and narrator identical" (40). His argument directs itself precisely against the not uncommon tendency silently to grant a distinct and privileged status to the narratives of tragic messengers.[2]

Complementing the work of de Jong (1991), Buxton rejects the use of the term "messenger" in the singular as injuriously general and neglectful of "the subtle divergences between the reports" (1991, 46). I will argue that Buxton's formulation, although laudable for the attention it pays to rhetorical variation in the narratives it studies, simplifies the status of the messengers in Euripides' play. Rather than being "firmly *within* the drama," the messengers occupy a place on the stage very different from that of the other *dramatis personae*. A reading founded on metatheatrical studies of the play will show that an important part of *Bacchae*'s self-conscious interest is directed at the status of the messengers, particularly with respect to how they define and are defined by Pentheus. The play produces messengers substantially "outside" the drama—virtual "spectators-in-the-text"—and in so doing expands our notion of what is possible on the tragic stage while clarifying the status of the spectator within the play's metatheater. Although by means of a starkly different route, this metatheater reveals a messenger very much akin to the one we find in Aeschylus's *Persians*. These two plays together are central texts for the understanding of the tragic messenger, as they map out and comment on this conventional figure's privileged status.

The metatheatricality of the play has found extensive critical exposi-

2. Buxton (1991, 46 n. 14) cites Barlow 1971 as an example of this tendency. He, like de Jong (1991, 63–64), ignores the qualification Barlow offers in acknowledging that the status of the messenger is complex and that the poet seeks to establish an unproblematic figure in the messenger against the constraints of the tragic stage. See the introduction above, and Heath 1987, 44.

tion in recent years.[3] The studies of Charles Segal (1982, 215–71) and Helene Foley (1985, 205–58) remain central to any discussion of the play as metatheater, while that of Anton Bierl (1991, 186–217) pushes the fundamental insights of Segal and Foley close to their limits.[4] All of these studies depart in principle from the fact that Dionysos is both the god of theater and the focus of the play: with this as a foundation, the text amply suggests that we read it as a prolonged reflection on theater itself.

Both Segal and Foley astutely discuss the play-within-the-play, Dionysos as director and Pentheus as unwitting protagonist. Segal remarks: "As an actor among actors, Dionysus stands on the same level as the other characters in the orchestra. But he is also director, dressing and instructing his 'actors' for the role they will have to play" (1982, 225). Pentheus's pilgrimage to Mt. Cithaeron to watch the Maenads and the *sparagmos* that forms the climax of the play become under Dionysos's direction a performance akin to tragedy in the theater of Dionysos at Athens. Indeed, the play-within-the-play coincides largely with the play we call *Bacchae*.

As Segal and Foley have shown, Pentheus's status as would-be spectator is central to the play's metatheatricality: much of the elaborate "drama" organized by Dionysos turns on Pentheus's desire to watch the Maenads in the mountains while remaining unseen himself. He wants to be a spectator (θεατής, 829), like the audience in the theater. And like the spectator in the theater, he is tempted by the offer Dionysos makes to see the "performance" on the mountain. In fact, the persistent thematic importance of vision underlies much of the metatheater of the play: the prospect of seeing the Bacchants marks a turning point for Pentheus. Dionysos asks him at 811:

3. There has been some objection to the term "metatheater" and to the validity of its use as an interpretive tool. For a good summary of views and a reply to these objections see Segal 1997, 369–78. For a concise and lucid exposition of what metatheater is see Falkner 1998, 29–33.

4. See also Goldhill 1986, 259–64, 267–86.

βούλῃ σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν;

Do you want to see them sitting together in the mountains?

And if Dionysos's taunt at 829 suggests the parallel with the audience, it does so in terms of vision:

οὐκέτι θεατὴς μαινάδων πρόθυμος εἶ;

Are you no longer eager to be a spectator of Maenads?

(Indeed, the word *theatēs* defines the audience in terms of vision.) Similarly, Pentheus himself, so the messenger tells us, emphasizes his obsession with seeing the Maenads (1058–62):

Πενθεὺς δ' ὁ τλήμων θῆλυν οὐχ ὁρῶν ὄχλον
ἔλεξε τοιάδ'· Ὦ ξέν', οὗ μὲν ἕσταμεν,
οὐκ ἐξικνοῦμαι μαινάδων ὄσσοις νόθων·
ὄχθων δ' ἔπ', ἀμβὰς ἐς ἐλάτην ὑψαύχενα,
ἴδοιμ' ἂν ὀρθῶς μαινάδων αἰσχρουργίαν.[5]

Pentheus, the wretch, not seeing the group of women, said such things as these: "Stranger, from where we stand I cannot reach the impostor Maenads with my eyes. But if I climb the tall fir on the hill, I could see the Maenads' disgraceful behavior clearly."

The text emphasizes Pentheus's desire to pass through town unobserved and to watch the Bacchants without being detected. To this end Dionysos garbs him with a full Dionysian costume, including wig, peplos, and thyrsus (831–35).[6] Once on the mountain, of course, Pentheus proposes, in the passage cited above, to mount the fir tree. From above he should not only have a good view but also remain undetected, as the vertical movement implies a withdrawal from the horizontal field of action. Indeed this is what Pentheus himself anticipates: ἐλάταις δ' ἐμὸν κρύψω δέ-

5. I follow here the text of Dodds 1960.

6. See Foley 1985, 224.

μας ("I will conceal my body among the fir trees," 954). To which Dionysos pleonastically responds (955–56):

κρύψῃ σὺ κρύψιν ἥν σε κρυφθῆναι χρεών,
ἐλθόντα δόλιον μαινάδων κατάσκοπον.

You will hide yourself in a hidden manner as you should be hidden
by secretly going to spy on the Maenads.

Here Dionysos repeats the word "spy" (κατάσκοπον) from line 916, where he applies this term to Pentheus for the first time. The god offers not only a view, but a secretive one: Pentheus imagines being an invisible spectator.

His hopes are dashed, or rather, inverted, as he becomes instead the unseeing spectacle, as the messenger reports (1075):

ὤφθη δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ κατεῖδε μαινάδας.

He was seen more than he saw the Maenads.

On both counts of vision and visibility the events on the mountain reverse the plan of his desire.[7]

THE SERVANT

As Pentheus fails to become a spectator, however, Dionysos is not the only one who "remains a spectator" (Foley 1985, 212). As invisible to critics as Pentheus wants to be to the Maenads, the messenger is the true spectator of Dionysos's drama on the mountain. He sees the entirety of what transpires, including Pentheus's transformation from spectator to spectacle. He alone remains unseen.[8]

7. Foley comments: "Pentheus, representing his city, goes to the mountain intending to be a spectator. Instead, his sight changes, and he becomes a spectacle and participant" (1985, 212).

8. Dionysos as the stranger, of course, vanishes; but this avenue is not open to mere mortals. Or he goes unseen only by disappearing, while the messenger remains at the scene and still goes unnoticed.

The text, however, prepares us to overlook the messenger as the successful spectator. The elaborate dressing scene preliminary to the trip to the mountain emphatically distinguishes Pentheus the protagonist from the messenger. When Pentheus says at 961–62:

κόμιζε διὰ μέσης με Θηβαίας χθονός·
μόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμ' ἀνὴρ τολμῶν τόδε.

Take me through the middle of the Theban land; for I am the only
man among them daring to do this.

we may readily acquiesce in his claim to uniqueness. And Dionysos's response at 963 with its emphatic repetition of μόνος, initial and final, again encourages us to view Pentheus's position as unique:

μόνος σὺ πόλεως τῆσδ' ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος·

Alone you struggle for this city, alone.

By the same token, the incomparability of Pentheus's role as spectator-become-spectacle constitutes the ambiguity both of the dressing scene and of lines 961–63: the dressing of Pentheus, while ostensibly (in Pentheus's eyes) designed to allow him to pass unobserved, really, of course, marks Pentheus as the protagonist of the play-within-the-play. As he thinks he is disguising himself so as to become an unseen spectator, he places himself in the center of Dionysos's play. These two scenes, then, clearly work to distinguish Pentheus as unique in his role as would-be spectator. He is unique, however, not in being a spectator, but rather in failing to become one.

The messenger himself reveals the significance of his own role. As he begins his narrative in the first-person plural, he enumerates the members of the embassy (1043–47):

ἐπεὶ θεράπνας τῆσδε Θηβαίας χθονὸς
λιπόντες ἐξέβημεν Ἀσωποῦ ῥοάς,
λέπας Κιθαιρώνειον εἰσεβάλλομεν

Πενθεύς τε κἀγώ (δεσπότῃ γὰρ εἱπόμην)
ξένος θ' ὃς ἡμῖν πομπὸς ἦν θεωρίας.

When we had left behind the dwellings of the Theban countryside and the waters of Asopus, we entered the rocky scrub of Mt. Cithaeron, Pentheus and I—since I was following my master—and the stranger who was our guide in the embassy for viewing the spectacle.

There were three, he says: Pentheus, the stranger, and himself. These lines not only establish his claim to presence at the scene; they also place him *alone* as the eyewitness on the mountain. Whereas the messenger's use of the term *theōria* at line 1047 underscores Pentheus's desire (and subsequent failure) to become a spectator, to watch unseen, it simultaneously signals the eventual success of the messenger on this score.

The messenger goes on to emphasize that the strategy of seeing unseen included him (1048–50):

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ποιηρὸν ἵζομεν νάπος,
τά τ' ἐκ ποδῶν σιγηλὰ καὶ γλώσσης ἄπο
σῴζοντες, ὡς ὁρῷμεν οὐχ ὁρώμενοι.

First we sat down on a grassy glen and kept silent, not a word on our tongues, so that we might see without being seen.

He alone accompanied Pentheus and the stranger, and he (too) watched secretly.

Perhaps most telling is Agave's instruction to the women while Pentheus is up in the tree (1106–9):

Φέρε, περιστᾶσαι κύκλῳ
πτόρθου λάβεσθε, μαινάδες, τὸν ἀμβάτην
θῆρ' ὡς ἔλωμεν μηδ' ἀπαγγείλῃ θεοῦ
χοροὺς κρυφαίους.

Come on, grab a branch, Maenads, and form a circle so we can catch the climbing beast, lest he report [ἀπαγγείλῃ] the secret dances of the god.

In terms that invoke the role of the messenger, Agave here articulates the motivation for the hunt that will bring Pentheus's end : the final act of the drama organized by Dionysos is announced by Agave as she warns that Pentheus may do what the messenger—who relates all this, of course—does. Until this moment Pentheus and the messenger lead parallel lives.

Although interested neither in parallels between Pentheus and the messenger nor in the play's metatheater, E. R. Dodds sees "several apparent reminiscences" of the *Iliad* in the messenger's account of Pentheus's death (1960 *ad* 1061). And these "reminiscences" underscore the metatheatrical presentation of Pentheus as a would-be spectator and as a would-be messenger. The Iliadic passage describes the arrival of Hera and Hypnos on Mt. Ida as they begin to carry out Hera's plan to seduce Zeus and to put him to sleep so as to distract him from the battle, thereby enabling Poseidon to come to the aid of the Greeks. To this end, Hera enlists the aid of Hypnos (along with that of Aphrodite). The lines from *Iliad* 14 referred to by Dodds describe Hypnos as he spies on Zeus, and they occur in a passage as much structured by the theme of vision perhaps as is *Bacchae* itself.

Hera asks Hypnos to put Zeus to sleep, drawing attention to his eyes as the object of her concern: κοίμησόν μοι Ζηνὸς ὑπ' ὀφρύσιν ὄσσε φαεινώ ("Put to sleep Zeus's eyes shining under his brow," 14.236). Hypnos does not agree immediately, negotiating the terms of his involvement. Hera then agrees to give him Pasithea (one of the Graces) in marriage, and he abandons his initial reluctance to scheme against Zeus. After their bartering, the two arrive among the forests of Mt. Ida, where Hypnos remains behind before Zeus can see him: ἔνθ' Ὕπνος μὲν ἔμεινε πάρος Διὸς ὄσσε ἰδέσθαι ("Hypnos stayed there before Zeus's eyes could see him," 14.286). Then follow the lines cited by Dodds (14.287–89), which tell of Hypnos mounting the fir tree:

εἰς ἐλάτην ἀναβὰς περιμήκετον, ἣ τότ' ἐν Ἴδῃ
μακροτάτη πεφυυῖα δι' ἠέρος αἰθέρ' ἵκανεν·
ἔνθ' ἧστ' ὄζοισιν πεπυκασμένος εἰλατίνοισιν

[Hypnos] mounting the high fir, which, being the tallest one then on Mt. Ida, reached the upper air. There he sat, hidden by the thick fir branches.

From this vantage point Hypnos is not only invisible to Zeus, but he is well-positioned to watch the ensuing seduction and slumber of Zeus.

The thematic centrality of vision in this entire episode is made yet clearer by what follows. Zeus sees Hera approaching, and this act of seeing alone accomplishes the seduction (293–94):

ἴδε δὲ νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς.
ὡς δ' ἴδεν, ὥς μιν ἔρως πυκινὰς φρένας ἀμφεκάλυψεν.

Cloud-Gathering Zeus saw her. And when he saw her, *eros* enveloped his mind.

When Zeus soon after asks Hera to delay her (pretended) visit to Okeanos and Tethys and to make love to him, she demurs on the grounds that they would be seen (331–35):

εἰ νῦν ἐν φιλότητι λιλαίεαι εὐνηθῆναι
Ἴδης ἐν κορυφῇσι, τὰ δὲ προπέφανται ἅπαντα·
πῶς κ' ἔοι εἴ τις νῶϊ θεῶν αἰειγενετάων
εὕδοντ' ἀθρήσειε, θεοῖσι δὲ πᾶσι μετελθὼν
πεφράδοι;

If you want to go to bed now and make love here on top of Ida, everything will be open to view. How would it be if one of the eternal gods should see us sleeping together and tell it to all the gods?

Zeus then attempts to reassure her, saying that no one can see them, not even Helios who has the sharpest vision of all (342–45):

Ἥρη, μήτε θεῶν τό γε δείδιθι μήτε τιν' ἀνδρῶν
ὄψεσθαι· τοῖόν τοι ἐγὼ νέφος ἀμφικαλύψω
χρύσεον· οὐδ' ἂν νῶϊ διαδράκοι Ἠέλιός περ,
οὗ τε καὶ ὀξύτατον πέλεται φάος εἰσοράασθαι.

Hera, have no fear that any of the gods or mortals will see us; I will cover us with such a golden cloud. Even Helios will be unable to see us through it, he whose brightness is the sharpest vision of all.

Hypnos, of course, is the one who does witness Zeus's slumber from high up in the fir tree. His ascent of the tree is recalled, suggests Dodds, by the messenger's account of Pentheus mounting the fir tree (1059–65, 1068–74):

ὦ ξέν', οὗ μὲν ἔσταμεν,
οὐκ ἐξικνοῦμαι μαινάδων ὅσσοις νόθων·
ὄχθων δ' ἔπ', ἀμβὰς ἐς ἐλάτην ὑψαύχενα,
ἴδοιμ' ἂν ὀρθῶς μαινάδων αἰσχρουργίαν.
τοὐντεῦθεν ἤδη τοῦ ξένου θαυμάσθ' ὁρῶ·
λαβὼν γὰρ ἐλάτης οὐράνιον ἄκρον κλάδον
κατῆγεν ἦγεν ἦγεν ἐς μέλαν πέδον [. . .]
ὡς κλῶν' ὄρειον ὁ ξένος χεροῖν ἄγων
ἔκαμπτεν ἐς γῆν, ἔργματ' οὐχὶ θνητὰ δρῶν.
Πενθέα δ' ἱδρύσας ἐλατίνων ὄζων ἔπι,
ὀρθὸν μεθίει διὰ χερῶν βλάστημ' ἄνω
ἀτρέμα, φυλάσσων μὴ ἀναχαιτίσειέ νιν,
ὀρθὴ δ' ἐς ὀρθὸν αἰθέρ' ἐστηρίζετο
ἔχουσα νώτοις δεσπότην ἐφήμενον·

"Stranger, from where we stand I cannot reach the impostor Maenads with my eyes. But if I climb the tall fir on the hill, I could see the Maenads' disgraceful behavior clearly." And then I see the stranger's miracle: grabbing a branch at the peak of a towering fir, he bent it down, down, down to the black earth [. . .] with his hands the stranger bent the mountain tree to the ground, an act beyond mere mortals, and putting Pentheus atop the fir, he smoothly released the tree straight up, taking care lest the tree throw him off; it rose straight toward the sky with master sitting at the top.

Dodds compares the Iliadic

εἰς ἐλάτην ἀναβάς (14.287)

with

ἀμβὰς ἐς ἐλάτην (1061)

and

ἔνθ' ἧστ' ὄζοισιν πεπυκασμένος εἰλατίνοισιν (14.289)

with

Πενθέα δ' ἱδρύσας ἐλατίνων ὄζων ἔπι (1070)

and

δι' ἠέρος αἰθέρ' ἵκανεν (14.288)

with

ὀρθὴ δ' ἐς ὀρθὸν αἰθέρ' ἐστηρίζετο (1073).[9]

Just what Dodds intends by stating that these lines of Euripides' play contain "reminiscences" of the *Iliad* scene is unclear, and I see no need to press the question. Whether the *Iliad* passage was a source consciously used by Euripides or not, it stands as a suggestive parallel. The coincidence of Hypnos's invisibility and his privileged position as spectator surely encourages reading the messenger's account as (in part) a reworking of the Iliadic passage. But the invisible eyewitness in the *Iliad* here has even more to offer as a model for Pentheus and his efforts to become a spectator.

In her mock resistance Hera suggests that the danger in being seen is that the voyeur might tell the rest of the gods (θεοῖσι δὲ πᾶσι μετελθὼν / πεφράδοι, 334–35). This, of course, does not happen, because the two are shrouded in a golden cloud. But this successful screening is only a trick: Zeus's satisfaction with the invisible lovemaking and the slumber that ensues stand as the visible objects of Hypnos's gaze. Hera's deception of Zeus is just that of Pentheus: in thinking himself hidden he becomes most visible and most vulnerable.

9. Dodds 1960 *ad* 1070 and 1073.

As Zeus falls asleep, Hypnos departs to tell Poseidon (354–55):

βῆ δὲ θέειν ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν νήδυμος Ὕπνος
ἀγγελίην ἐρέων γαιήοχῳ ἐννοσιγαίῳ·

Sweet Sleep sped to the ships of the Achaians with a message [ἀγγελίην] for the one who holds and shakes the earth.

Hypnos becomes the messenger. Here, as in *Bacchae*, we find that it is the invisible spectator who is able to tell the story. Just as Agave alerts us to the coincidence of invisible spectatorship and messenger status, so does Hera, together with the chain of events of book 14, equate the two. As parallel to, if not source of, the messenger's account, the *Iliad* passage stands as an illuminating commentary on the metatheatrical status of Pentheus as would-be spectator and the success of the messenger on this score.

That the role of spectator aimed at by Pentheus entails or creates the possibility of reporting—as Agave makes explicit—is alluded to already in the messenger's opening words. At line 1047 (cited above) he calls the journey to Mt. Cithaeron a θεωρία. Beyond the mundane meaning of "viewing," this term often carries connotations of both responsibility and authority. Those sent in an official capacity by the city—to athletic games or to the oracle at Delphi—embark upon a θεωρία. It is the charge of such persons to report accurately what they "see." Theognis invokes this burden of accuracy (805–10):

τόρνου καὶ στάθμης καὶ γνώμονος ἄνδρα θεωρὸν
εὐθύτερον χρὴ ‹ἔ›μεν Κύρνε φυλασσόμενον,
ᾧτινί κεν Πυθῶνι θεοῦ χρήσασ' ἱέρεια
ὀμφὴν σημήνῃ πίονος ἐξ ἀδύτου·
οὔτε τι γὰρ προσθεὶς οὐδέν κ' ἔτι φάρμακον εὕροις,
οὐδ' ἀφελὼν πρὸς θεῶν ἀμπλακίην προφύγοις.[10]

10. I give the text of West 1989.

> A *theōros* must be straighter than a straightedge or a plumb line,
> Cyrnus, more reliable than a compass and very careful—he to
> whom the priestess of the god at Pytho gives an oracular sign from
> the sumptuous shrine; for you won't find a solution by adding any-
> thing and you won't avoid offending the gods by omitting anything
> either.

However we read the relationship between *theōros* and poet in Theognis,[11] the emphasis this passage places on the reliability of the one undertaking a *theōria* is striking: nothing must be added to his report, and nothing taken away. With the institution of *theōria* demanding such a *theōros* (or at least the pretense of one), the messenger as he embarks on his narrative quietly clothes himself with the mantle of one granted a privileged, authoritative voice. He (along with Pentheus) goes not merely to watch; he goes with the task of watching with special care. His invocation of the *theōria* implies that his is no idle mission; it is as though organized by the polis itself.[12]

If the messenger succeeds where Pentheus fails, in that he brings a report from the mountain to the city, he also, and as a precondition to be sure, succeeds in passing unseen through the city as well as on the mountain itself. Not only do we know from the fact of his survival and presence onstage toward the end of the drama that he was invisible to Agave and the other women, but the text reveals something more at work than Agave's limited vision. In his *angelia* the messenger consistently remains

11. Nagy reads this passage as a moment of self-authorization on the part of Theognis: "Just as the priestess . . . *semainei* 'indicates' the message of the god, so also the poet speaks authoritatively, as if a lawgiver" (1990b, 165). See also Nagy 1985, 37, on the poet as *theōros*.

12. Massenzio (1969, 85–89) examines the failings of Pentheus's vision—he who would be a *theōros*. De Jong comments: "On the level of external communication (between Euripides and the spectators), the words [πομπὸς θεωρίας] indicate a ritual procession, with Pentheus the victim about to be sacrificed" (1991, 36). For a recent, far-reaching discussion of the institution of *theōria* see Nightingale 2001, esp. 29–33.

disengaged from the events. Only once after he situates himself at the scene does he overtly refer to himself.[13] But his invisibility as eyewitness is marked by more than mere rhetorical self-effacement. Having established that he was one of three in the party, he tells first of Pentheus mounting the fir tree (1064–74) and then (1077) of the stranger disappearing. The moment Dionysos dematerializes is the same moment Pentheus becomes visible atop the tree (1076–77):

> ὅσον γὰρ οὔπω δῆλος ἦν θάσσων ἄνω,
> καὶ τὸν ξένον μὲν οὐκέτ' εἰσορᾶν παρῆν.
>
> He was just becoming visible sitting on high when the stranger was
> no longer to be seen.[14]

Just as Pentheus achieves the position that he hopes will fulfill his wish, he becomes fatally visible to all. And at this same moment Dionysos vanishes from sight. This miraculous moment marks Pentheus as the center of the spectacle and engages both the visible Pentheus and the invisible Dionysos in a reciprocal relation that seems complete in its embrace: the seen and the unseen simultaneously define one another. But in this moment, as the text works to establish this view of Dionysos and Pentheus as broad and comprehensive, the third member of the party performs a different kind of disappearing act. He alone is unaccounted for, beheld by none even as an absence. And his invisibility on the mountain finds a parallel in the theater: not only does the messenger elude the women; he escapes the attention of many critics as well. Indeed, the success of his performance is indicated by the fact that even critics addressing the play's metatheatricality have not appreciated his status as invisible eyewitness on Mt. Cithaeron.

13. ὁρῶ at line 1063. Of course he speaks in the first-person again in concluding, at 1148–52. De Jong (1992, 578) takes ὁρῶ at 1063 as one of many signs of this messenger's focalization, in support of her claim that "le messager, comme tous les narrateurs, ne peut pas échapper à sa focalisation" (576).

14. My translation here follows Dodds (1960 ad loc.).

A substantial amount of criticism of the play maintains that Pentheus's (failure in his) mission to Mt. Cithaeron and his death at the hands of the Maenads bear witness to his alienation from and opposition to the society of Dionysiac worshippers, as well as testifying to his disturbed psychological state. Segal (1982, 263), for example, attributes Pentheus's failure to neurosis:

> He [Pentheus] would be a spectator, *theatēs* (829), but not as a member of an audience in a *theatron*. Instead, he is a voyeur, isolated in his private neurotic world. . . . He is shut out of the participatory community established by true theater or true belief in Dionysus.[15]

But in a drama so concerned with drama, this explanation may seem incomplete. While it surely speaks to his position with respect to the society of Dionysiac worshippers construed in its broadest sense and to his state of mind, Pentheus's failure is also metatheatrical in that it demonstrates the condition of and the constraints upon the *dramatis personae*. Pentheus desires to become a spectator of the metatheatrical drama on the mountain, and for him to do so would mean ceasing to be an actor while gaining the ability to "authorize a view" (Browne 1986, 109). But it is precisely this that he fails to do. The thrust of the metatheatrical commentary here suggests that he simply cannot leave behind—even temporarily—his position as a figure constituted and determined by his status as actor in the drama; he can only remain "within the drama," his perceptions, understanding, and speech all bounded by the greater and more comprehensive view of the real spectators, the invisible audience in the theater. As Bierl comments concerning the moment that graphically marks the reversal of Pentheus's status, turning spectator into actor: "The fall [from atop the fir tree] symbolizes the fact that Pentheus is thrown down to the level of the stage where he must 'perform a role.'"[16] It is the privilege of the anonymous and unseen audience to watch, contemplate, and judge the *dramatis personae*, who are confined to their status as actors onstage. The failure of Pentheus to become a spectator metatheatrically enacts and reaffirms this fundamental distinction.[17]

If it seems tautologous to argue that the tragic protagonist cannot abandon his position as actor to become a spectator, the significance of this claim lies in what it says about the status of the messenger. That is, if Pentheus's failure to become a spectator seems predetermined in metatheatrical terms, the success of the messenger might seem to be ruled out on the same grounds. In fact, as we have seen, the messenger does succeed and in so doing threatens to expand our notion of what is possible on the tragic stage: contrary to Buxton's claim, this messenger occupies a position substantially "outside" the drama in that he achieves spectator status and remains invisible to the Maenads. (His success on these counts, furthermore, has achieved a similar "invisibility" in criticism.) Indeed, the play-within-the-play reveals that Pentheus's desire to watch unseen is not entirely off-limits to some of the *dramatis personae*. And the case of the first messenger, the herdsman who reports the activities of the Maenads on Mt. Cithaeron, reveals that the servant is not the only

15. Foley reads Pentheus's demise as following on his status as "an enemy to festival" and his "attempt to exclude festival and its benefits from his recently formed and crudely hierarchical city" (1985, 231 and 241). On Pentheus's psychological state see, for example, Seidensticker 1972; Sale 1972; LaRue 1968.

16. "Der Sturz symbolisiert die Tatsache, dass Pentheus auf die Ebene der Bühne geworfen wird, wo er 'mitspielen' muss" (1991, 213).

17. As he is about to meet his end Pentheus tries yet again to escape the confines of his status by removing his mitra (1115–16): in metatheatrical terms he attempts to remove his costume (Segal 1982, 228). Foley points out that Pentheus's opposition to festival "is expressed primarily as a failure of sight, or a failure to benefit from *theōria*" (1985, 241). *Theōria*, as we have seen, implies a privileged kind of viewing, such as that of the audience in the theater. Vernant (1988b, 43) describes the relation of the audience to the inhabitants of the fictional world in complementary terms. On Vernant's formulation, however, see now Gould 1996, 218–21, and Goldhill 1996, 244–46.

messenger endowed with this privilege of spectatorship that is marked by a virtual invisibility and disembodiment.

THE HERDSMAN

The herdsman arrives to tell of the marvels performed by the Bacchants, and although he does not tell us explicitly where he was, we may infer that he was with the cattle he mentions at 677–78. Such a position seems evident a bit later when he and his fellow herdsmen hide (722–23). Indirectly, then, we get an idea of where he was as he saw the events that make up his story.

This position remains virtually unchanged until 734 where we find him (with the other herdsmen) fleeing the attacking women. Although we do not hear where they go, Dodds (1960 *ad* 751–52) reasonably takes them to flee toward Thebes.[18] After describing the *sparagmos* at lines 735–47, the herdsman proceeds to tell of the "flight" of the women (748–54):

> χωροῦσι δ' ὥστ' ὄρνιθες ἀρθεῖσαι δρόμῳ
> πεδίων ὑποτάσεις, αἳ παρ' Ἀσωποῦ ῥοαῖς
> εὔκαρπον ἐκβάλλουσι Θηβαίοις στάχυν,
> Ὑσιάς τ' Ἐρυθράς θ', αἳ Κιθαιρῶνος λέπας
> νέρθεν κατῳκήκασιν, ὥστε πολέμιοι
> ἐπεσπεσοῦσαι πάντ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω
> διέφερον·
>
> Like birds aloft, they sped across the understretch of plain that bears an abundant Theban crop by the river Asopus. And like enemies in battle, they fell upon Hysia and Erythra in the lowlands of Mt. Cithaeron and turned them all upside down.

Even if we take into account Dodds's note (1960 *ad* 751–52) that the herdsmen "would pass them [the towns of Hysia and Erythra] in their flight," it would be easy to show that the herdsman could not possibly

18. Seaford concurs (1996 *ad* 748–52).

have witnessed all that he describes. He says, after all, that the women flew "like birds."[19] Not only does he not say he accompanied them—which is standard for a messenger to do when a change of location occurs—but the context makes clear that even if he had tried, he would not have succeeded: the special power of Dionysos was obviously the enabling force for the women.[20]

His account of the women's return to the spot where his narrative begins is equally implausible, for he says not only that they returned there, but that they went to the springs and washed themselves (765–68):

> πάλιν δ' ἐχώρουν ὅθεν ἐκίνησαν πόδα
> κρήνας ἐπ' αὐτὰς ἃς ἀνῆκ' αὐταῖς θεός,
> νίψαντο δ' αἷμα, σταγόνα δ' ἐκ παρηίδων
> γλώσσῃ δράκοντες ἐξεφαίδρυνον χροός.
>
> They turned back whence they had come, to the very springs the god had made flow for them. They washed off the blood, and snakes licked away the drippings from their cheeks.

If, as Dodds suggests, the herdsman fled to Thebes immediately after his attempted ambush of Agave, he would not have been once again on the mountain to witness this.

It would be easy to show that this messenger's narrative clearly exceeds what he could realistically know.[21] But my interest is not to prove

19. Roux (1970 ad loc.) remarks: "Il ne s'agit pas ici d'une simple figure de style, mais d'un nouveau miracle."

20. Verrall (1910, 86) takes a different view, rejecting the herdsman's report as unbelievable: "The man does not know what he saw, and is not making any attempt to consult his memory and reproduce the record." Oranje, however, dismisses Verrall's argument, claiming that by means of "the messenger speech the spectator comes face to face with events in the play which are enacted off-stage. The level of reality cannot be tampered with" (1984, 74 n. 183).

21. Dodds (1960 *ad* 765–68) remarks: "The Herdsman is allowed to round off his narrative by describing what he cannot well have seen." And

the messenger a liar. This would tell us little, if anything. The importance of the remarks above lies in what they tell us about the messenger's self-representation. Here we see him appropriating a freedom of movement within the scene he describes that is clearly the province of one not confined by the limits placed on a "real" eyewitness: indeed, as his comparison of the women's flight to that of birds recalls certain Homeric similes, so his freedom from the realistic constraints of the scene he describes and his virtually disembodied presence at that scene recall the narrative practice of the epic bard. He claims a place within his narrative that at once allows him to see and prevents us from seeing him.

The absence of any indication of his whereabouts after line 734 (where he and the other herdsmen are pursued by the women) aids his project greatly. He tells us only that he went away from the spot of the ambush, without indicating a direction. Agave, it seems, has chased the messenger not only out of his ambush, but out of the narrative altogether. For the remainder of the narrative there are no first-persons, and indications of what he saw are either implicit or indicated by oblique or impersonal means. At 737–38, for example, he tells Pentheus:

καὶ τὴν μὲν ἂν προσεῖδες εὔθηλον πόριν
μυκωμένην ἔχουσαν ἐν χεροῖν δίχα.[22]

And you would have beheld her holding the well-teated, mooing heifer torn apart in her hands.

At 760 he employs an impersonal expression:

οὔπερ τὸ δεινὸν ἦν θέαμ' ἰδεῖν, ἄναξ.

Then there was a terrifying sight to behold, sir.

surely he is right to add that this "is not unusual, and does not authorize us to regard him as a liar."

22. Similarly at 740, εἶδες δ' ἂν. I depart here from Diggle in retaining ἔχουσαν of the manuscripts.

These subtle forms of self-excision aid in his performance of his own miracle of locomotion as he tracks with his narrative the miraculous deeds of the Bacchants.[23]

These references to impersonal vision (760) and to what "you" would have seen (737–38, 740) serve another function as well. This detachment from his own point of view of what the messenger claims to have seen seeks to normalize his privileged status. "You, too," he tells Pentheus, "would have seen all this." But as will become clear, Pentheus would not (and in the end did not). Pentheus, most of all, would not have seen. At 1060 he says:

οὐκ ἐξικνοῦμαι μαινάδων ὄσσοις νόθων·

I am not able to reach the impostor Maenads with my eyes.

This invocation of Pentheus's potential (safe) witnessing of what the herdsman saw—the very witnessing that becomes the object of Pentheus's desire, central to the metatheatrical manipulations of Dionysos—makes clear the privilege inherent in the messenger's vision and in his status as spectator.

The narrative of the herdsman, however, also offers a stiff challenge to my claims about the play's messengers. He tells us that as he and his comrades watched the miraculous activities of the Maenads, they hid in ambush and attempted to catch Agave. In sharp contrast to the invisible spectator, this messenger heads directly for the center of the action as he leaps at Pentheus's mother (728–30). Although this scene appears to confirm Buxton's claim that the messengers, too, "stand firmly within the drama," it illustrates that the messenger in fact does not successfully attain the role of actor at which he aims.

For the first 39 lines of his narrative (prior to line 714) we hear of only one herdsman, namely, the messenger. He uses the singular when he

23. This is not to deny that these lines may serve other purposes as well. For example, it is clear that the herdsman's use of the second-person encourages and augments Pentheus's desire to see the women himself.

says, for example, that he saw (ὁρῶ, 680) three groups of Bacchants. After describing in detail the remarkable doings of the women on the mountain, he turns to speaking of himself and those with him. Suddenly we find that he was not alone (714–16):

> ξυνήλθομεν δὲ βουκόλοι καὶ ποιμένες
> κοινῶν λόγων δώσοντες ἀλλήλοις ἔριν
> ὡς δεινὰ δρῶσι θαυμάτων τ' ἐπάξια.[24]
>
> We cowherds and shepherds assembled to compete with each other
> in tales of their terrifying and amazing deeds.

At the moment when we first hear of their discussion and attempted ambush of the Bacchants, these intrusive elements—which call attention to the *action* of the messenger rather than to his *vision*—seek to deflect our attention from its focus on the messenger onto the group as a whole. The quoted speech at 718–21 directs our attention to the herdsmen and away from the women, but as it does so it somewhat obscures the messenger himself by offering us the words of another member of the group. We hear one of the herdsmen speak, but the narrator himself remains "silent": it is the urbane herdsman who speaks (717–18):

> καί τις πλάνης κατ' ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων
> ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντας.
>
> And someone who wanders through town and has a way with words
> spoke to everyone.

The group, swayed by the slick talker, decide to hunt (*thērasōmetha*, 719) the women, and they therefore lie in ambush.

As Jeanne Roux (1970 *ad* 719) remarks, the shepherd here employs some of the vocabulary used earlier by Pentheus (his θηρασώμεθα echoes Pentheus's θηράσομαι at 228, for example), and this new hunt presages to some extent the fate that awaits Pentheus.[25] Similarly, the shepherds

24. Diggle brackets line 716.
25. See also Buxton 1991, 42–43.

mimic the act of observation on the part of the spectator in their self-concealment (722–23):

> θάμνων δ' ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις
> κρύψαντες αὑτούς·
>
> We hid in the foliage of the bushes, concealing ourselves.

But the hiding and mere observation do not last. As the women begin their ritual shaking of the thyrsoi and chanting (723–27), Agave comes near the herdsman, and he springs forth. As he does so he calls attention to the fact that he acts alone (κἀγὼ, 729). Here for the first time since the initial ὁρῶ of line 680—and also for the last time in the narrative proper—he uses the first-person singular (728–30):

> κυρεῖ δ' Ἀγαυὴ πλησίον θρῴσκουσ' ἐμοῦ,
> κἀγὼ 'ξεπήδησ' ὡς συναρπάσαι θέλων,
> λόχμην κενώσας ἔνθ' ἐκρύπτομεν δέμας.
>
> Agave came leaping near me, and I, wanting to grab her, sprang
> forth from the thicket where we were hiding.

As he leaps out of the bushes, he ceases to be a mere witness and underscores this in distinguishing himself again from the group of herdsmen. As he leaves behind the literal cover of the ambush he abandons the status achieved by the messenger who reports the death of Pentheus: his attempt to catch Agave marks his attempt to become an actor in his narrative and the focus of our attention. The impact of this move toward involvement in the action is augmented by the fact that this messenger's leap takes him from his place of hiding, where he is virtually invisible.

The herdsman's role as near protagonist (of his narrative), however, is short-lived and finds a telling end. At this charged moment, with the messenger suspended in midair, his account turns to Agave (731–33):

> ἡ δ' ἀνεβόησεν· Ὦ δρομάδες ἐμαὶ κύνες,
> θηρώμεθ' ἀνδρῶν τῶνδ' ὕπ'· ἀλλ' ἕπεσθέ μοι,
> ἕπεσθε θύρσοις διὰ χερῶν ὡπλισμέναι.

And she howled: "My running dogs, we are being hunted by these men. But follow me, follow, armed with your thyrsoi."

The herdsman remains aloft "wanting to grab" (συναρπάσαι θέλων) Agave. Precisely at the moment when he attempts to realize his desire to take part in the action he finds himself oddly frozen in midair. This leap that never reaches its target, I suggest, succinctly expresses the status of this (and the later) messenger as a figure endowed with a virtual disembodiment that both makes possible the narrative feats I have described and also denies him the ability to partake in the action he reports. Indeed, one might with profit compare the Homeric account of Achilles' frustrated attempt to embrace the likeness of Patroklos in his sleep (*Il.* 23.99–101) or that of Odysseus's similarly frustrated efforts to embrace the shade of his mother (*Od.* 11.203–8). Just as these two reach toward a realm that is off-limits to them, the herdsman attempts to leap from his position as spectator into the realm of action.[26] As the text shows that this leap does not succeed, it suggests in fact that it cannot succeed: not only does the herdsman, as messenger, have access to the kind of privileged spectatorship that Pentheus desires, but this privilege marks him as a figure confined to the role of eyewitness.

What next transpired we do not hear. This remarkable effort of the herdsman gives way to a colorless "we escaped" immediately following Agave's remark (734–35):

ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν φεύγοντες ἐξηλύξαμεν
βακχῶν σπαραγμόν.

We fled and escaped the bacchic *sparagmos.*

Given that the Bacchants possess remarkable powers, it may well not have been a trivial affair for the herdsmen to escape. We need not question the

26. Cf. Antikleia's explanation of the gap between the living and dead at 11.218 ("This is the way it is for mortals," αὕτη δίκη ἐστὶ βροτῶν), underlining the impropriety, and impossibility, of bridging this gap.

plausibility of their escape to notice that after so carefully setting the stage for his attack and insinuating himself into the center of his story, the herdsman suddenly ceases to be an actor in his narrative. The sudden and dramatic appearance of the messenger as actor in the story—κἀγὼ 'ξεπήδησ'—calling attention as it does to his role in the narrative, vanishes as quickly as it comes about. Having drawn our gaze upon the herdsman as would-be actor in his story, the text leaves us to ponder the absence of any interaction between herdsman and Maenads. And this absence repeats and extends the effect of the herdsman's leap: he fails to occupy the position of actor and instead resumes his role as eyewitness (and narrator).

That the two messengers together share the privilege of spectatorship and occupy a realm that is off-limits to Pentheus is made even clearer by the journey of Pentheus from Thebes to Mt. Cithaeron, for it is the first *angelia* that brings Pentheus to the site of the second. The first messenger's narrative not only introduces the role of the messenger as hidden spectator; it also paints a picture of what it is Pentheus shortly after will so eagerly want to see. Or it offers an account of what Pentheus (mis)takes for *aiskhrourgia* (1062). Upon receiving the first messenger's report, Pentheus immediately orders an attack on the women. But this plan is short-lived. Dionysos intervenes, offering first to make a deal that Pentheus suspects is a trick, and then to provide Pentheus with a private viewing. It is, of course, this second offer that Pentheus latches onto, revealing his profound curiosity (811–12):

Δ. βούλῃ σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν;
Π. μάλιστα, μυρίον γε δοὺς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν.

D. Do you want to see them sitting together in the mountains?
P. Definitely. I'd give a lot of gold.

These lines have been much discussed, with attention paid to the verb of seeing and its implications for a psychological study of Pentheus.[27] If

27. Dodds remarks: "It is the answer, if not of a maniac, at least of a man whose reactions are ceasing to be normal: the question has touched a hid-

it is profitable to read Dionysos's offer with emphasis on the final word *(idein)*, we should also remember that Pentheus has just been presented with a lengthy and marvelous portrait of σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας. Pentheus's fascination, well described by Dodds, seizes upon the possibility of seeing what he has just heard.[28]

Pentheus's desire to see for himself what the herdsman has already seen confirms what becomes clear in the second *angelia:* namely, that the status of spectator aimed at by Pentheus strongly resembles and is modeled on the privileged position of the messenger(s). The first messenger's narrative, then, occurs as the anticipation of Pentheus's desire; it not only gives rise and structure to his desire but makes it overwhelming: he must see what occasions the narrative and thereby recover the original moment witnessed by the herdsman. When we find, then, the second messenger succeeding where Pentheus fails, we realize that we have come full circle.[29] It is the privilege that the two messengers—and they alone—share that is the object of Pentheus's desire.

Inasmuch as metatheater enacts a form of commentary on the institution of theater per se, it thereby invites the examination of theatrical performance in the terms set forth by the metatheater. In this way we may consider, for example, the theatrical audience in terms of Pentheus's suffering and ask whether their/our experience is in some sense a metaphorical *sparagmos;*[30] or we may examine the festival context of the tragic performances in terms of *Bacchae*'s complex metatheatrical exploitation

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den spring in Pentheus' mind, and his self-mastery vanishes" (1960 ad loc.). See Segal, 1982, 225, and Gregory 1985, 23.

28. McDonald, (1992, 233) comments: "Penthée ne peut tirer un enseignement d'une parabole ou de la parole. Il ne croit que ce qu'il voit."

29. As Foley (1985, 244) observes: "The first messenger-speech gives Pentheus the precise scenario for his own death." See also de Jong 1992, 574 and 579–80.

30. As Segal suggests (1982, 218 and 225); cf. Foley 1985, 220.

of festival and ritual themes.[31] Similarly, the metatheater's incorporation of the familiar figure of the messenger invites us to examine the conventional messenger as a tragic "institution" in terms of the play's presentation of the servant (and the herdsman). In this way, the metatheater here offers a model for how tragic messengers acquire the privilege of spectatorship that is so crucial to their successful functioning in their appointed role: the particular form of autopsy that makes the tragic messenger-speech possible relies upon the very principles of spectatorship evident in *Bacchae*'s metatheater. Specifically, the narrative strategies as here analyzed—the implicit claim of a virtually disembodied status; a comprehensive view of the events narrated; a position noticeably "outside" the drama (i.e., extradiegetic status); and, as discussed above, the borrowing of features of epic narrative—indicate the basis of the tragic messenger's claim to the privileged status of (invisible) spectator. As such, elements constitutive of the tragic messenger-speech appear in the metatheater underlined by the play's sharp focus on spectatorship as central to Dionysos's manipulation of Pentheus. Furthermore, in presenting a messenger outside the metatheater (the shepherd) who shares essential traits with and who, as I have argued, functions in some senses in tandem with the messenger within the metatheater (the servant), the play as a whole suggests that its metatheatrical interest in the messenger applies more broadly: the yoking of the two messengers to their shared status of unseen spectator encourages us to consider this status as one that goes beyond either of these figures as individuals.[32]

31. As Foley does so well (1985, 205–58).

32. It is possible, of course, to point to moments of explicit self-reference in tragic messenger-speeches, as it is possible to perform the kind of analysis found in de Jong 1991, discerning traces of any given messenger's focalization. My claim is not that tragic messengers always unproblematically achieve the status delineated in Euripides' play. Rather, I would suggest that one strategy of the tragic messenger is to *claim* such a status in a variety of ways, most of which remain implicit. (I hasten to add that this strategy is not the only one employed by tragic messengers. They must also, for example,

This analysis has limited itself to the status of the messengers in Euripides' play. In claiming that the metatheatrical performance represents the messenger as a "spectator-in-the-text," however, this argument also raises a question concerning what the play's metatheater says about the audience seated in the Theater of Dionysos: To what extent is the messenger an enlightening model of the audience in the theater? Although I have argued that within the metatheater of Euripides' play Pentheus stands out as a would-be or failed spectator, it remains true that in some ways he is a more compelling model of the audience in the theater than is the messenger. With respect to what the (first) messenger sees, we are in the same position as Pentheus: we, too, are excluded from recovering the original moment witnessed by the messenger; we, too, must remain satisfied with his narrative. Additionally, as Segal has argued, Pentheus's status as spectator-become-spectacle and victim of the *sparagmos* symbolically represents the experience of the audience in the theater: "In order for the 'sacrifice' at the center of the rite-spectacle to work for them [the audience], they too must relinquish some of their distance; they must become participants" (Segal 1982, 225).[33]

But if it is fruitful to consider Pentheus as a model of the theatrical audience, it is equally compelling to consider this group in terms of the messenger's status as spectator. The latter, that is, does contribute to the metatheater's construction of the audience's role. And as this doubling of metatheatrical spectators suggests, the audience in the theater experiences more than a symbolic *sparagmos*. Just as the servant appropriates the vocabulary of the theater (or pilgrimage) in order to buttress his claim of privileged spectatorship (θεωρία at 1047), so the metatheater reaffirms the status of the audience members as *theōroi* endowed with the qualities

establish their status as eyewitnesses to the events reported, and this imperative can conflict with the claim to the kind of spectatorship discussed here.) Nonetheless, the history of criticism shows that these claims have been remarkably successful.

33. Much the same might be said of the audience from an Aristotelian point of view: experiencing pity and fear is a form of such "participation."

displayed by the messenger. The theater audience, the metatheater tells us, is made up not only of a group of individuals succumbing to emotional and psychological "*sparagmos*"; it consists also of those engaged in a collective, tranquil contemplation of what is staged. That is, not only are the spectators in one sense required, like Pentheus, to become "actors"; they also command a comprehensive, masterful view while they are endowed with the invisibility and invulnerability of the messenger on Mt. Cithaeron.[34]

The metatheater, then, posits an audience with the twofold role of both participant and observer.[35] This double status reflects something of the ambiguity of performance in the theater: as a fiction capable of speaking truth;[36] as representation endowed with an immediacy; and as the performance of actors that manages to elicit the audience's "belief" in the action's reality.

If it seems unremarkable that the metatheater should present such a view of the theatrical audience, it is important to appreciate the significance of the inclusion of this twofold audience in the play-within-the-play. By incorporating the messenger as spectator, the metatheater extends its interest in the audience beyond the psychological and emotional, as it exhibits a keen awareness of the audience's civic role. Just as *theōria* implies a civic purpose expressed in the eyewitness's report, so the messenger shows himself to be adept at turning spectatorship into narrative. And as *theōria* is the distinctive mark of both messenger and audience, we may read the metatheater's treatment of spectatorship as including an indication of the civic charge inherent in such spectatorship: the audience members, as *theōroi*, are granted a privileged, contempla-

34. Speaking of the messenger in Euripides' *Suppliants*, Froma Zeitlin remarks: "The messenger, as always in Greek tragedy, stands in for the spectators, those both on and off the stage" (1994, 143).

35. This is perhaps appropriate for a drama so concerned with doubling. See Segal 1982, 27–54; Foley 1985, 241–43; Goldhill 1988a.

36. Cf. Segal 1982, 232–40.

tive view and are endowed with both the ability and the responsibility to "report" what they have seen. As such, the metatheater pictures tragedy both as an occasion of Dionysiac experience, however mediated in its theatrical form, and as the subject of contemplation and public discourse.[37]

As such, the metatheatrical handling of spectatorship posits a continuity between the experience of the audience in the theater and life in the city. And this continuity bridges to some extent the "gap between the power of illusion within the fiction and the power of the fiction to convey truth," which gap, Segal argues, "*Bacchae* refuses fully to close" (1982, 237). Segal sees this disjunction in Euripides' metatheater:

> Through his metatragic criss-crossing between actor and audience, participant and spectator, fiction and reality, Euripides also opens the distance between what can be lived and what can be said, what can be grasped by the symbolic fictions of poetic representation and what can be communicated in everyday language. How much of what we experience in the theater (of Dionysus) can we bring into the rest of our lives? Does the self that surrenders to the power of the Dionysiac illusion overlap with the self that performs the daily responsibilities of worker, citizen, spouse, parent, friend? Pentheus and Agave's experience does not leave us sanguine. (1982, 236–37)

But that of the messenger may. Having seen that the metatheater's presentation of spectatorship is more complex than hitherto appreciated, we

37. The herdsman announces as much soon after entering: "I have come because I must report both to you and to the city" (ἥκω φράσαι σοὶ καὶ πόλει χρήζων, 666). Karen Bassi has argued that the spectators in the theater "assume a passive subject position inimical to the elite masculine ethos" (1998, 227–28). She speaks of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae* as epitomizing "the gender-specific prejudices that characterize the male as spectator in Greek culture" (230). We can now redirect her comments to the messenger as (successful) spectator: if *Bacchae*'s metatheater implies a discursive role for the citizen-spectator, it also figures something of the complexity that constitutes his citizen status, as Bassi suggests. Cf. Zeitlin's analysis of Plato's critique of theater as a feminizing force (1996, 367–74).

are able to narrow Segal's "gap," insofar as the metatheatrical representation of the audience embraces both of the worlds separated by this gap. As "victim" of a "*sparagmos*," the spectator "surrenders to the power of Dionysiac illusion"; as *theōros*, the spectator turns spectatorship into "narrative," transforming "experience in the theater" into a subject of public discourse, and brings it into the life of the city.

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Staged Narrative

Poetics and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy

James Barrett

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