

5-2019

Spirit Possession, Mediation, and Ambiguity in the Ancient Greek Worship of Dionysos

Isabella Barrengos

Bates College, ibarreng@bates.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scarab.bates.edu/honorsthesis>

Recommended Citation

Barrengos, Isabella, "Spirit Possession, Mediation, and Ambiguity in the Ancient Greek Worship of Dionysos" (2019). *Honors Theses*. 301.

<https://scarab.bates.edu/honorsthesis/301>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Capstone Projects at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

Spirit Possession, Mediation, and Ambiguity in the Ancient Greek Worship of Dionysos

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Isabella Rae Barrengos

Lewiston, Maine

March 20, 2019

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my mother and father for their patience, drive, and unrelenting support.

Thank you to Professor “Danny” Danforth for fostering my love for anthropology.

An additional thanks to Professor Lisa Maurizio and Professor Josh Rubin for accepting my invitation to be on my Honors Defense Panel.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Abstract	v
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: An Overview of Dionysian Religion and Orgiastic Worship	13
<i>Chapter 1.1: The Civic Worship of Dionysos</i>	15
<i>Chapter 1.2: Spirit Possession in Ancient Greece</i>	19
<i>Chapter 1.3: The Orgiastic Worship of Dionysos</i>	21
Chapter 2: A Synthesis of Interpretive and Structural Anthropology	31
<i>Chapter 2.1: Interpretive Anthropology</i>	31
<i>Chapter 2.2: Structural Anthropology</i>	32
<i>Chapter 2.3: The Anthropology of Spirit Possession</i>	36
Chapter 3: Animal, Human, and Divine	41
<i>Chapter 3.1: Dionysos as Animal, Human, and Divine</i>	42
<i>Chapter 3.2: Participants as Animal, Human, and Divine</i>	43
<i>Chapter 3.3: Boundary Movement and Possession</i>	50
Chapter 4: Mothers Drink and Bleed	61
<i>Chapter 4.1: Wine</i>	65
<i>Chapter 4.2: Blood</i>	71
<i>Chapter 4.3: Milk</i>	78
Chapter 5: A Bride, a Corpse, and a Bacchant	86
<i>Chapter 5.1: Dionysos, a God of Death and Marriage</i>	87
<i>Chapter 5.2: Women's Connection to Death and Possession</i>	91
<i>Chapter 5.3: Weddings, Funerals, and Possession Rites</i>	93
Chapter 6: The Other Inside Me	108
<i>Chapter 6.1: The Greek-Barbarian Dichotomy</i>	109
<i>Chapter 6.2: Dionysos the Greek Barbarian</i>	114

<i>Chapter 6.3: The Self-Other Dichotomy in Dionysian Possession</i>	117
Conclusion	127
Bibliography	132

Abstract

The ancient Greek worship of Dionysos, the god of wine, theater, and madness, consisted of public festivals and private (orgiastic) rites. The private rites were practiced by orgiastic groups that kept the details of their worship secret from those who were not initiated. A major feature of these rites was spirit possession in which certain initiated participants believed that Dionysos joined with their body or soul, causing an ecstatic state. Possession by Dionysos was believed to create an intimate relationship with the god, a state of catharsis, and, ultimately, a heightened status in the afterlife. Dionysian possession dissolved the boundaries between animal, human, and divine, male and female, life and death, and self and other. Dionysos was an animalistic god, feminized male, resurrected deity, and Greek Barbarian. In turn, his participants explored these identities during possession rites ultimately as a means to better understand themselves. Possession was a method of self-articulation and self-reflection. Ancient Greeks grappled with cultural categories by constructing the worship of a god who challenged those categories. As a figure, Dionysos was the idiom used to explore and question boundaries in a ritualized setting. In this thesis, I interpret Dionysian possession as a method of self-articulation and self-reflection through the process of dissolving boundaries and mediating between categories.

Introduction

“From the land of Asia, leaving behind sacred Tmolos, for Bromios [Dionysos] I speed sweet toil and weariness happily unwearying, exalting with ecstatic cries the Bacchic god [Dionysos]. Who is in the road? Who is in the road? Who is in the palace? Let him come out. And let everybody by keeping sacred silence make himself pure. For I will always hymn Dionysos. O blessed is he who, truly happy, knowing the initiations of the gods is pure in life and joins his soul to the thiasos [group] in the mountains performing Bacchic ritual with holy purifications, and correctly celebrating the mysteries... and shaking the *thyrsus* [fennel or ivy staff] up and down and crowned with ivy, serves Dionysos. Onward bacchantes, onward bacchantes, escorting Bromios, a god and a song of a god, Dionysos, from the Phrygian mountains to the streets, broad for dancing, of Greece”

(Eur. *Bacch.* 64-87)

...

“His mother began to slaughter first as priestess and falls on him. And he threw the sash from his hair, so that the wretched Agave would recognize and not kill him, and he says touching her cheek ‘look, it is I, mother, your child Pentheus... Pity me, O mother, and do not through my errors kill your child.’ But she exuding foam and rolling her twisted eyes, not thinking as she should think, was possessed by Bacchus, and he did not persuade her. Taking with her forearms his left hand, and setting her foot against the ribs of the unhappy man, she tore off his shoulder, not by her strength, but the god gave extra ease to her hands... The body lies scattered, part under harsh rocks, part in the deep-wooded foliage of the forest, not easy to search for”

(Eur. *Bacch.* 1114-1139)¹

...

The first passage is from the opening choral ode of Euripides’ *Bacchae*, an ancient Greek play from the Classical Period. The play follows Dionysos as he arrives at his birthplace, Thebes, to punish Pentheus, the current prince, for prohibiting his worship. Coming to the ancient Greek city from foreign lands with his Bacchantes, mythic female followers of the god represented by the chorus in the play, Dionysos punishes Pentheus and the royal Theban women who oppose his worship. He “set” the Theban women dancing in the mountains before the start of the play and goes on to forcefully possess Pentheus in a series of disturbing confrontations. Ultimately,

¹ I discuss Euripides’ *Bacchae* throughout my thesis. There are many translations of this text that can read very differently. For consistency, I draw from Richard Seaford’s translation throughout (Seaford 1996).

Pentheus is tricked into disguising himself as a Bacchant to spy on the possessed Theban women in the mountains, where they mistake him for a lion and he is then killed by his own mother, Agave, as the second passage shows.

How can two descriptions of possession within the same play and by the same god contrast so powerfully? The foreign Bacchants in the chorus sang of joy, purity, knowledge, celebration and dancing. The Dionysian possession they experienced was entirely consensual, intimate, and reciprocal. Yet the Theban women and Pentheus were possessed by the same god and they experienced foaming at the mouth, unhappiness, force, and horrific murder. Dionysian possession was often unclear and extreme. The god could bring about extreme joy and ecstasy or extreme pain and loss.

Dionysos was the god of theater, wine, and madness who mediated between categories, straddled boundaries, and occupied both sides of extreme oppositions. He was a god with human and animalistic features. He challenged the gender binary as a male god who constantly crossed over to the female realm. Segal notes that Dionysos was “a male god, but he has the softness, sensuality, and emotionality that the Greeks generally associate with women” (Segal 1982, 10). He was undeniably Greek, archaeological evidence suggesting that his worship existed in Greece since the Bronze Age (Caballero 2013, 24-25). Yet he was constantly labeled as a foreigner, only just arriving upon Greece from Asia in many mythic depictions, as seen in the above choral ode from the *Bacchae*. Dionysos was both a god of the living, in his vigorous connection to nature and ecstasy, and a god of the dead in his connection to the afterlife. In his origin story, Dionysos died as a baby and was brought back to life—he was the resurrected god, both a “fertility daimon” and “chthonic deity” (Segal 1982, 10). Dionysos always simultaneously occupied opposites and extremes.

In this thesis, I investigate Dionysian possession with the overarching theories of interpretive anthropology and structuralism. In the anthropological canon, interpretive anthropology and structuralism traditionally stand apart and often oppose one another. But here, I apply a synthesis of the two theories in order to rely on one when the other falls short. Interpretive anthropology is concerned with meaning and symbols, whereas structural anthropology focuses on binary oppositions. From the structural perspective, mediation is a major theme in Dionysian worship. Contradictions of binary oppositions are resolved with mediation. Mediations grapple with the paradoxes that occur within binary oppositions. For example, hunting mediates between war and agriculture. Within the interpretive and structuralist lenses, I draw specifically from the anthropology of spirit possession. I apply Lewis' foundational work on types of spirit possession groups, and Crapanzano's analysis of spirit idioms and the unconscious self. I also draw from Danforth's discussion of spirit possession as a form of self-articulation and Lambek's work on the mind-body dichotomy and spirit possession as a system of cultural communication.

The ancient sources I draw from are both archaeological and literary. Archaeological evidence includes artistic depictions and inscriptions. There is a collection of surviving inscriptions on tablets discovered in Greece, Italy, and the Near East, dating from the fourth century BCE through the Hellenistic period. These tablets were found in the graves, sarcophagi etc. of deceased worshippers of Dionysos (along with a few other religious groups) and provide instructions to the deceased on how to enter the Underworld (Graf 2013c). Literary evidence of Dionysian worship includes Euripides' *Bacchae*, dating at 405 BCE, the *Homeric Hymns* to Dionysos from the seventh century BCE, Plutarch's *Moralia* from the first century CE, Plato's

Phaedrus from the fifth century BCE, Demosthenes' speeches from the fourth century BCE, along with many others.

Dionysian worship varied greatly through time and space, so I focus on the orgiastic worship of Dionysos in mainland Greece and its islands, predominantly during the Archaic and Classical periods. Despite this, due to limited surviving sources, I will often draw from other eras such as the Hellenistic period, and other regions such as Italy and the near East, when particularly relevant. Although I focus on the orgiastic rites of Dionysos, I also interpret his civic rites because these two types of worship often interacted and shared similar themes.

Dionysos' worship in Ancient Greece is not an ethnographic study because the people, culture and religious system no longer exist. Although this restricts me, it does not prevent me from conducting insightful research and analysis. I will base my analysis on the archaeological evidence (inscriptions, gravestones etc.), artistic depictions, primary literary works contemporary with Dionysian worship mentioned above, and secondary sources and analyses. With this in mind, my work as an anthropologist is slightly different from traditional fieldwork-based anthropology, in that I am basing my account of Dionysian worship on other people's accounts of it. Thus, I am one more degree removed than is customary in ethnographic work. In order to maintain a methodological understanding of my role and place in the study of this culture and worship, I point to a quote from Vincent Crapanzano's work on spirit possession. The ancient sources I analyze are influenced by the writers' own understanding of possession and mystery groups—I keep the following quote in mind when reading my sources and presenting my own analysis of them.

Both the luridly descriptive and the objectivistic texts... must be regarded as products, defensive perhaps, of the fascination that is felt before the possessed. They serve both to

re-create the experience the author wishes to convey and to separate him from it; simultaneously they serve an evocative and exorcistic function... They speak within a tradition and are constrained by it

(Crapanzano 1976, 5)

Many of the ancient sources I draw from are luridly descriptive texts that are simultaneously within and constrained by ancient Greek culture. My thesis is closer to an objectivistic text in which I interpret these descriptive accounts of ancient Greek Dionysian possession. I keep the perspectives of ancient writers and artists in mind as I analyze ancient evidence—who was creating them, what their perspective was, the context of the piece—so I better understand how to interpret the meaning behind this culture. My thesis is an anthropological analysis of ancient religious cultural groups through the lens of historical interpretations of those groups.

First, I provide an ethnographic overview of Dionysian worship and ancient Greek spirit possession. Second, I go into further depth on structural and interpretive anthropology as well as the anthropology of spirit possession mentioned above. I focus on Geertz and Levi-Strauss' works, along with Lewis, Lambek, Danforth, and Crapanzano's interpretations of spirit possession.

In Chapter Three, I focus on Dionysos' mediation between the animal, human, and divine realms. He was able to mediate between all three categories and simultaneously embody animal, human, and god at the same time. In contrast, initiated participants of Dionysos' orgiastic worship could only temporarily cross these boundaries. Through these rituals, worshippers were able to step outside of their human state and cross into the animal and divine worlds. At times, this ritual process enabled participants to attain a possessed state. This possession could result in a positive and intimate relationship with the god if the boundaries were crossed on Dionysos'

terms. In contrast, the possession experience could be negative, as in Pentheus and Agave's situations, if the boundaries were crossed in violation of Dionysos' terms.

In Chapter Four, I consider liquids in Dionysian worship as neutral and unstable mediatory substances. Liquids including wine, blood, and milk were present in Dionysian myth and ritual. They were used as libations as means to grow closer to the god. But these liquids could also symbolize a negative relationship with the god and a harmful possession experience. Blood mediated between sacrifice and murder, and wine mediated between ecstatic intoxication and poison. Liquids were also inherently gendered because of female worshippers' association with blood, based on menstruation, and milk, based on their roles as mothers and nurses. Liquids in Dionysian rituals were thus representative of the indefinable nature of Dionysos himself.

In Chapter Five, I interpret Dionysos' ritual and symbolic connections to ancient Greek weddings and funerals. I argue that they are both metaphors for possession. All three ceremonies are rites of passage that overlap in structure and meaning. Weddings and funerals were inherently related as dangerous states of liminality (Stears 1998, 119). They were also associated with women due to the focus on the bride during the wedding as well as women's constructed connection to death in ancient Greek culture (Stears 1998, 118). In turn, weddings and funerals were metaphors for possession as yet another potentially dangerous and heightened state.

In Chapter Six, I interpret the Dionysos' paradoxical role as the local foreigner. I explore the relationship between the physical geography of place and the symbolic geography of the mind. Dionysos mediated between Greek and Barbarian in place, and, in turn, he mediated between self and other in the mind during possession. Geography of place is in reference to the physical and cultural boundaries drawn in space that separated Greece from the non-Greek

world. Geography of the mind represents the culturally constructed space between self and other—a dichotomy was established between conscious and unconscious that broke down during Dionysian possession. Dionysos' role as a Greek and a Barbarian is a metaphor for his role as a mediator between conscious and unconscious, dissolving the boundary between self and other during possession.

Although I do not have a specific chapter dedicated exclusively to gender, I discuss gender throughout my thesis. Dionysos as a mediator between male and female was a fundamental part of his worship. For this reason, I discuss gender in each chapter as it relates to divinity, animality, liquidity, marriage, death, and the other.

I argue that Dionysos served, ultimately as a means to self-exploration, expression, and liberation. His paradoxical nature challenged the socially constructed binaries of ancient Greek culture, including the male-female binary, the finality of life versus death, and the division between self and other. His ability to mediate between these categories empowered participants to step outside of their own restrictive roles in society, at least temporarily. Through Dionysian possession, his worshippers were able to collapse the space between self and other, which in turn allowed for their liberation from the many cultural and physical boundaries drawn in ancient Greek society.

Chapter 1: An Overview of Dionysian Religion and Orgiastic Worship

Dionysos was an Ancient Greek god of many names and roles. He was referred to as Dionysos, Iacchos, Bacchus, and Bromios. He was associated with wine and wine-making, theater and masks, death and the afterlife, ecstasy and madness, and festivities. He was the “god of ecstasy and terror, of wildness and of the most blessed deliverance” and he was “mysterious and paradoxical in nature” (Otto 1965, 65). He violated boundaries, straddled borders, and challenged the binary—he was simultaneously male and female, beast and god, mortal and immortal, alive and dead, local and foreign etc.

According to the eponymous *Homeric Hymns*, Dionysos was the son of Zeus and Semele, the mortal Theban princess who died when she was pregnant with him. Zeus sewed Dionysos into his calf until he was born, at which point he was sent to the mythical land of Nysa to be raised by nymphs in a cave (Hom. *Hymn Dion.* 26.1-10). Although this is the better-known origin myth of Dionysos, there was another Cretan version, in which Dionysos was in fact the son of Zeus and the goddess Persephone. When he was still a child, the Titans, sent by Zeus’ jealous wife Hera, tore him apart and ate everything, but his heart. Zeus placed this in his calf which allowed Dionysos to grow and be born again (Paus. *Description of Greece* viii.3; Diod. Sic. *History* iii.62). In both versions, Dionysos experienced a traumatic birth in which he died and was resurrected. This is why he is referred to as a “twice-born” god (Schlesier 2011, 3).

Dionysos’ worship in Ancient Greece can be dated as far back as the fifteenth century BCE. His name was used in Linear B, the Mycenaean writing system from the late Bronze Age. Tablets recording this language are preserved in which Dionysos’ name was written several times. Up until this archaeological discovery, Rohde (1950) had established a fairly uncontested

theory that Dionysos had entered Greek religion much later than the other gods (Caballero 2013, 24). The two tablets discovered that referenced Dionysos were inconclusive, simply stating his name in the genitive or dative cases without any context. Thus Dionysos' religious presence during the Mycenaean era continued to be contested and Rohde's theory still held. But the next tablet, discovered in Chania, Crete, recorded Dionysos' name along with Zeus' and referred to an offering of honey. The final tablet, found in Pylos, read "to the sacrificial hearth of Dionysos" (Faraone 2013, 25). These two inscriptions from Linear B tablets concluded that had been worshipped in ancient Greece at some capacity since the fourteenth century BCE.

Further and more consistent evidence of Dionysian worship appeared by the eighth century (Otto 1965, 52). Rohdes' argument that Dionysos was a latecomer in worship was partially based on the fact that ancient writers often described Dionysos as a foreign or new god. Ancient writers such as Herodotus, from the fifth century BCE, and Pausanias, from the first century CE, explained that Dionysos came from Egypt and entered Greece much later than the other gods (Hdt. *Histories* 2.49, 5.7, 7.111; Paus. *Description of Greece* 10.29.4). One of Dionysos' paradoxical roles was the local foreigner thus any ancient description of the god as new or foreign was purely mythical as opposed to historically accurate. These descriptions have no historical grounds given evidence in the Linear B tablets.

Ancient interpretations of Dionysos are, above all, varied. Dionysos' influence stretched across most of the Greek world. He was a panhellenic god in that he was "one of the oldest gods in the Greek world and he was worshipped... in every Greek city," but his worship was practiced very differently throughout because "he was not, however, a panhellenic god, in the other more narrow sense of the word" in that there was very little officially established standard of worship enforced by political or cultural figures (Faraone 2013, 121-122).

Dionysos was often depicted in art, drinking or holding a cup of wine and carrying a *thyrsus*. A *thyrsus* was “a fennel rod which, when it is adorned with leaves, becomes a symbol of Dionysos” (Kalke 1985, 409). He was frequently pictured in scenes of dancing, processions, weddings, and funerals, and alongside his mythic female worshippers, called bacchantes or maenads, and satyrs, mythic half-man, half-goat creatures. More ancient representations of the god show him to be older, more male, and bearded, but by the Hellenistic period, he was often depicted as a younger, more androgynous god (Bowden 2010, 105-136).

Chapter 1.1: The Civic Worship of Dionysos

For my purposes, I divide the worship of Dionysos into the civic worship and the private, orgiastic worship of the god. Even within these categories, ritual practices varied greatly throughout the Greek world from the Archaic to the Roman times. The civic festivals of Dionysos were often in conjunction with and influenced by the Dionysian mysteries. In general, Dionysian rites “involved sacrifices and a procession from the city, which anyone could see and join in, followed by secret activities ‘on the mountain’, usually restricted to women, or perhaps with separate groups of men and women” (Bowden 2010, 121). I will first discuss the ritual cycle of the civic worship of Dionysos.

The ritual cycle of civic Dionysian worship took place in the winter, as this was a season the god was often associated with. It opened with the *Oschophoria* during what can be roughly equated to November, followed by the *Lenaia* and then the *Anthesteria* in late February. The Dionysia was a far more varied festival and separated into the Rural Dionysia and City Dionysia.

The *Oschophoria* was the festival on the seventh of *Pnyxion* in the fall. It was named after, *oschoi*, the bunches of grapes that were carried during the procession (Seaford 2006, 17).

Thus, *Oschophoria* literally means “the carrying of the bunches of grapes on their branches” (Parke 1977, 77). This festival was shared between Apollo and Dionysos, signifying the end of Apollo’s ritual cycle and the beginning of Dionysos’. At the start of winter, this festival “fell at the time of the vintage and wine-pressing and was therefore a thanksgiving to Dionysos, the giver of the grapes” (Simon 1983, 92). The *Oschophoria* was held mainly in Athens as far back as the Mycenaean times due its more ancient emphasis on vegetation though it may have been practiced into the Roman times as well (Simon 1983, 92). It consisted of a procession led by two youths with vine-branches that ended at the sanctuary of Athena *Skiras*. There, a mixture of sad and cheerful dances and songs were performed in mourning of Dionysos’ death and celebration of his rebirth (Simon 1983, 90-91). The Linear B tablets suggest that the *Oschophoria* was celebrated during the Mycenaean times though, by the Hellenistic and Roman times, Dionysos’ orgiastic groups became a more formative part of the celebrations (Simon 1983, 92).

The *Lenaia* took place during the month of *Gamelion*. Roughly equating to the month of January, *Gamelion* literally means “the month of marriages” in reference to the marriage between Zeus and Hera (Parke 1977, 104). It has been contested whether the *Lenaia* “was a festival of women... or more specifically... a celebration of Dionysos of the wine press” (Guía 2013, 100). This dispute over the *Lenaia*’s theme mainly comes from its vague etymology. In the past, the *Lenaia* could be connected to *lenoi*, meaning wine-press. It also could be in reference to the *Lenaion*, an enclosure in Athens with the sanctuary of Dionysos *Lenaios* inside where dramatic contests took place, described by Aristophanes (Parke 1977, 104). But Guía argues that the more accepted theory is that the *Lenaia* was in reference to *lenai* who were maenads or women similar to maenads (Guía 2013, 100). The festival consisted of a procession briefly described by Heraclitus of Ephesus involving hymns and a phallus (Guía 2013, 101). During the

procession people shouted insults which was a fairly common practice in ancient Greek festivals. Tragedies, comedies, and contests were also performed for several days during the festival (Parke 1977, 104). The *Lenaia* was a fairly ancient festival and used the Basileus (the Archon King) who was “the original authority for religious as well as civil administration” (Parke 1977, 105). Mainly celebrated in Athens, there is evidence of its practice up to the second century BCE.

The *Lenaia* also had a fair amount of interaction with mystery groups, specifically those of Dionysos and Demeter, her group referred to as the *Eleusinian* mysteries. Parke argues that the Basileus worked with the *Eleusinian* mysteries later on in the fourth century BCE. This interaction appears in the only ancient statement about the festival that has survived: “in the theatrical contests at the *Lenaion* the *Daiduchos* (‘Torch-bearer’) holding a torch says, ‘Call on the god,’ and the audience shout, ‘Son of Semele, *Iacchos*, giver of wealth’” (Parke 1977, 105). Son of Semele and *Iacchos* (another name to refer to Dionysos) is in reference to Dionysos while “giver of wealth” is one of Demeter’s epithets. “This small bit of liturgy is a good example of the way in which in polytheistic Athens one popular cult could interpenetrate another” (Parke 1977, 105). In its earlier and more ancient forms, the *Lenaia* had many interactions between the public worship of Dionysos and his orgiastic groups. There was more focus on the ecstatic worship of Dionysos and his female followers, but “by the fifth century this continued, but was overshadowed by the procession and the plays” (Parke 1977, 106).

The *Anthesteria* took place from the eleventh to the thirteenth of *Anthesterion* which can be equated to February or March (Simon 1983, 92). *Anthesteria* is the ancient Greek word for flower and is in reference to the first bloom, the month, and potentially the flower wreaths that children wore during the festival (Parke 1977, 107). The three-day festival celebrated the

opening and drinking of the wine that was made and stored during the *Oschophoria*. Although it was associated with many Ionian communities, much of the surviving evidence comes from Athens (Seaford 2006, 17).

The first day of the *Anthesteria* was called *Pithoigia*, meaning “jar-opening.” Large containers of wine called *pithoi* were brought to a shrine to Dionysos in the marshes, theorized to be located in a valley below the *Areiopagus* by the Acropolis (Parke 1977, 108). Thucydides called this area “the most ancient site of the worship of Dionysos” (Parke 1977, 107-108). There, Athenians opened the *pithoi*, mixed the wine with water, and offered it to Dionysos at his shrine. Men were then permitted to drink the wine after saying a prayer, which I will discuss in Chapter Four.

The second day was called the Feast of the *Choes*, meaning the feast of wine-jugs. Although the details of what occurred on this central day are contested, *Choes* did consist of a procession in which Dionysos “came riding in a ship mounted on wheels” (Parke 1977, 109). This procession consisted of insults similar to those uttered at the *Lenaia*. Processions were a common feature of the ancient Greek festival and they “converted streets into living theater as marchers simultaneously defined their city and themselves in front of the spectators” (Maurizio 2001, 29). Another known component of the *Choes* was the *Hieros Gamos*, “sacred marriage,” that took place at the sanctuary of Dionysos in the Marshes. The Basileus married a virgin citizen who would become his Basilinna—this marriage was symbolic or real depending on the instance.

The third day of the *Anthesteria* was the *Chytrai*, meaning pots. The final day of this festival had a slightly different tone and was considered “the day of ill-omen” by worshippers (Parke 1977, 116). The name of the day was in reference to the pots used to cook vegetables in.

The food was then poured as an offering to the dead in the Underworld. During this day “the spirits were free to come up to the land of the living and roam about” so everyone was wary, and the sanctuaries were even closed during the day (Parke 1977, 116). This concluded the *Anthesteria*.

The Rural Dionysia occurred in the midwinter towards the end of the month of *Poseidon*, which roughly corresponds to December though the exact timing of the festival varied from village to village (Simon 1983, 101). The festival consisted of a procession that featured “a large stylized wooden *phallos*” (Simon 1983, 101) and led by a *kanephoros*, “basket-carrier,” according to Aristophanes. The procession also featured a sacrificial goat. In contrast, the City Dionysia took place from the ninth to thirteenth of *Elaphebolion*, the month corresponding to March (Simon 1983, 102). It consisted of a procession opened by all-male dithyrambic choruses with the statue of Dionysos *Eleutherios* (one of Dionysos’ epitaphs, meaning “liberator”). Tragedies and comedies were performed on the following days, a feature added to the City Dionysia in the early sixth century BCE (Simon 1983, 101-102). Contests were also conducted during the festival and “victors in Dionysiac festivals used to offer their prizes—bulls or billy goats—to the god” (Simon 1983, 102). An all-night festival also occurred which contained orgiastic elements.

Chapter 1.2: Spirit Possession in Ancient Greece

Before discussing the Dionysian Mysteries, I provide a brief analysis of spirit possession in Ancient Greece in general. Spirit possession was not an explicit or strictly defined category in this culture (Maurizio 1993, 76). Those who were possessed by a spirit fell under the broader category of *mantis*, translating to seer. A seer “was a professional diviner” (Flower 2008, 22)

committed to “bridging the gap between gods and humans” (Flower 2008, 72). Those who led spirit possession practices were, in the broadest sense, seers.

The most well-known case of a seer undergoing spirit possession in Ancient Greek culture was the Pythia at Delphi. She was the oracle or *prophetes* of Apollo (Flower 2008, 86) and “imagined, heard, intuited, or feigned Apollo’s presence and then uttered Apollo’s divine response to the human client who made inquiry of the god” (Maurizio 1993, 69). During this interaction, Maurizio argues that the Pythia underwent a trance state.

Varied terminology has been used around spirit possession by ancient writers including Plato, Socrates, Herodotus and Plutarch. Because possession wasn’t an established category, the vocabulary used to describe it has been theorized and pieced together by scholars such as Maurizio and Flower. Herodotus uses the term “taken by the god” when referencing spirit possession (Hdt. *Hist.* 4.79.4) while other mystery groups such as the Meter group were often attached to the term “carried by the divinity” (Burkert 1987, 112). One term often used in reference to spirit possession, specifically amongst Dionysian worshippers, is ecstasy. “In Greek, ecstasy can refer to an abrupt change of mind and indicates that one does not quite seem to be one’s self” (Maurizio 1993, 76). But ecstasy does not necessarily mean that a spirit has entered the body, or the soul has left. Rather, *entheos*, a term used by Plato “implies that a god is in the body” (Maurizio 1993, 76).

Maurizio argues that the Greek word “most akin to the English word ‘possessed’” is *katachos* meaning “held” or “owned” in the passive (Maurizio 1993, 76). Furthermore, in *Phaedrus*, Plato described different kinds of madness (which, as we will see, is closely related to Dionysian possession). He discussed love, prophetic, ritual/telestic, and poetic madness (Pl.

Phdr. 244-245), touching on a common theme in ancient explorations of madness and possession in the context of the arts. Plato attributed telestic madness to Dionysos, noting that *mania*, “madness,” was a gift and release when it came from the gods (Pl. *Phdr.* 244d-e).

Spirit possession also may have been related to the soul or *psyche*. Burkert commented on Plato’s discussion of telestic madness, stating “the change effected in the *psyche* by initiatory ritual; the ‘great *tele*’ that first make the soul void of all the powers that once haunted it mean ‘purification’, and then a jubilant chorus, crowned with wreaths, brings in new powers to hold sway thereafter” (Burkert 1987, 97). Thus, a few components of the self may have been involved in spirit possession. Possession may have involved a god joining with the participant’s soul. It also may have involved the *psyche* which left “a person when he loses consciousness and presumably, return as he awakens” (Simon 1978, 55). The *psyche* was a sacred part of the self that was “somehow part of oneself, and yet is more a replica of the self than a part” (Simon 1978, 56). *Psyche* was also related to the concept of breath which coincides with Maurizio’s discussion of *epipnous*, “breathed upon,” and *pneuma mantikon*, “mantic wind” (Maurizio 1993, 76).

Chapter 1.3: The Orgiastic Worship of Dionysos

Orgiastic groups existed throughout the ancient Greek world and were dedicated to different gods though Dionysos, Demeter, Cybele, Isis, and Meter were some of the major gods associated with orgiastic worship (Bowden 2010, 14-15). They had a few features in common including the fact that their rites “usually took place at night and in secret” (Bowden 2010, 15). These rites were private and kept secret from those who weren’t initiated. Activities were

“frightening and disorienting” at times and often involved light and loud music or noises (Bowden 2010, 15).

Three types of organization prevailed in these orgiastic groups—“the itinerant practitioner or charismatic, the clergy attached to a sanctuary, and the association of worshippers in a form of club, *thiasos*” (Burkert 1987, 31). These three types often interacted, and it is agreed that the Dionysian orgiastic groups were made up of a *thiasos* but took on the organization of an itinerant practitioner or charismatic. The itinerant practitioner or charismatic was essentially the “wandering seer or priest” (Burkert 1987, 31). In myth, the charismatic was represented by the Stranger (Dionysos himself) in the *Bacchae* who arrived upon Thebes disguised as a human with the intention of initiating people into his rites.

In general, I will call Dionysian mystery groups orgiastic groups. I will call those who were initiated into these groups, participants. Ancient terms to describe the groups and its participants varied greatly. Each term often had a meaning too specific or too broad for my purposes. For example, *bacchant* and *maenad* were often used to describe participants, but these terms have their own connotations—both were often in reference strictly to female participants and they have been used so frequently and in so many different ways by ancient and modern scholars that they have many preconceived notions and assumptions attached to them. Within the orgiastic groups, women were called *bacchantes*, especially during the Attic and Classical Periods (Henrichs 1982, 146). During these periods, the term *maenad* “referred exclusively to the legendary women who were driven mad by Dionysos,” but by the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it “ends up designating every woman following Dionysos” (Caballero 2013, 160). Although maenadism was often considered a state of being as opposed to an identity. These

terms were clearly ambiguous and would bring unintentional implications into my thesis if I were to use them throughout.

Ancient Greeks “considered their principal cults of Dionysus to be age-old” (Otto 1965, 53) and consistent evidence of Dionysos’ orgiastic rites exists from as early as the sixth or fifth centuries BCE (Burkert 1987, 2). As time went on, they increased in popularity and numbers through the Roman era up until their subjugation (Liv. 39). But by that point, the orgiastic groups had greatly changed. There wasn’t an established, central location of power for these groups-- “they seem to have appeared everywhere from the Black Sea to Egypt and from Asia Minor to southern Italy” (Burkert 1987, 5). The orgiastic rites of Dionysos were private and only included initiated members, which was a common feature of orgiastic groups in the ancient Greek world. Various pieces of archaeological and literary evidence suggest this exclusive nature. For example, one famous inscription found in Cumae, Italy marked a burial ground exclusive to initiates of Dionysos’ orgiastic groups. The inscription read “lying buried in this place is illicit unless one has become *bakchos*” (Casadio and Johnston 2009, 36). *Bakchos*, means to have lived like a *bakchos*, or, in other words, to have lived as an initiate of Bacchus or Dionysos.

Most notably, the *Bacchae* was a Classical Greek tragedy dated at 405 BCE written by Euripides. It follows Dionysos as he travels through the Greek world, establishing his rites. He has finally arrived upon his original birthplace, Thebes, where the current prince, Pentheus, has rejected the worship of the god. Disguised as the Stranger, Dionysos infiltrates Thebes and sends the Theban women into a frenzy in the mountains. He then tricks Pentheus into cross-dressing in order to spy on the women in ecstatic worship. At this point he is caught and torn limb from limb by the women who think he is a lion. The play concluded with Dionysos revealing himself as a god and successfully establishing his worship in Thebes. This was a fictional play, written by a

non-initiate of the orgiastic groups and performed for the public. Thus, the *Bacchae*, as a form of evidence for Dionysian possession and orgiastic worship, holds some concerns. These concerns include “whether the *Bacchae* reflects what women actually did in or before Euripides’s own time” and “whether the *Bacchae* itself becomes the source from which subsequent Bacchic ritual is derived” (Kraemer 1992, 64). Regardless, I argue it holds value because it is a contemporary account of the orgiastic groups and reflection of what the members may have been doing during their secret rites. Thus, the *Bacchae* can be treated as a secondary source and commentary on the orgiastic groups.

The types of people who joined the orgiastic groups varied greatly. Although membership required an initiation ceremony, initiates could be men and women despite the gendered aspects of these groups. Nilsson argues that they “were limited to certain groups of women; not everybody who wished was admitted” (Nilsson 1957, 5). This is a controversial statement and it has been more widely accepted that some of these groups were open to male and female initiates, while some were exclusive to women and this changed over time. It can be argued that there were simply different kinds of orgiastic worship to Dionysos. Kraemer theorizes that there were two different kinds of initiations: “one shared by men and women and oriented toward the afterlife and the other initially restricted to women, comprising a ritual reenactment of the birth of Dionysos and the death of Pentheus and the deeds of the first women possessed by Dionysos, with no clear connections to any afterlife mysteries” (Kraemer 1992, 68).

Many participants were often wealthy individuals, fully integrated into the *polis*. They were by no means social outsiders despite Dionysos’ attachment to the marginal realm. “The members of a club are and remain autonomous, detached individuals with private interests,

occupations, and property” (Burkert 1987, 44). Participants must have ranged in age though they were most commonly adults with a few special cases of children being initiated if their parents were a part of the orgiastic groups (Burkert 1987, 52). Despite the exclusivity of these orgiastic groups, they were an established part of Greek religion. This is apparent in who joined the group—wealthy and independent citizens who were by no means outsiders shunned from society as was imagined based on mythic depictions of Dionysos and his followers as outsiders. Despite their secrecy, the orgiastic groups were a foundational component of Greek religion as a whole. This can be seen in the interaction between orgiastic rites and civic worship mentioned earlier—“mystery-cult is on the one hand practiced secretly, by a small group, but on the other hand may belong to the official calendar of the *polis*” (Seaford 2006, 71).

As mentioned, the structure of the orgiastic group loosely followed that of a charismatic who worked in conjunction with a *thiasos*. The *thiasos* was a general term meaning any “group of worshippers of a divinity” such as but not exclusive to Dionysos. The *thiasos* associated with Dionysos “engaged in ecstatic activity” (Bowden 2010, 110). Burkert describes the *thiasos* as a “type of community” that “may persist through several generations” (Burkert 1987, 44). These members were often independent, wealthy and “fully integrated into the complex structures of family and *polis*; but they contribute interest, time, influence, and part of their private property to the common cause” which was a common expectation of wealthy citizens then (Burkert 1987, 32). Nilsson elaborates that members of a *thiasos*, would “engage in common activities, especially in sacrifices with the ensuing ceremonial meal, and also in demonstrations, *pompai*, which move through the city and make clear to everyone who belongs to the group” (Nilsson 1957, 44). Although the term, “*thiasos*,” is used in reference to Dionysos’ orgiastic groups at

times, it is too broad to consistently use for my purposes. “*Thiasos*,” is simply a general structure that the orgiastic groups fit into along with many other religious groups in ancient Greece.

Rites often involved dance, music, sacrifice, drinking etc. It was known to occur outside of the *polis* and at night. Important materials were used during rites including a *thyrsus* and animal skins. The orgiastic groups also may have incorporated a *hieros logos*, sacred text, as well. “Bacchic mysteries had holy books, scrolls, from which something was recited to the *mystae*. We do not know what they contained (Nilsson 1957, 133). In general, their practices “involved sacrifices and a procession from the city, which anyone could see and join in, followed by secret activities ‘on the mountain,’ usually restricted to women, or perhaps with separate groups of men and women” (Bowden 2010, 121). But the specific structure was unique, and some orgiastic groups “may have been celebrated more freely according to old custom” (Nilsson 1957, 6-7).

Diodorus Siculus noted that women in Greek cities would “celebrate Bacchic festivals every other year, and that it is customary for the maidens to carry *thyrsi* and join in the frenzied revels with shouts of *Evoe*, while the matrons sacrifice to the god and celebrate the Bacchic festivals in groups” (Nilsson 1957, 7). “*Evoe evoe*” or “*Iou Iou*” were common Bacchic cries (Bremmer 2014, 71) to communicate “amazement and confusion” (Parke 1977, 77). Variations of this phrase, such as “*evoe saboi*” were uttered in order to attain *Backeuein*, “the experience of Bacchic deliria” (Casadio and Johnston 2009, 46).

Another major component of many of the sacred rituals of the orgiastic groups, including the *Oreibasias*, was the practice of *sparagmos* and *omophagia*. *Sparagmos* was the ritual tearing of flesh and *omophagia* was the ritual eating of raw flesh. This practice was a ritualistic

reference to the tearing apart of Dionysos in the Cretan origin myth and was, of course, recreated in the *Bacchae* when Pentheus was torn limb from limb. *Sparagmos* and *omophagia* were ritualized methods of growing closer to Dionysos and were potentially symbolic of the god himself.

One known rite that involved many of these elements was the *oreibasia*. These festivals took place at Delphi and became more popular by the Hellenistic times. They took place “at night at midwinter” (Dodds 1951, 271) and involved dances that were “in imitation of the maenads” though “there must have been a time when the maenads... really became for a few hours or days what their name implies—wild women whose human personality has been temporarily replaced by another” (Dodds 1951, 271). Dodds goes on to argue that dance was a major component of spirit possession because its physicality “takes possession of people without the consent of the conscious mind” (Dodds 1951, 272).

Spirit possession amongst the orgiastic groups was another major component of their rites. Possession was a method of growing closer to Dionysos and, in turn, growing closer to the general *thiasos*. “The unity of the *thiasos* seems to require a sense of the presence of the deity, perhaps even of the deity *possessing* the souls of the group” (Seaford 2006, 33). Spirit possession was typical amongst two major orgiastic groups—that of Dionysos and Meter, the mother goddess (Burkert 1987, 112). Aretaeus, a doctor from the first century CE, provided an account of a possession experience amongst a mystery group to Meter. Although different from the Dionysian orgiastic groups, the Meter and Dionysian groups often appeared alongside each other in aspects of possession and this ancient description thus still holds merit in what possession may have been like for ancient worshippers. Aretaeus wrote:

[The participants] are turned on by flute music and gladness of heart... or by drunkenness, or by the instigation of those present... this madness is divine possession. When they end the state of madness, they are in good spirits, free of sorrow, as if consecrated by initiation to the god

(Aret. CA. 3.6.11)

This is a valuable ancient account for understanding what a possession ritual may have looked like amongst Dionysian groups. One major difference is that there was an emphasis on flute music amongst the Meter groups that was not as apparent amongst the Dionysian groups (Burkert 1987, 112).

The details of initiation and possession rites are unknown though Demosthenes, a famous Athenian orator referenced a few features of the groups. During a speech against his opponent, Aeschines, Demosthenes noted that Aeschines' mother was an initiate of Dionysos' orgiastic rites. Demosthenes teased him for this connection, theorizing about his own role in the rites. Demosthenes was not an initiate of the orgiastic groups nor did he think of their rites in a positive light given the context of the speech. Despite this, his speculations still have merit, as long as we understand his own perspective. Demosthenes noted that Aeschines, as the son of an initiate, assisted his mother with

her initiations, reading the service-book while she performed the ritual, and helping generally with the paraphernalia. At night it was your duty to mix the libations, to clothe the catechumens in fawn-skins, to wash their bodies, to scour them with the Ioam and the bran, and, when their lustration was duly performed, to set them on their legs, and give out the hymn: 'Here I leave my sins behind, here the better way I find'

(Dem. 18.259-260)

These may have been some of the features of a Dionysiac initiation. Dress during initiation may have included animals skins and *thyrsoi*. An Athenian red-figure cup from the mid-fifth century BCE shows a woman putting on an animal skin and carrying a *thyrsus* which has been derived as

an initiation scene (Bowden 2010, 131). Regardless, these initiations often involved spirit possession by Dionysos, but it is argued that not all participants experienced possession. This is based on Plato's well-known statement, "many are the *narthex*-bearers, but few are the *bacchoi*" (Pl. *Phdr.* 69c). A *narthex* was an instrument similar to the *thyrsus*. This suggests that Dionysian possession was "an event that will happen in an unforeseeable way, and probably only to a few special individuals" (Burkert 1987, 112). It was pursued by those who wanted a closer relationship with the god, a better afterlife, and potentially catharsis as a cure for an ailment (often mental). This was a pursuit of the "Dionysiac cure" which claimed "to operate a catharsis by means of an infectious 'orgiastic' dance accompanied by the same kind of 'orgiastic' music... it seems safe to infer that the two cults [Dionysos and Corybantes] appealed to similar psychological types and produced similar psychological reactions" (Dodds 1951, 78).

Dionysos was a volatile and mediating god. In civic and orgiastic rites, he was worshipped as a god of liberation who could temporarily free people from the constraints of every day societal norms. Within the joy and ecstasy of his worship and possession, was an underlying threat and potential for violence and insanity. Dionysos was a god who simultaneously lived in the animal, human, and divine realms. He was a boundless and liquid god, strongly connected women, marriage, death, and the afterlife. And he was a god who dissolved the boundaries between self and other and, ultimately provided a method of self-exploration.

Chapter 2: A Synthesis of Interpretive and Structural Anthropology

To explore the symbols and dichotomies in Dionysian worship, interpretive and structural anthropology work in conjunction with one another. Structuralism is a way to analyze ancient Greek constructed categories, and the ways in which Dionysos and his worshippers operated between these dichotomies. The interpretive lens is a means to understand the meaning behind the symbols and metaphors in Dionysian worship. Where one theory falls short, the other theory will be used. In turn, the anthropology of spirit possession will also be a major theory in order to interpret the possession rites of Dionysos' orgiastic groups.

Chapter 2.1: Interpretive Anthropology

Interpretive anthropology emphasizes meaning, symbols, and construction. Geertz established the foundational work on interpretive anthropology, taking the analysis of culture to be “not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz 2000, 5). Geertz was concerned with “layers of meaning,” arguing that culture is in fact performed and can be dissected into different layers of intention, performativity, and cultural meaning. He stated that “what the ethnographer is in fact faced with... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit” (Geertz 2000, 10).

Geertz also introduced the concept of “thick description” which is the method of ethnographic work that explores the layers beneath the surface of performance. Overall, this discussion of meaning points to the construction of culture and the ways in which it is performed and constructed, but ultimately very real. According to Geertz “culture, this acted document, thus

is public... though ideational, it does not exist in someone's head; though unphysical, it is not an occult entity" (Geertz 2000, 10).

Geertz applied his lens of interpretive anthropology to the anthropology of religion describing it as "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 2000, 90). I keep this definition in mind throughout my interpretation of the meanings behind Dionysian worship and religion.

Chapter 2.2: Structural Anthropology

Structuralism focused on the overarching and interrelated structures within a system of culture. Levi-Strauss established this foundational theory within his study of myth in the 1960's. In his work, he established the concepts of structure, code, binary opposition and mediation. Structure is the overall construction composed of codes. Levi-Strauss considered the way in which structures are inherently a foundational part of culture—the codes that make them up have "neither been invented nor brought in from without" (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 12). Structures, such as myth in Levi-Strauss' work, are a construction within culture. Levi-Strauss intends "to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact" (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 12).

Cultural codes are made up of "dots and dashes" that acquire meaning. Codes are thus a system to communicate meaning. The more codes are repeated, the more cultural significance they bear. Middleton calls this repetition "redundancy", noting that "redundancy increases information" and it "confirms the understanding and reinforces essential meaning" for members

of a culture (Leach 1977, 2). Another major concept in structuralism is Levi-Strauss' introduction of binary oppositions. He argued that, specifically in myth, there are major themes and concepts that stand in opposition of one another, thus creating a specifically dynamic relationship between the concepts when the oppositions are lined up. This is best displayed in a diagram:

Raw	Cooked
Nature	Culture

This is a major opposition of empirical categories that Levi-Strauss established, arguing that nature is considered “raw” while culture is opposingly “cooked.” He states that “empirical categories... can nonetheless be used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions” (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 1). He goes on to explain the vertical relation between the terms—“all the relations belonging to the same column exhibit one common feature which it is our task to discover” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 215). And these empirical categories inherently oppose one another in dichotomous ways according to Levi-Strauss. At the very foundation of these binary oppositions is a struggle to come to terms with the concepts within any culture that challenge a binary, and the paradoxical and contradictory relationship between opposites.

This is where mediation is introduced. Mediation is the way in which the contradictions to binary oppositions are resolved. Leach notes that “mediation is always achieved by introducing a third category which is ‘abnormal’ or ‘anomalous’ in terms of ordinary ‘rational’ categories. Thus, myths are full of fabulous monsters, incarnate gods, virgin mothers. This middle ground is abnormal, non-natural, holy” (Leach 1977, 4). These anomalous categories are

the virgin mother, the bull-horned god etc. Thus, reincarnation becomes the mediator between life and death, hunting the mediator between war and agriculture etc.

Structuralism was a major component of the canon in anthropology thus it has faced much criticism. Interpretive anthropologists such as Geertz argued that the structuralist method was reductionist and universalizing. Many of these critiques have been summarized by Clarke. Critics accuse structuralism for being reductionist and simplifying complex concepts. Clarke argued that the binary opposition model within structuralism fails to investigate the subtleties and interactions within these major, supposedly opposing concepts. He argues that structuralism is “marked by the naïve belief in the existence of a reality independent of human apprehension or in the existence of a humanity that could create its own world” (Clarke 1981, 1). In other words, Clarke argues that structuralism removes culture from people and ignores the reflexivity and reciprocity of the relationship between a culture and members of that culture. I argue that structuralism does not ignore these intricacies, but rather articulates them through the use of mediation. Levi-Strauss’ work is arguably dated, but structuralism as a theory does not disregard human agency as a component for constructing culture and categories.

The potentially reductionist aspects of structuralism can even go as far as an issue of objectivity. Clarke goes on to argue that the black and white treatment of cultural concepts that are placed in binary opposition of each other does not make room for subjective interpretation. He states, “the claim of structuralism to have isolated symbolic order as a privileged reality of which we can have direct knowledge depends on its ability to identify the meanings constituted by such orders independently of any particular subjective interpretation of these meanings” (Clarke 1981, 2). Thus, the order established in structuralism does not make room for any varying interpretations of these meanings. I argue that structuralism does not attempt to maintain

order, but rather attempts to define the categories constructed by the relevant culture in order to better understand the meaning behind them.

I argue that structuralism can only become reductive when taken to the extreme. Considering major concepts in a culture and placing them in the binary can be done without simplifying a culture. Looking at the structure of a system *is* a holistic approach, but can still take into account other subtle factors within a binary if done correctly. Levi-Strauss defends himself against this critique, saying “I shall no doubt be accused of overinterpretation and oversimplification in my use of this method. Let me say again that all the solutions put forward are not presented as being of equal value, since I myself have made a point of emphasizing the uncertainty of some of them... I therefore say in advance to possible critics: what does this matter?” (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 13). I argue that a structuralist argument that is reductionist is, at times, simply a poor use of structuralism.

Another major critique of structuralism is its etic tendencies. Levi-Strauss has been accused of taking cross-cultural analysis too far and applying his own terms to cultures around the world regardless of how they themselves categorize those concepts. This is apparent in his analysis of myth, drawing out common themes in myth amongst varying cultures and thus taking an etic approach. Clarke notes that Levi-Strauss’ concern in meaning is simply a reflection of his own values and interests and has nothing to do with the people of the studied culture. He states, “the meanings that Levi-Strauss extracts from the systems of myth under review are no more than a formalization of the very idiosyncratic meanings the material has for Levi-Strauss” (Clarke 1981, 184).

I argue that the universalizing issues are a product of Levi-Strauss himself as opposed to structuralism. Levi-Strauss' work is inarguably etic as he applies his own, universal themes and concepts to many different cultures and attempts to equate them to one another. But this is an issue of Levi-Strauss' methods and not structuralism itself. When applying structuralism correctly, the concepts and codes placed in binary opposition do not have to be etic and universalizing. They can be analyzed in each culture individually based on that culture's terminology and values. Another potentially etic component of structuralism is the structure of binary opposition itself if that culture doesn't necessarily organize their codes in this manner. But I would argue that these binary oppositions are simply ways for the anthropologist to understand and conceptualize the culture's codes. This is the process of transmission that must occur in order to analyze ethnographic work.

In many ways, interpretative and structuralist lenses stand in opposition of each other because structuralism has been criticized for being reductionist and etic when used to the extreme. But in the instance of my thesis, using them together will allow me to better analyze Dionysian worship. Dionysos was composed of dichotomies, so placing these dichotomies into a structuralist argument will assist in conceptualizing his paradoxes. Dionysos was the ultimate mediator. But because Dionysos also defied order and structure itself, solely using structuralism would be a simplification of his power. Thus, I will resolve this issue by using interpretive anthropology, considering the layers of meaning within Dionysos' paradoxes and the worship that came of it. In order to synthesize these theories, I simultaneously use one to assist the other.

Chapter 2.3: The Anthropology of Spirit Possession

The anthropology of spirit possession is the study and interpretation of spirit possession in cultures. James Frazer (1890) established one of the first anthropological accounts of the phenomena followed by Oesterreich (1929) and Metraux (1959) though these studies are dated and ethnocentric. A foundational text for spirit possession theory today is IM Lewis' work (1978)—he looked into gendered aspects of possession and potential structures and variations of spirit possession groups. Vincent Crapanzano (1976) also developed foundational work in the field, taking on an interpretive lens and considering the spirit idiom and spirit possession groups in Morocco. Bourdignon (1979) was another influential anthropologist in the field, studying spirit possession and trance, though I argue her work is ethnocentric and will not be referencing her. Spirit possession theory has been applied to a broad set of contexts such as medicine, psychology, religion, and therapy. In recent years, spirit possession theory has been reevaluated. Katherine Dernbach studies spirit possession and its relation to death rituals and the afterlife (2005). Erick White (2017) just analyzed spirit possession amongst the Theravada Buddhists, critiquing prior anthropological analyses of spirit possession in that group.

The overall evolution of spirit possession theory followed the general trajectory of the anthropological canon as a whole. Over time it has become more reflexive and culturally relativist. Crapanzano notes that “the important point for our purposes is the consensually validated, and often ritually confirmed, belief in the existence, the facticity, of the spirits” (Crapanzano 1976, 11). Thus, the anthropologists' job, when studying spirit possession, is to take the phenomena as an indisputable fact as their participants do. This challenges the boundary between anthropologist and participant as Danforth discovered during his work on fire walking rituals in rural modern Greece. “The sharp boundary between self and other, between subject and

other, became blurred. The ethnographic distance that separated me from people who walk on fire was bridged” (Danforth 1989, 290).

According to Crapanzano, spirit possession is “any altered state of consciousness indigenously interpreted in terms of the influence of an alien spirit” (Crapanzano 1976, 7). Spirit possession is a method of addressing an issue whether physical, emotional or otherwise, and it generally focuses on the relationship between the participant and the spirit. “By participating in possession rituals people enter into relationships with spirit others and through these relationships dramatize in a public context the problem or conflict they are experiencing” (Danforth 1989, 60-61).

Trance is an altered state of consciousness and is often a major component of spirit possession. Spirit possession is one of the reasons for being in a trance state—a person may be in a trance state because they are possessed by a spirit. But trance states in possession can be presented in many different ways. Anthropologists cannot tell whether someone is possessed unless they are told so by the participant—often times signs of possession are physical whether the possessed participant makes a noise, a motion etc. Crapanzano emphasizes the somatic aspects, stating “the body becomes the medium of symbolic transformation which is replayed periodically in possession ceremonies” (Crapanzano 1976, 25). The body thus relates to the mind in an unusual way during many possession rites—Lambek recognizes that this mind-body dichotomy that exists amongst many cultures in different ways, is challenged during possession (Lambek 1998, 107).

Another major aspect of spirit possession theory is the spirit idiom. “The set of beliefs and practices associated with spirit possession in any given culture constitutes a spirit idiom or

language that provides people with a means for self-articulation and a vehicle for making statements to others about themselves and their experiences” (Danforth 1989, 59). Thus, the spirit idiom is the language used in order to grapple with and understand the spirit possession participants experiences. It is a “vehicle for articulation” (Crapanzano 1976, 10) and a way in which to express and comprehend an “idiosyncratic individual experience” (Crapanzano 1976, 10) in a group-context. One major aspect of the spirit idiom is the emic language used around possession. Every spirit possession culture uses an operative verb to describe the relationship between the spirit and the participant during possession—the spirit may take, seize, or mount a participant.

Spirit possession theory also explores the essentializing and otherizing aspects of spirit possession stereotypes. Schmidt and Huskinson note that earlier accounts of spirit possession such as Frazer and Oesterreich “describe those characteristics that we have come to associate with such phenomena—the exaggerated bodily motions, the contorted facial expressions and sudden intrusion of an unfamiliar personality” (Schmidt and Huskinson 2010, 4) and it is precisely these unfamiliar qualities that exoticize spirit possession. Crapanzano elaborates that “the dialectical drama between the possessed and his spirit, between (human) self and (spirit) Other, may well provide an allegory for the confrontation between the ethnographer and his people” (Crapanzano 1976, 34).

Structural and interpretive anthropology interact to create a dynamic and complex method of approach. The tension between them allows me to understand Dionysian orgiastic worship from varied angles and lenses. Within this vein, the anthropology of spirit possession provides with the language and approach to better comprehend the practices of Dionysian spirit possession. A synthesis of these theories permits a layered, dynamic approach.

Chapter 3: Animal, Human, and Divine Ambivalence and Mediation between Nonhuman Categories

Many are the forms of divine things, and the gods bring many things to pass unexpectedly; and what seemed probable was not brought to completion, and god found a way for the unexpected. Thus did this affair turn out

(Eur. *Bacch.* 1388-1392)

...

The above passage is the closing choral ode and the final lines to the *Bacchae*. Pentheus has died at his mother's hands and all of Thebes has been punished for its denial of Dionysos' worship. He has successfully established his rites in Thebes. The chorus sings of his ultimate divinity that brings about "unexpected" results. This points to the erratic and shifting nature of Dionysos. Participants believed that the god had ultimate control over their possession and results could be positive or negative depending on the context. Thus, Dionysian possession was an unexpected and dangerous pursuit. The chorus also recognizes that Dionysos took many forms which points to his connection to the animal and mortal worlds. Dionysos straddled the boundaries between animal, human, and divine.² As a result, participants often crossed the boundaries between these categories during rites. At all times, Dionysos was simultaneously animal, human, and divine—it was a permanent state for him. In contrast, boundary-crossing was temporary and contingent upon ritual practice for participants. Thus the chorus' reference to Dionysos' unexpected nature points to the fickle results of possession. In their everyday life, participants were human, but during orgiastic worship, they symbolically shed this status and

² Animal is a vague term and I use it on purpose. As we will see in this chapter, Dionysos can be associated with domesticated or wild animals (Seaford 2006, 23) in both positive and negative ways. For example, when negatively associated with the animal world, Dionysos is often called a beast (Eur. *Bacch.* 435). Animal encompasses all of these associations and I will specify as needed.

took on the traits of animals and gods. This brought them closer to Dionysos and, at times, may have been accompanied by an altered state of consciousness.

Chapter 3.1: Dionysos as Animal, Human, and Divine

Dionysos was strongly associated with wild, and at times domesticated, animals in myth and ritual. “The god has a unique rapport with those beasts that are uncontrollable by humans” (Seaford 2006, 23). This can be seen in varying representations of him. Starting in the sixth century BCE, vase paintings depicted Dionysos in a chariot drawn by wild animals (Seaford 2006, 23). In myth he was depicted as a lion (Hom. *Hymn Dion.* 7.40), a wild animal (Eur. *Bacch.* 1108), a bull (Ant. Lib. *Met.* 10; Eur. *Bacch.* 920; Plut. *Mor.* 299b), and has further been represented as a goat and a snake at times (Storm 1998, 18).

In the *Bacchae*, “the boundaries between god and man and beast, between sacred and profane violence, have collapsed” (Foley 1985, 207). Euripides referred to Dionysos as the “bull-horned god” (Eur. *Bacch.* 100) and later on in the play, Pentheus says to Dionysos that he sees horns emerging from the god’s head (Eur. *Bacch.* 919). Artistic depictions of him on vases and mosaics often represent him in the animal world. A mosaic in Pella, the ancient Macedonian capital dated at 400-360 BCE, shows the god riding a panther and carrying a *thyrsus*.

Dionysos fit within the human category because of his origins. He was the son of a mortal woman and was thus attached to the mortal world in this way. He was also a human in that he often appeared as one to mortals. This was a fairly common trait in Greek myth, but “of all Greek deities it is Dionysos who most tends to manifest himself among humankind, and to do so in various forms” (Seaford 2006, 39). In the *Bacchae*, Dionysos sneaks into Thebes, disguised

as the Stranger. He explains this to the audience in his opening monologue stating, “having changed my form from god to mortal” (Eur. *Bacch.* 4).

The *Bacchae* touches on a common theme in mythic depictions of Dionysos in which he disguises himself as a human only to ultimately reveal himself as a god. He notes this in the *Bacchae*, stating, “I will show myself to be born a god” (Eur. *Bacch.* 47). Dionysos as a mortal is also seen in Homer when sailors bound Dionysos to their ship “for they thought him the son of heaven-nurtured kings” until the helmsman stopped them, saying “Madmen! what god is this whom you have taken and bound” (Hom. *Hymn Dion.* 7.1-15). In this instance, he masked his divine form by disguising himself as a mortal only to ultimately reveal himself as a god.

Despite his many interactions with the animal and human worlds, Dionysos was a god. He was “a god and the son of a god” (Eur. *Bacch.* 84). The *Homeric Hymns* to Dionysos emphasize his origin, upbringing, and ultimate status as an immortal deity. A major component of his divine power was his ability to cross the boundaries within the human and animal worlds. This status was often complicated partially because of his origin. Dionysos was a deity specifically associated with resurrection because his mother died while he was still in her womb and Zeus was able to bring Dionysos back to life afterwards. The Cretan origin myth, in which Dionysos was torn apart and brought back to life, includes resurrection even more clearly. He was often referred to as the “twice-born” god (Schlesier 2011, 3). One of Dionysos’ known epithets was *dimetor* which literally translates to “two mothers” meaning “twice-born” (Diod. Sic. *Library of History* 62.5). Simultaneously animal, human, and divine at all times, Dionysos was the god who lived in all realms and straddled all the boundaries between.

Chapter 3.2: Participants as Animal, Human, and Divine

In contrast, movement across boundaries amongst participants was temporary, constrained, and could often lead to harmful consequences. When participants crossed boundaries within in the context of spirit possession rites, it had to be done on Dionysos' terms. Outside of the ritual context, participants were exclusively human and did not challenge this category. It was only during Dionysian worship and possession that they crossed into the animal and divine realms. Their relationship to animals and their relationship to the divine was thus temporary and constructed. The only permanent component of their worship was the immortal status they attained in the afterlife due to their connection to Dionysos.

Just as Dionysos was deeply connected to animals, so were his participants. "It is not only Dionysos but also his followers who were associated and identified with animals. Maenads were sometime represented with wild animals, frequently as wearing the skins of fawns or leopards, occasionally as suckling wild animals... and occasionally as eating raw flesh" (Seaford 2006, 24). Participants often imitated animal-related themes from myth in their rites as seen in *sparagmos* and *omphagia*, ritual dress, and their association with satyrs.

Sparagmos was the ritual tearing of flesh and *omophagia* was the ritual eating of raw flesh. This practice was often seen in artistic depictions of Dionysos and his worshippers. One Athenian amphora dating from 475 to 425 BCE shows a mythic Maenad tearing a small sacrificial animal apart. A satyr with a *thyrsus* stands nearby along with two worshippers leaning up against one another. Her arms raised above her head, she holds half of the animal in her left hand and the other half in her right (Beazley 2019). Inscriptions reveal evidence of the *omophagia* in ritual as well. An inscription from Miletos, an ancient city located in modern day Turkey, dated to 276 BCE suggests "that some meat may have been actually eaten raw in Dionysiac cult, albeit not necessarily with the savagery that it symbolized" (Seaford 2006, 24).

This implies that the *omophagia* was a structured and established component of ritual and simply an imitation of the wild and frenetic tearing of flesh, as seen in the *Bacchae*. A key function of both *sparagmos* and *omophagia* in ritual was to cross the boundary from human to animal. By imitating myth, worshippers were able to attain an animal status similar to Dionysos' animal connections in myth. "Eating raw flesh, which distinguishes animals from humans, assimilated the maenads of myth to animals" (Seaford 2006, 24). By touching and consuming animal flesh, a participant may have become closer to the animal world and Dionysos himself.

In tragedy *sparagmos* specifically allowed participants to grow closer to the animal and, in turn, divine world. But it also served as a metaphor for the disruption of the mind and soul that occurred during possession. "There is a *sparagmos* of the mind and self in tragic drama that is also a specific function of the Dionysian impression on character, an effect for which the destruction of the identity as well as the body of Pentheus may stand as a metaphor" (Storm 1998, 20). Just as Dionysos himself was torn apart in myth, he, in turn, tore apart the control and sense within his participants' own minds during possession. In this way, the role of the one being sacrificed and the one performing the sacrifice was cyclically inverted. Dionysos was torn apart by the Titans and, in turn, he temporarily tore apart the mind of his participants, and they, in turn, tore apart the animals, representative of him in *sparagmos*.

Crossing the boundary between human and animal was a key component to attain an altered state of consciousness in ritual. "Those who practiced the ritual of *omophagia* at the time were experiencing a mixture of supreme exaltation and supreme repulsion, it was a sacramental act and at the same time it was characterized as a pollution" (Christodoulou 2014, 32). The paradox of *omophagia* was in its sacred role in ritual yet its violation of common Greek ritual practice. It both supported and violated sacred rites which further suggests Dionysos'

paradoxical nature. The *sparagmos* and *omophagia* were a ritually approved violation of boundaries, a regulated movement from the human to the animal state, and an imitation of Dionysos' own animalistic associations. It was thus a major method of exploring the boundary between human and animal.

Another way in which worshippers crossed the human-animal boundary was through their ritualistic dress. In many artistic depictions, Dionysos and Maenads are seen wearing animal skins over their shoulders. One amphora from Athens dated to the late sixth century BCE shows Dionysos himself wearing a leopard skin around his shoulders and tied below his neck. Maenads frame him on either side and a *thyrsus* can also be seen in the image (Bowden 2010, 77).

In rites such as the *oreibasia*, worshippers wore animal skins that were thought to transmit Dionysos' power to them (Christodoulou 2014, 29). The animal skins work as a metonym for the participants in this context. A metonym is "the logical inverse of a metaphor" in that it "is the relationship of two terms that occupy a common domain, but do not share common features" (Sapir and Crocker 1977, 20). In this context, a metaphor would simply be "the participant is an animal." But a metonym focuses on the close physical contact between the animal skin itself and the participant. When participants put the animal skin on their skin, they obtained Dionysos' power.

Omophagia and *sparagmos* are also metonyms, because the participants attained an animal status and Dionysian power through the physical contact between their skin and animal's flesh. In an Athenian red-figure stamnos from the early fifth century BCE, Dionysos is seen wearing a leopard skin over his shoulders and tearing apart a goat (Bowden 2010, 123). There is

a strong focus on physical contact here—participants wore the animal skins, tore apart animals with their hands, and ate the raw flesh of animals. Spirit possession is “a complex series of transformation of... metaphorical statements into... metonymous ones in a dialectic play of identity formation” (Crapanzano 1976, 19). Thus, participants’ metonymous relationship with animals emphasizes the underlying power that that relationship elicited—participants underwent a transformation process during possession, partially because of their physical contact with animalistic symbols of Dionysos himself.

Another way in which worshippers crossed the human-animal boundary was through their connection to and imitation of satyrs. There is evidence of men dressing up as satyrs during the *Anthesteria*, and *Dionysia* to celebrate Dionysos’ arrival (Seaford 2006, 24). Just as female worshippers imitated the mythic maenads in worship, male worshippers (in civic and private contexts) imitated satyrs (Henrichs 1982, 157-158).³ Seaford notes that satyrs “combine humanity, animality, and immortality” (Seaford 2006, 24) thus imitating them was a method of not only crossing the animal-human boundary, but in fact simultaneously crossing over to the divine category as well. Thus, when men dressed up as satyrs they attained “another identity, as an immortal creature in the presence of Dionysos, by means of collapsing all three fundamental categories of living being into one: human, animal, and deity” (Seaford 2006, 24). Although the men did not attain another identity in the same way that the female worshippers in the orgiastic groups did during possession, it was still a notable movement into the animal world.

Crossing the boundary from human to animal was closely connected to crossing the boundary from human to divine. Specifically women’s “association with the divine can work in

³ For further discussion on female worshippers imitating Maenads, see Chapter Four.

the same way as women's traditional association with the animal" (Goff 2004, 50). These associations with the non-human world were specifically gendered though male and female participants both practiced rites involving a crossing of boundaries. Participants crossed the animal-divine boundary, embodying both categories simultaneously during the ritual. By crossing the boundary from human to animal, the participants were in turn able to cross over to the divine boundary and transcend their statuses.

The participants crossed the boundary from human (and animal) to divine in ritual often. As alluded to above in my discussion of metonym and satyrs, boundary-crossing into the animal realm was often times a method of acquiring a temporarily immortal or divine status. An overarching theme in orgiastic worship was to attain a better afterlife due to their closer connection to Dionysos. Participants' connection to the afterlife also played into their violation of the human-divine boundary, as they gained an immortal status in the afterlife.⁴

The participants' connection to the divine can be seen in the Thurii tablets, a set of early to mid-fourth century inscriptions found in several tumulus' in southern Italy. One line reads "you have become a god instead of a mortal" (Graf 2013c, 9). Addressing a deceased participant, this line implies that upon her death, she became a god. Thus, worshippers believed that their commitment to Dionysos allowed them to attain a divine status, either temporarily (in the mortal world) or permanently (in the afterlife).

Possession itself was also a major component of crossing the human-divine boundary for participants. In the anthropology of spirit possession, when the spirit (in this case Dionysos) possesses the participants (in this case his worshippers), the space between them collapses,

⁴ For further discussion of Dionysian worship and the afterlife, see Chapter 5

resulting in an altered state and changed status for the participants (Crapanzano 1976, 19). Thus, many groups that practice spirit possession define boundary-crossing between the spirit and the spirit carrier as a key method of possession. This method of boundary-crossing is also a major theme in the anthropological study of ancient Greek religion, focusing on “the barrier between human and divine reality: what separates the human from the divine, and, conversely, what brings them together?” (Gernet 1981, 3).

In Dionysian orgiastic worship, spirit possession was what temporarily brought Dionysos and his participants together, collapsing the boundary between human and divine. I argue that Dionysian possession was a joining of Dionysos to the worshippers’ souls based on linguistic evidence and the role Dionysos played in community. As discussed in Chapter One, *entheos* is in reference to a god literally being in a body, but more specifically, *pleres theou* translates to “filled with the god.” During possession, participants may have literally been filled with Dionysos. This is another example of a metonym—participants may have believed the possession involved physical contact between themselves and Dionysos and that touch allowed them to temporarily attain his divine status.

Possession may have been more than being “filled with” Dionysos. The language used by Euripides to describe Dionysian possession in the *Bacchae* suggests an emphasis on a joining of souls not just to Dionysos, but to the group, *thiasos*, itself. The chorus sang that a participant “joins his soul to the *thiasos*” (Eur. *Bacch.* 75). Possession was not just a joining to Dionysos, but also a joining to the group. Possession brought about a blending of boundaries between participant, other participants and Dionysos himself. Possession may have been an intimate interaction reliant upon communality based on these lines. Gernet goes on to explain that spirit possession “signifies a liberation or exaltation of the human spirit” (Gernet 1981, 4) and this

liberation implies a heightening of the participants' human status. By joining their souls with Dionysos during possession, participants crossed that boundary.

Dionysos as a symbol of the community touches on his connection to communality. Seaford defines communality as “the sum of the feelings and actions of several individuals that promote and express their simultaneous belonging to the same group” (Seaford 2006, 26), which is greatly relevant to the orgiastic groups. Seaford goes on to state that in ancient Greece, the polis was politically and economically self-contained so “communality might be emotionally self-contained and politically significant. The overwhelming power to inspire communality, whether in the whole polis or in a small group, was ascribed in particular to Dionysos” (Seaford 2006, 26). I argue that “because communality breaks down individual self-containment and may replace it with a sense of wholeness” (Seaford 2006, 26), it may have played a major role in Dionysian possession. A *thiasos* and the *polis* thus related in that they were both dedicated to Dionysos in an orgiastic or civic context respectively. Dionysos' ascribed power to join people together and collapse individuality (and thus boundaries) is evidence that Dionysian possession was a matter of joining souls with the divine in the body. In this way, participants transcended their nonhuman status and, through their contact with Dionysos, temporarily became divine.

Chapter 3.3: Boundary Movement and Possession

In considering the different types of movement across boundaries which prompt possession, I reintroduce a structuralist argument. Given the fact that participants moved away from their human statuses either towards animal and/or divine, it was this human status that implies an unpossessed state. Thus, when participants remained within the human boundary, they

were not possessed, but when they crossed into any non-human boundary, often straddling the animal and the divine, they were possessed.

Not Possessed	Possessed	
Human	Not Human	
	Animal	Divine

The joining of participants’ souls to Dionysos and being filled with his divinity, often times by attaining an animal status as well, allowed them to enter a possessed state. Dionysos could “dissolve the boundaries of the soul” (Seaford 2006, 33), and this was rooted in the distortion of boundaries between animal, human, and divine. The soul was thus deeply linked to these boundaries and the ability to temporarily dissolve them.

But this kind of possession carried serious responsibility and the potential for negative consequences. The communality that Dionysos stood for was “so powerful that ... the Dionysiac is dangerously ambivalent” (Seaford 2006, 26). Dionysian possession was variable in that it could result in extremely positive or extremely negative consequences for his worshippers depending on how they practiced that temporary crossing of boundaries. If they did not cross the human-animal-divine boundaries on Dionysos’ terms during possession, the worshippers may have believed that they would experience a negative possession by the god.

When I say “on Dionysos’ terms” I mean that participants were correctly crossing boundaries during rituals in that they were doing so as initiated worshippers and with the intention of gaining a better afterlife, and growing closer to Dionysos, and the *thiasos*. Pursuing possession outside of these intentions would thus be considered an incorrect boundary-crossing that was not on Dionysos’ terms. This can be seen in the *Bacchae* when the chorus sang “to think

non-mortal thoughts means a short life” (Eur. *Bacch.* 396-397). Clearly, a mortal thinking non-mortal (immortal or divine) thoughts could potentially die and, in turn, face their mortality even sooner. Transgressing this boundary thus had to be done in a particular way that was in accordance with a god’s worship, such as that of Dionysos. Later on, Pentheus asks Dionysos what the mystic rites were and Dionysos responded “the mystic rites of the god are hostile to the one who practices impiety” (Eur. *Bacch.* 476). This is a clear suggestion that non-initiates (or rather those who pursued possession rites without the correct intentions) would experience negative possession and, in Pentheus’ case, death.

In Plato’s discussion of different types of divine madness, he recognized the importance of permission when discussing the madness from the Muses. “He who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good power by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the same man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen” (Pl. *Phdr.* 244a-e). Although this is within the discussion of madness from the Muses and Dodds ascribes ritual madness to Dionysos (Dodds 1951, 76), this is still a valid point. To pursue the positive effects of madness (in Plato’s case, producing art, and in Dionysos’ case, a cathartic and communal experience), one must be correctly mad (in Plato’s case, afflicted with a madness specifically from the Muses, and in Dionysos’ case, boundary-crossing on his terms).

Thus, Dionysos’ communality held a threat over the worshippers when they crossed those boundaries. They believed that he ultimately held the power over their possession experiences despite their temporary divine status during the rites. This is the point on which the divine-human relationship hinged—the power of the participants had to work within possession and Dionysos’ terms and was thus, ultimately, temporary. The “Dionysian experience... is by

definition temporary and, just as their divine leader comes and goes, so the women leave the city and become Other, but will return again to normality” (Christodoulou 2014, 28).

In this way participants, in their desire to grow closer to Dionysos through possession, still stood apart from the god even in the most sacred and intimate moments. “Even to his devotees, Dionysos is an elusive deity. Although one can recognize a momentary fusion between man and god in this cult, the union is not strictly a personal one” (Gernet 1981, 4). Even during possession, when Dionysos had transferred his power into his worshippers and allowed them to embody animals and heighten their status to divine, he was above them and in control of them.

Correct Boundary-Movement	Incorrect Boundary-Movement
Positive Possession	Negative Possession
Ecstatic	Dangerous
Cathartic	Painful

When participants crossed boundaries correctly, they believed they would experience positive possession. In the *Bacchae*, the chorus sang:

O blessed is he who, truly happy, knowing the initiations of the gods is pure in life and joins his soul to the thiasos in the mountains performing Bacchic ritual with holy purifications, and correctly celebrating the mysteries.

(Eur. *Bacch.* 72-79)

Participants who knew Dionysos’ initiations and celebrated his mysteries within his rules, underwent a correct and temporary movement away from the human category. This is because participants believed these movements to be approved of by Dionysos. And this correct movement resulted in a positive possession. Positive possession was an experience of ecstasy, catharsis, communality, and self-expression which was the result of an overall positive

relationship with Dionysos. This can be seen in the above passage—a participant who crossed the boundary correctly was “blessed”, “truly happy”, and able to undergo “holy purifications.”

Establishing correct movements across boundaries was thus a major component for establishing a system of possession during these rites. Crapanzano notes that in spirit possession, the practice “gives the event structure, thus precipitating its context, relates it to other similarly constructed events, and evaluates the event along both idiosyncratic and (culturally) standardized lines. Once the experience is articulated, once it is rendered an event, it is cast within the world of meaning and may then provide a basis for action” (Crapanzano 1976, 10). In the context of rites and practices of the orgiastic groups, once spirit possession occurred, it was established as a meaningful event that could be repeated. I argue that one of the major criteria for establishing this ritual was determining the difference between correct and incorrect crossing of boundaries, as boundary-crossing was a component of possession.

In the context of ancient Greece, positive possession was often associated with the divine world. Plato noted that “the greatest blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods”, and went on to note that “mania, when it comes by gift of the gods, is a noble thing” (Pl. *Phdr.* 244a-c). Thus, divine worship could often result in positive possession amongst participants, but only when experienced correctly and only, in the case of Dionysian worship, when proper boundary-movement occurred.

In contrast, incorrect crossing of boundaries resulted in negative possession for the participants. Those who crossed the boundary between human, divine, and animal without Dionysos’ permission and through methods unapproved of by Dionysos, would experience a

negative, and in Pentheus' case, fatal possession. Most importantly, transgression could only correctly occur when the possessed believed in Dionysos as a divine power.

A clear example of incorrect boundary-crossing is Pentheus in the *Bacchae*. Note that Pentheus did have Dionysos' permission to cross the boundaries, but this was a distortion of Dionysos' permission in ritual because of Pentheus' original intentions regarding Dionysos. He did not believe in the divine status of Dionysos and refused to recognize his worship in Thebes. Dionysos convinces Pentheus that he should disguise himself as a Bacchant in order to spy on the possessed women in the mountains. During this conversation Pentheus' altered state of consciousness becomes increasingly apparent to the audience. This is clear in his language.

Pentheus: And indeed I seem to myself to see two suns, and a double Thebes and seven-mouthed fortress; and you seem to be leading, ahead of me, as a bull, and horns seem to be on your head. Were you a beast before? For you are certainly changed into a bull.

Dionysos: The god, being previously not well-disposed, is accompanying and at peace with us; now you see what you should see.

(Eur. *Bacch.* 918-924)

This scene marks a major turning point in Pentheus' possession. Pentheus is seeing double and envisions horns growing from the Stranger's head. The horns allude to the Stranger's true identity, as Dionysos was often depicted as a bull. Dionysos responds to Pentheus that the god (himself) had not been well-disposed with the prince prior. This speaks to the dangerous and threatening side of Dionysos' unstable nature. Pentheus had disrespected Dionysos by refusing his worship in Thebes—a lack of belief in the god was one of the key features that results in incorrect boundary-crossing and negative possession. Dionysos then says that the god is now “at peace with us.” This response is layered because Dionysos is in fact at peace with Pentheus and

the Stranger because Pentheus is currently possessed by Dionysos (thus Pentheus is “full of the god”), and Dionysos is with the Stranger because they are in fact the same being.

Yet, the god is certainly not at peace with Pentheus because he is about to march off to his death. Even in his altered state of consciousness, Pentheus has crossed the boundary from male to female, non-Bacchant to Bacchant with the intention of spying on the women in the mountains. Dionysos constantly straddles the boundary between male and female, but Pentheus crosses boundaries with negative results. Although under the influence of Dionysos, he still does not believe Dionysos to be a god worth worshipping thus his boundary-crossing is still woefully incorrect. He does all of this as an uninitiated member of the orgiastic group and will suffer the consequences. Because he has not crossed the boundary correctly, he will experience a negative possession that will eventually result in his death. This was Dionysos’ plan all along which reveals the danger and force that lies beneath the joyous ecstasy of his worship. If one does not join willingly, they will be forced to join (Eur. *Bacch.* 39-40).

The fates of Pentheus and his mother, Agave coincide because they both incorrectly crossed boundaries. As discussed above, Pentheus disrespected Dionysos by preventing his worship in Thebes. His mother Agave (the sister of Semele), along with the other Theban women, also disrespected Dionysos because they denied his Theban heritage. In his opening monologue, Dionysos states

the sisters of my mother, who least should have done so, denied that I, Dionysos, am the son of Zeus, claiming that Semele was bridged by some mortal and then, the clever invention of Kadmos [Cadmus], ascribed to Zeus the fault of her bed. And because of this, they would loudly proclaim, Zeus killed her, because she lied about the union. And so myself I stung them with frenzies from their homes, and they are dwelling in the mountain, their minds deranged. And I forced them to wear the trappings of my mysteries.

(Eur. *Bacch.* 26-34)

Disrespecting Dionysos' Theban roots and divine heritage, the Theban women, including Agave, were punished by the god. It is clear that participants believed that when one did not willingly join the orgiastic group when Dionysos wanted them to, they would be forced to do so by the god. Pentheus refused the god's worship and was punished with a negative possession. Agave denied his heritage and has met similar consequences at the opening of the play. She has been forced into an ecstatic state though, as the messenger reported, this state was fairly positive until she was disturbed by outsiders. Her punishment comes when Pentheus arrives.

Pentheus reaches the mountains to spy on the women, but they mistake him for a lion in their possessed state and tear Pentheus limb from limb. A messenger provides an account of Pentheus' death, stating:

[Pentheus'] mother began the slaughter first as priestess, and falls on him. And he threw the sash from his hair, so that the wretched Agaue [his mother] would recognize and not kill him... But she exuding foam and rolling her twisted eyes, not thinking as she should think, was possessed by Bacchus... Taking with her forearms his left hand, and setting her foot against the ribs of the unhappy man, she tore off his shoulder, not by her strength, but the god gave extra ease to her hands.

(Eur. *Bacch.* 1114-1124)

Pentheus and Agave's punishments go hand in hand. Pentheus is murdered by his mother and Agave unknowingly murders her own son. She comes to this realization at the closing of the *Bacchae*, when she proudly presents his head to all of Thebes (still thinking it a lion) and Cadmus finally shows her otherwise. Upon seeing what head she really holds, she understands what she has done and cries, "Dionysos destroyed us, now I realize" (Eur. *Bacch.* 1296).

Pentheus and Agave are stark examples of improper boundary-crossing and negative possession. Pentheus was a mortal man who, in all of his attempts to transcend these components

of his identity was unable to. He failed to properly cross the boundary from male to female or human to divine. He did temporarily step into the animal boundary when he was mistaken for a lion, but this transgression was in fact what killed him. In turn, Agave was a mortal woman who was able to temporarily attain the status of an initiate—she experienced positive ecstatic possession in the mountains (despite the fact that it was forced upon her) and participated in *sparagmos* (though it was a perversion of the ritual in which Pentheus, as opposed to an animal, was torn apart). Pentheus' death was the “worst-case scenario characterized by a disturbed relationship between men and gods, and by the temporary suspension of normal civic and social mechanisms” (Henrichs 1990, 258). In the *Bacchae*, both the sacrificed (Pentheus) and the one performing the sacrifice (Agave) are punished. Pentheus' “sacrificial death” (Foley 1985, 208) and “perverted initiation” (Foley 1985, 214) are his punishment. “If Pentheus is to be the god's victim, he must become the god's vehicle” (Dodds 1960, xxviii). As a victim, Pentheus is sacrificed while as a vehicle Pentheus is entirely taken over by the god. In turn, Agave, as the “priestess of the ritual” (Foley 1985, 209-210) receives punishment in the form of killing her own son.

But the paradox in these improper boundary-movements is Dionysos' ultimate power over all of them. Despite the fact that Pentheus and Agave crossed boundaries without the intention of growing closer to the god, Dionysos still maintained his power. In the case of Pentheus, Dionysos forcefully possessed him and convinced him to improperly cross the boundary. In the instance of Agave and the other ecstatic Theban women, Dionysos punished their denial of his heritage by possessing them—remember that Dionysos gave Agave extra “ease” or strength in her hands so she was able to tear Pentheus' arm off. In this way, Dionysos was solely responsible for everything that happened in Thebes.

This paradox is specifically apparent in Euripides' use of *chre* meaning "it is necessary" or "necessity" though Seaford translates it as "should" in the above passages (Eur. *Bacch.* 924; 1123). Dionysos argued that Pentheus was finally seeing what he "should" see, implying that his possessed state was desired by the god. But the messenger then noted that Agave was not thinking as she "should" when she killed Pentheus because she was possessed by Dionysos. In this case, what should happen according to Dionysos and what should happen according to societal norms were often in conflict, but Dionysos always won.

In the *Bacchae* Dionysos asserts "increasingly greater control" as "an expression of his divinity" (Foley 1985, 217) and this control never waivers nor is it ever truly challenged. Dionysos established what would come about if he was met with resistance at the very start—"for this city must learn to the full, even if it does not want to, what it is to be uninitiated" (Eur. *Bacch.* 39-40). Thus Dionysos' control was not challenged by proper versus improper transgressions—he in fact was responsible for most of them and the resulting negative possession experiences. Incorrect movements across boundaries resulted in negative possession for participants. The *Bacchae* is simply a fictitious exploration of what could go wrong, and a display of Dionysos' power as a divinity.

In conclusion, participants crossed the boundary from human to animal or divine as a method of growing closer to the god and, at times, attaining a possessed state. Whether this movement into the animal and divine worlds were simply symbolic imitations of Dionysos in myth or real attempts at breaking down status-based boundaries does not affect the very real experience of possession that participants had. In order to maintain this positive experience, they had to cross boundaries within the expectations Dionysos had of them. Within the limitless potential of boundary-crossing and possession, was Dionysos' ultimate power. Participants could

accomplish boundary-crossing, transcend their human status, and attain a possessed state, but the results had either a cathartic or a dangerous potential. Reconsidering the opening passage of this chapter, Dionysos was definitively a god. Although he also lived in the animal and human categories, his divinity was uncontested by participants. It is fitting that the final lines of the *Bacchae* speak to his divinity above all else. Dionysos as a spirit idiom could help participants attain ecstasy, but, if used incorrectly, he could be their downfall. Although participants believed that the potential outcomes of their actions were in Dionysos' control, I argue that the god simply represented the unpredictable potential and disconcerting intimacy of the ecstatic experience itself.

Chapter 4: Mothers Drink and Bleed Ambivalent Liquids and Gender in Orgiastic Worship

“Anyone can get drunk, but not all are bakchoi” (Burkert 1987, 112)

The body “hung dripping under the fir trees, all mixed up with blood” (Eur. *Bacch.* 742)

“A bull, you jumped into milk” (Graf 2013c, 37)

...

The above three passages are in reference to three major liquids used in Dionysian orgiastic and civic rites. The first line refers to wine used in worship, the second to the blood of the cow that the Theban women tore apart in the *Bacchae*, and third refers to milk in a line in a death inscription—these texts will be further discussed momentarily. Wine, blood, and milk were all means to growing closer to the god and, at times, attaining a possessed state. Wine could result in possession or illness, and blood could be a result of sacrifice or murder. Blood, as well as milk, also represented key stages in a woman’s life and the ways in which her gender roles related to orgiastic rites and Dionysos himself. Liquids in Dionysian possession mediated between categories, different stages of life, and gender roles.

Gender has been a major theme in the analysis of spirit possession in many cultures. Women are often associated with the spiritual world in many cultures including that of ancient Greece. This role could have served as a method of social empowerment for women or as a limitation to their agency. Their role in ritual “removes the woman from her usual domestic context, affords her a visible presence in the wider community, and endows her with a measure of autonomous agency. But this presence and agency is bought at the price of an alignment with the nonhuman that can subtract from women’s identity as members of a human society” (Goff

2004, 50). Even in ancient Greek worship, women operated within a paradox of agency and confinement.

Lewis comments on the relationship between women and possession by categorizing spirit possession groups into “central cults” and “peripheral cults.” Central cults are often occupied by men and work within the confines and rules of that culture (Boddy 1994, 410). Lewis ascribes peripheral cults “primarily to women and to those of other excluded and subordinate categories to marginalized groups such as women” (Lewis 1966, 323). In this type of cult “possession works to help the interests of the weak and downtrodden who have otherwise few effective means to press their claims for attention and respect” (Lewis 1978, 32).

This universal categorization is obviously dated and etic, but this work was a major component of the canon of the anthropology of spirit possession. I thus point out his work on gender in spirit possession to emphasize the ways in which the theme of gender has been foundationally developed in the canon. Although Dionysos’ participants were not always considered ill during possession, they were still women and thus a marginalized group in society. Healing was not unrelated to Dionysian possession as it was a cathartic experience and there was a correlation between illness and marginalization. Lewis’ analysis touches on the dilemma that Goff brings up: women practicing possession for social empowerment versus women being reduced as representatives of the mystical realm and, in turn, excluded from society.

Anne Carson argues that women were often associated with wetness and liquidity in ancient Greece. Ancient writers such as Hippokrates and Aristotle described women as “wet” in that they were negatively associated with boundlessness, sexuality, emotion, pollution, uncleanliness, drunkenness, irrationality, self-indulgence etc. In contrast, men were considered

“dry” and associated with sobriety, rationality, cleanliness, control etc. (Carson 1990, 137-138). Wetness was inherently negative in ancient Greek culture—to have a wet mind “was an intellectually deficient condition” (Carson 1990, 137) according to Aristophanes. Meanwhile, “the soundest condition for a human being is dryness” (Carson 1990, 137) based on ancient sources such as Heraklitos.

This binary between wet and dry also ties into Nietzsche’s Apollonian and Dionysian theory. He discusses the “tremendous opposition” in the ancient Greek world that was often illustrated through the opposition between Apollo, the god of art, light and reason, and Dionysos, specifically within the context of art. “These two very different drives run in parallel with one another, for the most part diverging openly with one another and continually stimulating each other to ever new and more powerful births, in order to perpetuate in themselves the struggle of that opposition” (Nietzsche 1872, 19). He goes on to argue that within this opposition, they become “coupled” and this coupling of opposites is the basis of Attic tragedy (Nietzsche 1872, 19). This foundational argument is a similar binary opposition to that of wet and dry between men and women, according to Carson. Although this is a dated argument, it is important to note Nietzsche’s role in structuralism, supporting the binary opposition between rationality and irrationality, wet and dry. I intend to interpret the mediations and disruptions within these oppositions.

Because women were associated with wetness in ancient Greek culture, they were thought to be more capable of and susceptible to spirituality, possession, and nature. “United by a vital liquidity with the elemental world, woman is able to tap the inexhaustible reservoirs of nature’s procreative power. Man, meanwhile, holds himself fiercely and thoughtfully apart from this world of plants, animals, and female wantonness—doubly estranged from it, by his inherent

dryness of form” (Carson 1990, 143). Ancient Greeks believed that the liquidity of women allowed them to cross boundaries more seamlessly. As discussed in Chapter Three, boundary-crossing was a major component of spirit possession in Dionysian worship. Because women were thought to be more liquid, they were considered more capable of crossing boundaries the same way liquids could permeate through dividing lines. Women were thus strongly associated with Dionysos, the boundless god. “Women, then, are polluted because of a special tendency to go out of bounds, to lose their boundaries, to ally with the unbounded” (Carson 1990, 159). Dionysos was without question unbounded.

I expand on Carson’s theory in order to apply it to Dionysian worship and possession. Dionysos and Dionysian possession have been associated with liquids including wine, blood, and milk. Plutarch noted that “the Greeks regard Dionysos as the lord and master not only of wine, but of the nature of every sort of moisture” (Plut. *Mor.* 365). This is where Dionysian worship contrasts from Carson’s discussion of liquids. In the Dionysian orgiastic groups, liquids were not negative, as Carson argued but rather neutral. Liquidity was not exclusively gendered, but rather attached to possession—anyone, though it was often women, who were possessed by Dionysos was inherently connected to liquidity.

Gender and liquidity can specifically be tied to Dionysos because of his own boundless nature. Carson notes that in ancient Greece, women were “regarded as especially lacking in control of their own boundaries” (Carson 1990, 135). This lack of control over their own boundaries meant that ancient Greeks may have believed women had more access to and connection with possessing spirits. Boundlessness was also attached to “suppliants, strangers, guests, and other intruders” (Carson 1990, 135). Dionysos was undeniably a stranger and

intruder who was perceived as invading Greece from a foreign land despite his historical introduction to Greece during the Mycenaean times.

Dionysian liquids were neutral mediators that complicated binaries such as that of male versus female, and symbolized Dionysos’ own volatile nature. Note that, in my argument, wet and dry do not imply inherently negative or positive states as Carson argues. Wetness simply, often times, implied a possessed state. Their potential for either positive or negative results speaks to my larger argument of Dionysian mediation. Placing this within a structuralist lens, the liquids straddle and cross many of the binary oppositions within Dionysos’ realm, working as mediators of the dichotomy.

Chapter 4.1: Wine

Possessed		Not Possessed
Wet		Dry
Good Possession	Bad Possession	Sober ⁵
Wine as an Agent for Divine Communication	Wine as a Poison	

Dionysos had been associated with wine in worship since the 7th century BCE based on references in the *Homeric Hymns*. Seaford argues that wine was considered a part of his realm as early as the fourteenth century BCE based on evidence from the Linear B tablets (Seaford 2006, 16). Hesiod described wine as the “gifts of joyful Dionysos” (Hes. *WD*. 609). Archilochus, the 7th century BCE poet, elaborated on Dionysian worship stating, “for I know how to take the lead in the dithyramb, the lovely song of lord Dionysos, my wits thunderstruck with wine”

⁵ As we will see, intoxication does not automatically lead to possession so many people who drink wine aren’t necessarily possessed. I still fit the above categories into an opposition because wine was an agent that at times led to possession and thus intoxication was inherently connected to a possessed state.

(*Archilochus*, Fragment 120). The term thunderstruck (*keraiunias*) here, may be an allusion to Semele's death—she was struck by Zeus' thunderbolt when seeing him in his true form.

Euripides referenced “thunderstruck” in the *Bacchae* when Dionysos states during the opening, “I see here by the house the tomb of my thunderbolt-struck mother” (Eur. *Bacch.* 6). Thus, to be thunderstruck by wine carries the connotation of drunkenness, but also emphasizes Dionysos' association with death, mortality and loss, which are potentially negative effects of wine.

Dionysos was often depicted with wine in vase paintings. One terracotta vase from Attica, dated to around 450 BCE, shows Dionysos with wine, surrounded by his inebriated worshippers (Karoglou 2013). A satyr stands beside the god, seeming to help him upright, which implies that Dionysos himself is inebriated along with his followers. He not only introduced wine to humans, but he himself participated in the festivities. He was the inventor *and* consumer of wine.

Wine operated as a positive liquid for both male and female participants when it was used as a method of growing closer to the god and done so on Dionysos' terms. Similar to my argument in Chapter Three that a positive possession experience is contingent upon crossing boundaries on Dionysos' terms, gaining a positive experience with wine (often within the context of possession), was entirely determined by the approval and presence of Dionysos.

Wine was a positive liquid within the civic context of the *Anthesteria*. On the opening day of the festival, the *Pithoigia*, men were the second to drink the wine from the *pithoi* after offering the first taste as a libation to Dionysos. But before the men drank “they prayed with their libation that their partaking of this potion would be harmless and actually beneficial to them” (Parke 1977, 108). This emphasizes the level of control that most Greeks believed Dionysos to

have over them when drinking. The god decided if their consumption of alcohol and potential intoxication would lead to a joyful experience or an experience of harmless and detriment. “The phrase uttered implies that wine had a potent, even a magical, power which only Dionysos would control” (Parke 1977, 108). I argue that this magical power of wine was specifically a divine and transcendent quality. Furthermore, this prayer reveals the unpredictable potential of wine in that it had the potential to either become a negative or a positive to Greek festival-goers. Here, I make the distinction between an initiated member of Dionysos’ orgiastic group and a common Greek member of the *polis* who participated in civic festivals. Although there was overlap between private and public worship in many of the cases I discuss, it is important to note that participants in festivals who were not initiated into the orgiastic groups were still involved in drinking rituals associated with Dionysos. Wine carried great potential for a positive relationship with Dionysos and a positive possession experience in the case of orgiastic worship, but, in turn, it also had the potential to destroy a participant or festival-goer. Wine is thus an indecisive mediating liquid.

Women also had a positive experience with wine during the *Anthesteria* through the *Gerarai*. These fourteen women potentially poured wine as a libation on the altars to Dionysos during the second day of *Choes* (Parke 1977, 111). The rituals of the *Gerarai* is an example of interaction between the private and civic worship of Dionysos. Parke is very clear in differentiating the *Gerarai* from maenads, noting that the *Gerarai* were “solemn and elderly priestesses” and not “maenads indulging in some licentious ritual” (Parke 1977, 112). Despite this, the rites performed by the *Gerarai* under the *Basilinna* were a mystery—“what they offered we are not told... But it was probably part of the mystery with which this ceremony is surrounded that we are told no more” (Parke 1977, 111). Thus, there were clearly secretive

aspects to these civic rites that were deeply gendered considering the all-female worshippers participating in this exclusive ceremony. Here, wine served, not as a method of intoxication, but a quiet and controlled method of growing closer to Dionysos. It stands apart from the negative stereotypes of boisterous behavior associated with intoxication. This ceremony reveals the positive and at times, controlled, almost sobering effects that wine could have if used as a libation as opposed to a beverage. I argue spirit possession did not occur during this ceremony, but the use of wine is still apparent as a positive method of honoring the god.

Another example of wine as a positive component of Dionysian worship is seen in the Pelinna Gold Leaves, a late fourth century BCE set of tablets found in the sarcophagus of an older female worshipper of Dionysos in Pelinna, Thessaly. She was found with two almost identical gold leaf inscriptions as well as a maenad figurine which makes it clear she was an initiate. One line reads “you have the fortunate wine as your honor” or “you have wine as your fortunate honor” (Graf and Johnston 2013, 140). Addressing the deceased woman, this tablet presented wine as a reward and honor in the afterlife. It thus established a positive association with Dionysos especially after her death. In the *Lenaia*, wine was a symbol of “Dionysos, his death and reemergence from Hades” (Guía 2013, 109). Thus, the use of wine as an honor after death establishes a further connection between liquids, death, and a positive relationship with Dionysos.

Another positive example of the role of wine in Dionysian worship is apparent in the *Bacchae*. Teiresias, an old man and friend of King Cadmus of Thebes, explains that Demeter was the goddess “who nourishes mortals with dry food” but Dionysos immediately followed her and “discovered the liquid drink of the grape cluster... that which stopped wretched humans from suffering... He [man] is poured out to the gods, himself a god” (Eur. *Bacch.* 276-284).

Participants believed that wine was a method of ending suffering in this context and, in fact, attaining a temporarily heightened divine status. Thus, wine was an effective method of not only forgetting sorrows, but also communing with Dionysos at a very personal level. *Spendetai* translates to “poured out,” but the literal translation is the “making of a drink offering.” Wine was used as a libation offered to the gods. But in this context, Euripides implied that mortal participants themselves were poured out as an offering to the gods. Participants became the wine and libation that was poured out in worship. This is an example of wine as a metonym—by drinking wine and physically coming into contact with it, Euripides implied that participants would literally become wine. As they became the liquid sacrifice, participants were poured out to the gods and, in turn, grow closer to the divine world and attain a temporarily heightened status.

Demeter and Dionysos were opposites here—Demeter introducing dry food to mortals and Dionysos introducing wet wine to them. The female goddess Demeter was associated with dryness, a traditionally male concept according to Carson. And Dionysos was associated with the liquidity of the female. Thus, gender roles and Carson’s conception of liquidity switched in this context. This is partially because Dionysos was a god who constantly straddled the male-female boundary, despite the fact that Demeter was not vague in gender at all. This line also further supports my theory that liquids were neither positive nor negative in Dionysian worship. Wine had the potential to allow either men or women to cross boundaries with positive or negative results.

Wine could also result in negative consequences—wine was not only a means of release, communion and joy, but also a liquid than could serve as a poison when used incorrectly. Again, in this context, incorrectly simply means that wine was consumed without a clear understanding or recognition of its power and negative potentials that were controlled by Dionysos.

The myth of Dionysos first introducing wine to the Greeks resulted in murder. Dionysos approached a mortal named Icarius in Attica and taught him how to make wine. Icarius then shared the wine with a few shepherds nearby “who, when they had tasted the drink and then delightedly and recklessly gulped it down undiluted, thought they had been poisoned and slew Icarius” (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.191). Icarius’ daughter was so upset by his death, that she hung herself, and Dionysos drove the entire city mad, forcing all of the other women to hang themselves in a similar fashion. This is an extreme example of the negative association with wine—in excess and consumed incorrectly, it had detrimental effects of recklessness and, ultimately, death.

Note that the shepherds drank the wine incorrectly partially because it was “undiluted.” In many areas of ancient Greece, including Athens, wine was watered down. The mixing of wine was a common practice and Herodotus even argued that “drinking unmixed wine could cause madness” (Hdt. *Histories* 6.84) in the negative sense of the word. This reveals wine’s literal liquidity and boundlessness in its ability to mix with other liquids. Yet in ancient Greece, wine when mixed with water was arguably less dangerous, according to Herodotus. Mixing wine with water was a common practice in Athens and many other parts of Greece (Parke 1977, 107-108). Wine held power in its neutrality—this liquid had the negative potential as a poison to cause madness or death. The Greeks feared these potentials, so wine was thus watered down, diluting its powerful and intoxicating effects. Without water, wine was in fact more liquid, boundless, and socially uncontrollable. In general, water worked as a diluting and purifying liquid in ancient Greek culture.⁶

⁶ For further discussion of water, see Chapter 5

Women were often depicted in Attic vase paintings involved with or near the wine-production process. This proximity was in fact a proximity to “the unmixed wine (in which the satyrs of untamed nature are also found) and the god himself. It is the women who, because they are close to the god and his ‘savage’ and ‘liminal’ nature, have the capacity to approach the god in this aspect and in this phase of wine production... It is they who are best qualified to invoke and call the god, in nocturnal rites” (Guía 2013, 107). In this way, women closely interacted with wine especially when it was unmixed. I argue that, in this form, wine was considered undrinkable by many Greeks, and thus not an acceptable method of intoxication or worship by society. In its unmixed form, only women and satyrs could be associated with its potency and potential as a poison. From Carson’s perspective, the *polis* may have considered wine to be more powerful and liquid when unmixed and it thus may have been more closely tied to women, the supposedly more liquid and boundless gender.

Wine was a liquid with the potential to cause joy or suffering—it was both a means to ecstasy and a poison depending on how it was used. Wine was widely present in civic and orgiastic rites, but, only when consumed correctly, could it assist with a positive relationship with the god and, at times, a positive possession experience. Only some had the ability to utilize wine to induce possession—“even the most common drug often identified with Dionysus, wine, is not sufficient to induce true *bakcheia*: anyone can get drunk, but not all are *bakchoi*” (Burkert 1987, 112). Wine thus had the potential to assist in spirit possession, but it was not a guarantee. Yet wine only held the power of possession for a few, whereas it simply aided in intoxication for many. Wine was a fundamental mediator and violator of boundaries in Dionysian worship.

Chapter 4.2: Blood

Blood also worked as a neutral mediator of boundaries. It was connected to men and women in Dionysian worship, both in civic and private rites. Blood can be associated with murder, sacrifice, menstruation and menopause.

Possessed	Not Possessed
Murderous Blood	Sacrificial Blood
Blood from Tearing	Blood from Cutting
Orgiastic Blood	Civic Blood

Blood could have been the result of physical violence, but it was an unpredictable liquid because violence had the capacity of positive or negative results. Blood could be violently spilled in the context of sacrifice (positive) or the context of murder (negative). In ancient Greece, the distinction between sacrificial and murderous blood was based on the context. When a living being was killed within the context of a religious ritual and following the ritualistic rules, the blood spilled was sacrificial, but when a living being was killed outside of a religious context, the blood spilled was murderous. Thus, blood was an fickle liquid in Dionysian worship in that it had the potential for attaining religious purity or suffering great losses and consequences.

In ancient Greek religion, the distinction between murderous blood and sacrificial blood was specifically based on the way in which it was spilled. Foley explains that in ancient Greek sacrificial ceremonies, animals would be sacrificed by cutting them with a blade. The tearing of flesh was considered primitive and against religious practices (Foley 1985, 211). Yet *sparagmos* was a structured and ritualized component of orgiastic worship and it involved the tearing, as opposed to cutting of flesh. It was thus in conflict with general sacrificial practices in ancient Greek culture according to Foley. *Sparagmos* was a contradiction of common ancient Greek sacrificial practices though it was not necessarily in violation of religious rites, because it was an

established and organized part of worship performed by religious leaders and initiates. But the *sparagmos* and *omophagia* was a clear way in which Dionysian worship stood apart from other ancient Greek rites, especially in the civic context.

A perversion of the *omophagia* is in the *Bacchae*. Pentheus, mistaken for a lion, is torn apart by his mother Agave and the other Theban women. During the event, Euripides described the Theban women, “each one with hands bloodied” (Eur. *Bacch.* 1136). Note the difference between human blood (the blood of Pentheus) and animal blood (the blood of the lion the women thought they were killing). The boundary between human and animal dissolved here, blood working as a neutral mediator between the categories. Pentheus’ death was a clear perversion of sacrifice in rites because the blood on the women’s hands is from a sacrifice in one sense, and a murder in another sense. Pentheus’ death was a murder in the sense that Pentheus was human. Seaford notes that in the *sparagmos* “we should suppose not necessarily full-blooded tearing apart and raw-eating, but the ritual handling of raw meat that was symbolic of the savagery of myth” (Seaford 2006, 37). *Sparagmos* in rites was an imitation of myth, thus Pentheus’ death was a ritual gone wrong.

Pentheus’ death represents a sacrifice and a murder because he was a perverted sacrifice and initiation (Foley 1985, 214). “In a wild rather than civic context the unwilling victim is torn apart by the hands of maddened women rather than dispatched with due ceremony and a sacrificial knife by men” (Foley 1985, 214). Pentheus’ death was thus a “sacrificial death” because blood had to be shed in order to appease Dionysos. When “unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim” (Girard 1979, 2). In this case, Pentheus was that surrogate victim, representing both a punishment from the god and a sacrifice to the god.

Thus, in Dionysian sacrifices especially, sacrificial blood was paradoxical because it was still violent, despite its positive connotations. The paradox of the sacrificial victim relates to the paradox of sacrificial blood “because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed” (Girard 1979, 1). Thus, there was still an obvious relationship between sacrifice and violence here that has simply been socially accepted because of the context (Girard 1979, 2).

Blood was also a liquid symbolic of different stages of women’s fertility. When women bled, they were fertile and sexualized. In the context of fertility, Carson’s theory holds in that women were considered wet in a way that men weren’t—their bleeding marked certain stages of their lives. Women (girls) before they began menstruation and women who had gone through menopause and no longer menstruated were not wet. Blood served as a key liquid to signify these stages—menarche signified the beginning of a woman’s fertility, whereas the lack of blood prompted by menopause signified the end of her fertility.

In ancient Greece, upon menarche, women became “wet” and were sexual and liquid. It was at this moment that a woman was wet and menstruating, but not yet sexually active that she was at her momentary peak of her life and role in society as a woman. According to ancient Greek culture, she could not act on her fertility until marriage because “sexual indulgence brings the woman not to her peak, but past it” (Carson 1990, 146). Thus, the blood of menstruation represented the potential for a woman’s sexuality, but not the physical act of it—“at her peak a woman is sexually untried” (Carson 1990, 147).

The emphasis on virginity was key here. Women passed their peak once they engaged in sex partially because the sexuality or *eros*⁷ of their liquidity made them dangerous to men—women in ancient Greece were considered to “feel no physical need to control desire since, by virtue of innate wetness, female capacity is virtually inexhaustible” (Carson 1990, 142). In other words, once women were considered to be sexual, they were a threat to the rational dryness of men. The way they remedied this threat was through marriage. In ancient Greece, marriage was the means “whereby man can control the wild *eros* of women and so impose civilized order on the chaos of nature” (Carson 1990, 143). Only through marriage were women able to have sex according to societal rules.

In marriage, sex was purely for reproduction—this type of intercourse was positive and considered “work” (Carson 1990, 149). If a woman acted on her sexuality outside of marriage, it was strongly negative and considered “play.” She would be associated with prostitution or adultery in this case (Carson 1990, 150). Thus, the blood of menstruation was a paradoxical liquid in that it represented the potential to “tame” a woman’s sexuality through marriage, but also a woman’s own potential to act on her sexuality outside of marriage.

Note that the next major stage in a woman’s sexuality and reproductive life was pregnancy and childbirth. After marriage, women engaged in sex with the intention of reproduction (work) and, in turn, became pregnant and birthed children. During this time of childbirth, women were considered “polluted” and this was only remedied through “purifactory rites” that occurred on the fifth, tenth, and fortieth days after the birth (Stears 1998, 118). Thus,

⁷ A desire or lust for something one cannot have. This is part of a larger concept and discussion in ancient Greek culture (Sanders 2013).

women maintained their liquidity during the stages between virginity and menopause, the pollution level heightening during childbirth itself.

Once women married and reproduced, they eventually stopped bleeding and underwent menopause. At this stage a woman was no longer wet in a certain sense because she no longer bled and was thus no longer fertile. These stages of fertility and sexualization were paradoxical—“a woman’s life has no prime, but rather a season of unripe virginity followed by a season of overripe maturity, with the single occasion of defloration as the dividing line” (Carson 1990, 144). A woman’s momentary peak was thus the point at which virginity and menarche met. In ancient Greece, women were believed to reach sexual maturity and a marriable age by the time they were fourteen, thus menarche and loss of virginity theoretically coincided (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 10). For the sake of my argument, virginity was ideally associated with a pre-menarche state, while loss of virginity ideally occurred at the very start of menarche. The closest women came to the unattainable dryness of men was when they were pre-menarche as young girls and infertile as matrons at post-menarche, despite the fact that women’s fertility was one of their sole contributions to a marriage in men’s eyes (Carson 1990, 153). The question is, how, if it all, did the private worship of Dionysos serve to violate, challenge, work around, or temporarily relieve women of these paradoxical standards of virginity and motherhood?

The blood of menstruation and childbirth were deeply connected to women’s sexuality and fertility in ancient Greece. Women were operating within the dichotomy of virgin and mother. Although marriage was the socially acceptable method of working around this, spirit possession and Dionysian worship may have been a method of temporarily escaping this paradox. In ancient Greece, women were thought to be liquid and crossing-boundaries with ease—“the boundaries of women’s bodies are perceived as more fluid, more permeable, more

open to effect and entry from the outside” (Zeitlin 1996, 344). Women were theoretically drawn to Dionysos, the god so deeply associated with liquidity and the dissolving of boundaries (Segal 1982, 12). Many ancient Greeks believed the relationship between women and Dionysos went both ways—in ancient Greek culture, women were a threat in that they were capable of crossing boundaries and working around these paradoxes of virginity and sexuality, but they were also victims in that they were more susceptible to pollution and the influence of Dionysos.

Female participants ranged in age and marital status. Euripides referred to the women in the mountains as “young and old women and girls still unmarried” (Eur. *Bacch.* 694). Diodorus Siculus does make one reference to a private Dionysian ceremony during the first century BCE that occurred every other year—“he makes a distinction between the younger women who engage in frenzied activity while the older women offer sacrifices and sing hymns” (Bowden 2010, 121). If this is at all suggestive of a pattern of roles in a *thiasoi*, then blood, wetness, and menstruation may have played a role in Dionysian worship. The younger, arguably menstruating women in the *thiasoi* were wet and thus engaging in ecstatic worship, and potentially possession. The older women who had arguably already gone through menopause were less wet and thus assigned to the less frenzied tasks. This suggests that wetness may have been associated with possession, whereas dryness may have been associated with religious order and prayer, at least in this specific case.

By the Hellenistic period, men were “frequently initiated into the Bacchic mysteries as young boys, but women were never initiated as girls [pre-menarche]” (Faraone 2013, 121). This may further suggest that women had to be menstruating, fertile, and thus wet in order to be a part of Dionysian worship. This supports the idea that wetness was at times required for possession— young girls could not join because they did not have the dangerous liquidity that gave women the

potential to mediate, commune with and be “polluted” by Dionysos. This is not to say that no pre-menarche girls were initiates, considering Euripides’ above line. I simply argue that this was rare and Dionysian possession was thematically attached to menarche women. This was not an established rule in the orgiastic groups, nor do I argue that possession was exclusive to the younger female participants of an orgiastic group. At times, there may have been a loose and inconsistent connection between menstruating and non-menstruating women and how that related to their role in the orgiastic group

Blood, as a symbol for murder, sacrifice, and women’s sexuality was a paradoxical mediator and metonym. Blood was a metonym in that it was through physical contact with the liquid that brought participants closer to the god—the blood on the hands of the Theban women as they killed Pentheus coincided with the height of their negative possession. Blood mediated between the gender binary and the societal norms women were constrained to in ancient Greece. A boundless liquid, it was neither beneficial or foreboding, but rather whatever Dionysos wanted it to be, in the eyes of his participants.

It is also important to note that both wine and blood are red liquids. Turner argues that redness is “associated with bloodspilling as well as with blood kinship” and denotes “discontinuity, strength acquired through breach of certain rules” (Turner 1967, 57-58). This is part of his larger argument concerning the white-red-black color triad, but it aligns with redness in the context of wine and blood in Dionysian worship. Blood and wine were both mediators between categories which breached societal rules and elicited positive or negative results.

Chapter 4.3: Milk

Another gendered and mediating liquid that appeared in Dionysian worship was milk. Milk was specifically associated with women, but it crossed the boundaries within maternal roles between biological mothers, culturally constructed mothers (wet nurses), and religiously ascribed mothers (Gaea and Nymphs). Milk was associated with nursing and, in Dionysian worship, distortions of nursing, as seen in the *Bacchae*, rituals, and inscriptions.

Possessed	Not Possessed
Nursing outside of social norms	Nursing inside of social norms (mother nurses child)

Milk could come from the breast of a mother or a wet nurse. Yet in the *Bacchae*, milk sprouted from the ground. A messenger told Pentheus that he saw the possessed Theban women in the mountains scratching at the earth and drinking milk from it. He explained, “those who had a longing for the white drink scraped at the earth with their finger-tips and had streams of milk” (Eur. *Bacch.* 709-710). Milk was thus also produced from Gaea, the earth mother in ancient Greece. Milk from a breast and milk from the earth both fall into the maternal category, but the milk simply comes from a different kind of mother. This also may strengthen the connection ancient Greeks made between women and nature— “united by a vital liquidity with the elemental world, woman is able to tap the inexhaustible reservoirs of nature’s procreative power” (Carson 1990, 143). Dionysos also had a strong association with nature (Seaford 2006, 15), thus the connection between women, milk, and the earth was very relevant in the context of his worship.

The relation between milk, mothers, and wet nurses is a very compelling aspect of Dionysian worship. In a proper relationship within the *polis* according to ancient Greek societal norms, a woman became a mother, produced milk, and nursed her children from her breast. In a

culturally ascribed addition to the category of motherhood, there were wet nurses who nursed children whom they did not give birth to. In turn, nursing and suckling are major themes in the myths and rites to Dionysos. In this context, women and Dionysos entered a complex and paradoxical relationship in which women served as his mother, wet nurse, lover, child, and follower.⁸ Milk operates as a female liquid mediator between mothers (or wet nurses) and those nursing from them. In turn, milk operates as a neutral mediator and metonym within Dionysian worship.

Nursing and suckling are apparent in the origin myths of Dionysos. Dionysos was raised by the Nymphs who acted as his wet nurses because Semele had died before his birth. In one *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysos, “the rich-haired Nymphs received him in their bosoms from the lord his father and fostered and nurtured him carefully... But when the goddesses had brought him up, a god oft hymned, then began he to wander... And the Nymphs followed in his train with him for their leader” (Hom. *Hymn Dion.* 26.1-10). Once Dionysos grew up, the women who were once his wet nurses became his female followers. This introduces the first facet in the relationship between Dionysos and his female worshippers—they were mothers to Dionysos.

Dionysos’ female worshippers acted as his mother and wet nurse in rites. As we will see, the inversions and distortions of suckling that occurred in rites were in imitation of myth and may have been literal or symbolic. The evidence suggests that rites involved some kind of distortion of nursing though whether or not it was symbolic, literal, or suggestive is unknown. I discuss the nursing that may have occurred in rites because even if it was symbolic, it is still suggestive of many themes and concepts within the orgiastic groups. Suckling in ritual is

⁸ For further discussion of marriage in Dionysian possession, see Chapter 5

apparent in the artistic depictions of female followers having animals suckle from their breasts. The Villa of the Mysteries, a series of frescoes preserved in a Pompeiian villa from the first century CE, show scenes of Dionysiac initiation. In one frieze, a woman sits, half-clothed, exposing one breast to nurse a deer (Bowden 2010, 132). In the *Bacchae*, the messenger observed the Theban women in the mountains in their ecstatic state before being interrupted. He noticed that some of the women “held in their arms a roe or wild wolf-cubs and gave milk” (Eur. *Bacch.* 700). They imitated the role of wet nurse in ritual here, but used animals as opposed to humans.

As Dionysos often appeared in the form of an animal, I argue that women nursing animals could be symbolic of women nursing Dionysos himself. This distortion of suckling reveals a violation of the mother-child relationship within the *polis* in which a human mother nursed the human child she gave birth to. It also reveals a reversal of Pentheus’ death—in these rites, participants gave life and sustenance to an animal, whereas in the *Bacchae*, the Theban women, mistaking Pentheus for an animal, took life away from him.

Furthermore, Dionysos himself was referred to as the “nurse of beasts” (Eur. *Bacch.* 557) by Euripides in a choral ode of the *Bacchae*. If the chorus called Dionysos the nurse of beasts, Euripides suggested that the god himself was connected to the ritual nursing of animals. This is an even further distortion of roles because Dionysos, despite his gender fluidity, was male in many respects who would not normally take on the care-giving role of a wet nurse as this line implies. Regardless, he was likened to his female participants who allowed animals to suckle from them. Dionysos was able to take on these seemingly contradictory roles because he was the mediator between male and female, human and non-human.

The human female participants who imitated the immortal Nymphs as wet nurses thus attained a temporary divine status as well. In Thrace and Thessaly “female initiates seem, indeed, to have identified themselves with the very first maenads, Dionysos’ wet-nurses on Mt. Nysa, yet these maenads are not simply cultic imitations of Dionysos, but rather they play a significant role in nursing the baby god and their salvation is connected with nursing” (Faraone 2013, 121). Milk thus served as the gendered liquid mediator that grappled with these distortions and inversions of female roles. Female participants symbolized the immortal Nymphs by acting as Dionysos’ wet nurses. In this way, milk allowed them to cross the boundary from human to divine, a key component of spirit possession. These female participant believed they “have taken in the newborn child [Dionysos], have reared him and are, therefore, called his nurses” (Otto 1965, 54). In this way, female participants acted as mothers and wet nurses to Dionysos by suckling the animals who represented him in rites.

Female participants not only nursed animals, but they also nursed from animals, either in literal or symbolic imitation of myth. This reflects the other facet of the parent-child relationship between Dionysos and participants. Note that in the *Homeric Hymns*, once Dionysos grew up, the Nymphs who were once his wet nurses, became his followers once he grew up. There was a clear correlation between child and follower here, in which the relationship between a spirit and their participants is similar to that between a parent and child, respectively. When participants nursed from animals, which were representations of Dionysos given his connection nature, they symbolically became the child and Dionysos the parent.

Female worshippers are seen in artistic depictions nursing from animals. A gem from the Hellenistic period depicts a maenad suckling a panther (Seaford 2006, 207). This is another distortion of the mother-child nursing relationship within the *polis*. Dionysos was often depicted

as an animal and associated with panthers, as seen in the fourth century Macedonian fresco mentioned earlier. The image on the gem implies that the maenad is either nursing from Dionysos or a symbolic representation of Dionysos. This establishes the parent-child relationship in which Dionysos was a parent to his followers. I say parent because nursing is an inherently female role despite the fact that Dionysos did not have breasts. He was a god with an ambiguous gender, thus his suggested role as a wet nurse simply reinforces his movement between the male and female boundaries.

Milk was a metonym in Dionysian worship in this context—when female participants either nursed an animal or an animal nursed from them, the women grew closer to the god. It was their physical contact with the milk that either was inside of them and going to the animal or outside of them and coming in from the animal, that gave them divine proximity. It was the physical contact between the participant and milk that brought them closer to Dionysos, either by providing milk to his animal self or drinking milk from his animal representations.

Milk was also featured in some of the tablets buried with deceased initiates. I focus on the Pelinna Gold Leaves, discussed earlier in this chapter, and the Thurii tablets, both dating within the fourth century BCE. Milk was emphasized in these messages to the deceased initiates. The last line of one of the Thurii tablet reads, “a kid I fell into the milk” (Graf 2013c, 13). Similar lines are found in the Pelinna Gold Leaves:

Bull, you jumped into milk.

Quickly, you jumped into milk.

Ram, you fell into milk.

(Graf 2013c, 37)

The concept of “falling into milk” has been contested. Johnston agrees with Bernabe’s argument that the phrase is “a proverb expressing happiness. To ‘fall into milk,’ or ‘leap into milk’ means to be in the midst of abundance, or to make a new beginning... the lines make sense as part of a *makarismos*—a statement of the initiate’s bliss” (Graf 2013a, 129). The ritualistic associations with milk and distortions of nursing had to have been key components of joyful and ecstatic worship of Dionysos, based on this argument. If milk was a liquid of abundance and bliss, then it played a role in attaining bliss during possession rites and during the afterlife, given the fact that these tablets were addressing the deceased.

Nursing and milk were clearly related in rites partially due to the fact that the gold leaves from Pelinna were found placed on either breast of the deceased female participant. “The ivy-leaf shape of the tablets and their symmetrical placement emphasize the fact that this woman once nursed children, both in her own life as a mother and in spiritual self-fashioning as a maenadic wet-nurse for the child Dionysos” (Faraone 2013, 128). This is compelling proof that suckling played a major component in Dionysian worship, either literally, symbolically or both.

Milk was specifically associated with a “kid,” a “bull,” and a “ram” in these inscriptions. The deceased initiate at Thurii was the subject of the text and was thus being called a kid. In this way, she was placed in the role of child in the parent-child relationship between Dionysos and his participants. The participant at Pelinna was likened to a bull or ram—“Dionysos was sometimes equated with a bull in antiquity” (Graf 2013a, 129) so this participant may have been likened to Dionysos himself. Her role as wet nurse in worship in fact allowed her to become the god himself. Milk was thus a metonym for participants to attain a divine status because their physical contact with the liquid allowed them to mediate the boundary between human and divine.

Wine, blood, and milk are all metonyms and symbols of Dionysos and his worshippers, in both an orgiastic and, at times, a civic context. The opening passage refers to all three of these liquids to highlight their role in worship. Participants may have believed that the wine they consumed, the blood they drew in sacrifice, and the milk they nursed with *was* Dionysos, or at least linked to the god. Participants then *became* these liquids during rituals and, in turn, *became* the god himself. Liquids operated as mediators between the boundaries that Dionysos straddled and participants temporarily crossed. Participants' contact with and consumption of liquids allowed them to in fact momentarily become liquid and thus become the boundless and mediating god himself.

Chapter 5: A Bride, a Corpse, and a Bacchant Marriage and Death as Metaphors for Possession

Radiant Cleanthis was raised, a queen,
Surpassing all other maidens,
Better than Aphrodite and Helen herself
(Oakley and Sinos 1993, 23)

I come pure from the pure, Queen of the Chthonian Ones...
For I also claim to be of your happy race...
I have approached the longed-for crown with swift feet.
Happy and blessed, you will be a god instead of a mortal...
(Graf 2013c, 13)

Purity, queen among gods,
Purity who are carried over the earth with gold wing...
[Dionysos is] the god whose province is to participate in the dances of the *thiasos*,
and to laugh with the pipe, and to put a stop to anxieties,
whenever the bright joy of the grape-cluster comes in the feast of the gods
(Eur. *Bacch.* 369-383)

...

These three passages are in reference to ancient Greek weddings, funerals, and possession rites respectively. The first passage is an ancient Greek wedding song, comparing the bride to Aphrodite herself. The second passage is from a fourth century BCE Thurii tablet, from the perspective of the deceased initiate entering the Underworld. The final passage is a section of a choral ode from the *Bacchae*, describing the heightened state of participants during possession and Dionysos' role in it. I will discuss these passages at length momentarily, but open with them

in order to emphasize the similarity of weddings, funerals, and possession in emotion and structure. All three rites were heightened states of liminality which marked the transition from one status to another. I argue that weddings and funerals were in fact metaphors for spirit possession in orgiastic worship.

Chapter 5.1: Dionysos, a God of Death and Marriage

Marriage and death in ancient Greek culture were both significant rites of passage marked by ceremonies (weddings and funerals respectively). In turn, Dionysos was connected to weddings and funerals in both civic and orgiastic rites. His simultaneous association with death and marriage was partially due to the parallels between these rites—structure, gender roles, and symbolism in these ceremonies were notably similar. In turn, Dionysian possession also had similar characteristics.

In structural anthropology, life and death are one of the major oppositions within myth and religion (Leach 1977, 3). This is partially because so many cultures have complex mediators that operate between life and death. “Religion seeks to deny the binary link between the two words; it does this by creating the mystical idea of ‘another world’” (Middleton 3). This “other world” is a general mediator between life and death. In the context of ancient Greek culture, Dionysos was an unpredictable mediator between this opposition.

The ancient Greeks believed that, upon death, the soul or *psyche* of the deceased exited the body. The separation of the soul from the body was key as “dying involved the struggle of the soul to break loose” (Alexiou 2002, 5). Once free, the soul went on a journey to the Underworld. This journey was ritually marked by the funeral, which often had three distinct stages—the *prothesis*, the preparation and laying out of the corpse, the *ekphora*, the procession

to the grave, and finally, the visiting of the tomb. In ancient Greek religion, Dionysos was one of the primary gods associated with death and the afterlife. His worship grappled with opposition and crossing boundaries, thus it made sense for him to have a connection with crossing the boundary between life and death. “There is a dynamic paradox of death and life in all the mysteries associated with the opposites of night and day, darkness and light, below and above” (Burkert 1987, 101). There is a significant amount of evidence suggesting this connection in civic and orgiastic worship.

The *Lenai* had connections with the afterlife. Especially during the Archaic Period, the *lenai* played a major role in the Athenian festival “in awakening, invoking or calling the god from death” (Guía 2013, 105). Furthermore, the crushing of grapes in the production of wine during the *Lenai* has been connected to the death of Dionysos—there is an arguable correlation between producing wine by crushing the grapes in the wine press... and the death of the god [Dionysos] by being torn to pieces described in the sources” (Guía 2013, 106). The *Lenai* was also a symbol of the grape harvest and, inversely Dionysos’ death and “reemergence from Hades” (Guía 2013, 109). In addition, the evergreen plants that often appeared in depictions of Dionysos symbolized “life after death” in ancient Greece (Faraone 2013, 128).

In orgiastic worship, Dionysos played a key role in the participants’ afterlife, partially because they became initiated into the group in order to receive a heightened status after death, as was common amongst orgiastic groups in ancient Greece. Seaford notes that Dionysos’ association with death can be “derived, directly or indirectly, from the attempt by humans to control their experience of death, in mystery-cult” (Seaford 2006, 76). In Dionysian orgiastic groups, the rituals and initiations “changed the statuses of the person who underwent it... Bacchic initiates expected a blessed afterlife” (Graf 2013a, 140).

Dionysos' connection to death can also be extended to his association with Orphism. Orphism was the religious following of Orpheus, the mythical musician who almost successfully retrieved his wife from the Underworld and was later torn apart by maenads. There are obvious parallels between the myths of Dionysos and of Orpheus—the *omophagia*, the relation to the Underworld, music, and gender being the main ones. “Dionysus had a prominent part in Orphism. The banquet of the dead, that old and inveterate idea of a happy afterlife, was part of the Orphic doctrine” (Nilsson 1957, 133). Their interactions can be seen in the Orphic Gold Tablets, a collection of eighty-seven short religious poems on Orphism from the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods (Graf 2013b, 50). Although this is not the focus of my study, it is important to note that Dionysos and his mysteries were referred to in these poems and had similar connections to the Underworld.

Weddings in ancient Greece were extravagant spectacles, often lasting three days. The ancient Greek word for wedding was *gamos*, though the verb *gamein* was used to “refer to sexual unions in general... The wedding was, in essence, a celebration of a sexual union that was sanctioned by the community” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 9). The first day was called the *proaulia*, the second the *gamos*, and the third the *epaulia*. The terms *proaulia* and *epaulia* “apparently derive from the verb *aulizesthai*, ‘to pass the night’” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 10). The *proaulia* was the day of preparation, involving sacrifices, offerings, bathing and the ritual adornment of the bride and groom (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 11). The *gamos* involved a large feast, singing, dancing, a symposium, and the climactic procession at nightfall, in which the bride was brought to her new home and she and the groom consummated their marriage. The next day, the *epaulia* featured another feast with singing and dancing, and the presentation of gifts to the bride (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 38).

Dionysos was associated with marriage and often depicted in weddings. One of the earliest surviving images of Dionysos is in a wedding scene on a vase-painting from 570 BCE. The image shows the wedding of Thetis and Peleus, Dionysos standing out in a more “primitive” depiction than the rest of the guests (Seaford 2006, 16-17). He is also seen as a *proegetes* (the leader of a procession) in wedding vases, leading the mortal bride and groom during the celebration, oftentimes on a chariot (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 44).

One of the starkest components of Dionysos’ association with marriage is the *Hieros Gamos*, “Sacred Marriage,” during the *Anthesteria*. The *Hieros Gamos* took place during the second day, the day of *Choes*. It was a ritualistic marriage between the Basileus (king) and the Basilinna (queen). The Basileus was the King Archon who “retained the responsibility for many of the older religious ceremonies of the city throughout his year of office and by old tradition he shared some of these rites with his wife” (Parke 1977, 110). His wife, the Basilinna, had to have never been married and still a virgin. She had a particular set of responsibilities during the day of *Choes*, that were supposedly outlined on a stone outside of the sanctuary to Dionysos at the Marshes (Parke 1977, 110). Note that much of the evidence pertaining to the Basilinna comes from Demosthenes’ *Against Neaera*, a speech he delivered in the mid fourth century BCE.

The Basilinna responsibilities included leading the fourteen *Gerarai* in their ritual performances and representing the *polis* by producing offerings on its behalf. She was permitted to enter the sanctuary, where “no foreigner” nor any “other Athenian” could go. In that context, she held a special power alongside her husband, the Basileus (Parke 1977, 110). The Basilinna underwent the *Hieros Gamos*, a sacred wedding ceremony with the Basileus on the evening of the *Choes*. Many of its features imitate the traditions of civic marriages in which the groom escorted the bride to her new home on the night of the wedding (Parke 1977, 112). The

ceremony took place in the *Boukoleion*, a building in the civic center of Athens (Parke 1977, 112). But little else is known about the *Hieros Gamos* because details were not recorded as “it was regarded as a sacred mystery” (Parke 1977, 112). The Basileus often represented Dionysos and the Basilinna a mythic maenad. She “had to be married to Dionysos and be united with him” (Parke 1977, 112). There is evidence of someone representing Dionysos earlier on, during the procession. This person may have been the Basileus who “again robed and masked to impersonate the god during the wedding” (Parke 112-113).

The *Hieros Gamos* dominantly occurred in Athens and it was one of the only rituals of its kind in Athenian religion. The Basilinna operating as a priestess and “consort of a male god” was a theme in ancient Eastern religions. “How it came to Athens and was accepted as part of the cult of Dionysos remains unexplained... the festival and its ritual are primitive and date from some early period” (Parke 1977, 113). This emphasizes Dionysos’ mysterious and mythically foreign origins.

Chapter 5.2: Women’s Connection to Death and Possession

It is apparent that marriage and death were inherently gendered in ancient Greece. They were marked with “elaborate rituals”, weddings and funerals respectively, in which “gender division was a significant feature” (Stears 1998, 119). Many of the funerary rites were specifically done by women, especially during the *prothesis*. The female relatives of the deceased washed the body, wrapped it in a shroud, and decorated it with herbs, jewels and garlands. In addition, many funerary vases depict women with both hands on their head in a sign of lamentation and grief (Stears 1998, 114). Women may have been linked to death because both women and the dead were considered to be a source of *miasma*, ritual pollution (Stears 1998,

117). “Like death, birth was regarded as a source of *miasma*, and women, because of their child-bearing capacity, were therefore seen as latently both polluted and polluting” (Stears 1998, 117). Thus, men expected women to “mediate pollution... Participation in funerals, it will be argued, served in fact as a means for the construction and display of women’s power in both the domestic and political arenas” (Stears 1998, 118).

Similarly, many features of the wedding in ancient Greece were clearly gendered. The beginning of the process of a wedding was, in fact, marked by the *engye*, the agreement on betrothal between the prospective groom and the bride’s father. This discussion occurred exclusively between the groom and the father, while the bride was not present (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 9). This gender division emphasizes the bride’s passive role in the wedding—she was not an agent, but rather an object in her betrothal. The *proaulia* was gendered as well in the offerings, bathing, and adornments. The bride offered a lock of her hair and her old toys to the gods, often Artemis, to symbolize the end of her childhood. The groom similarly offered a piece of his hair in an earlier and unrelated ritual to mark the end of his adolescence (Oakley and Sinos 1993). This suggests that the wedding marked a transition from one stage of life to the next for the bride, but not for the groom. The bride’s societal roles and transitions throughout life hinged upon her marriage and sexual relations to her husband, despite the fact that her husband’s major transitions in life were marked by unrelated ceremonies, independent from the wedding and his marital relations with her.

The *gamos*, also emphasized gender during the feast and symposium—though both men and women were present, they were strictly segregated (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 22). Furthermore, the procession at nightfall led the bride to the groom’s bed, emphasizing the sexual aspects of the wedding and marriage. This was considered the height of the wedding and was

depicted often in art. One bathing vessel dated at 450-425 BCE elaborately depicts the *engye* between the father and groom on one side and the procession on the other. In the procession, the bride's female companions tend to her as she gingerly takes the groom's hand. Behind them is the bedchamber which is where the groom leads her. Images associated with Aphrodite and sex surround the bride and her female attendants, including *Eros*, the winged son of Aphrodite and a goose, one of the goddess's associated animals (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 110-111).

Women's association with weddings and funerals, in turn, draws a connection between the two ceremonies themselves. Marriage has long been associated with or symbolic of death. "Marriage and the journey to distant lands are important metaphors for the experience of death, since they involve painful separation" (Danforth 1982, 33). In the ancient Greek world, these parallels were clear. Weddings and funerals had very similar structures—they both occurred in a three-step process. Both rituals began with the preparation, bathing, and adornment of the bride and groom, or the deceased. In fact, in common funerary practices of the Archaic and Classical periods, the male or female bodies of those who were unmarried or newly married (Alexiou 2002, 5) were often "adorned as if for a wedding" (Stears 1998, 114). Both weddings and funerals also involved an elaborate procession as the second day or phase of the ritual. Artistic depictions of weddings and funerals further highlight their similarities—wedding scenes often show the bride getting ready, dressed in her adornments, as well as her procession to the groom's house, while funeral scenes show the cleaning and adornment of the body followed by its procession to the grave (Stears 1998, 118-119).

Chapter 5.3: Weddings, Funerals, and Possession Rites

Possession, marriage, and the afterlife all involve initiation rituals. Weddings and funerals were both rites of passage that marked a stage of movement—the transfer of the bride from the *oikos* of her father to the *oikos* of her husband, or the transfer of the soul from the body of the deceased and land of the living to the Underworld. Rites of passage are transitions from one stage of life to the next—“the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts” (Van Gennep 1960, 3). During these special acts, those undergoing the rite of passage were in a liminal state. The liminal state was “an interstructural situation” (Turner 1967, 93) and those undergoing it were people “being initiated into very different states of life” (Turner 1967, 95).

The wedding in ancient Greece was often referred to as an initiation in which the bride underwent a liminal state. The *gamos* “represented an important stage in her passage from childhood to adulthood, effecting her transformation into a woman who could bear legitimate children for the new *oikos*” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 10). The wedding thus worked as an initiatory rite in which the bride (and to a lesser extent the groom) moved from one stage of life to another, from one *oikos* to another. In contrast, the groom did not leave his *oikos* as marriage was patrilocal—the bride was simply added to his established home with his existing blood-relatives. Because this was a time of transition, the bride was considered to be very vulnerable and was in fact “an individual capable of ritual pollution” (Stears 1998, 119). Divine worship was emphasized in weddings, partially because they were considered a dangerous time of transition and liminality. There was a known fear of the bride or groom dying during their wedding. “Both the bride and the groom propitiated the gods with sacrifices and offerings, since

their future happiness and their safety during this dangerous time of passage depended upon divine help” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 11).

Ancient Greeks believed the corpse went through a similarly heightened yet vulnerable state of liminality. The journey from the living to the dead was highly dangerous and thus ritually marked by the funeral. The journey to the Underworld was thought to be dangerous and treacherous. This was apparent in the many tablets found with the bodies of participants which provided instructions on how to navigate the Underworld. The language in the inscriptions suggest a dangerous journey, as I will discuss in a moment, which reveals a similarity between the precarious journey and liminal state that the bride or possessed participant underwent.

Dernbach notes that within the Chuuk culture in Micronesia, the recently dead “occupy a liminal place between the worlds of the living and the dead” (Dernbach 2005, 99). There was danger in this liminality. Death, just like a wedding, was thus a “dangerous passage” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 11). In this way, both weddings and funerals were rites of passage as they both signified a movement from one stage of life to another. So those getting married or going to the Underworld clearly underwent a liminal period as well. Both the bride (and groom) and the deceased underwent dangerous states of liminality, transitioning from one stage of life to the next, from one world to another.

Possession rites within orgiastic worship also clearly involved initiatory rites. They were thought to be an intimate and personal experience with the god. In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus asks Dionysos “from what source do you bring these initiation rites to Greece?” and Dionysos, still disguised as the Stranger, responds, “Dionysos himself initiated me, the son of Zeus” (Eur. *Bacch.* 465-466). Furthermore, initiation in some orgiastic groups “puts the emphasis on purification and change of status, even change of identity” (Burkert 1987, 96). Initiation as a

change of status and identity is similar to the initiations that occurred during weddings and funerals. The bride's status changed from single to married and her identity changed from daughter to wife. Similarly, the status of the deceased changed from living to dead and the focus of their existence shifted from the body to the soul.

Possession, weddings, and funerals had similar ritual features, including an emphasis on darkness, music, dance, sacrifice, processions, ritualistic dress, and liquids. First, all three rituals had a special attachment to darkness and nighttime. In the *gamos*, the “most conspicuous public part of the ceremony” was the procession at nightfall to the bride's new home (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 26). At the end of the wedding feast, just as it grew dark, the guests began to cry out “get up, make way, carry the torch” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 26) and the procession began. It was very important that the journey was lit by torches and this responsibility was mainly held by the mother of the bride or groom (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 26).

Nighttime and darkness were similarly important in death. Although there was not a specific emphasis during the funeral itself, there was frequent reference to darkness and nightfall in the funerary inscriptions buried with participants. The first line of one of the Thuri tablets found in tumulus from the fourth century BCE reads: “But as soon as the soul has left the light of the sun” (Graf 2013c, 9). It was the soul as opposed to the body that was of concern now, marking a change in status and identity and thus further proof of death as an initiation. In the same line, it is noted that the journey to the afterlife can only begin once “the soul has left the light of the sun.” This is a clear reference to the darkness that comes with death. Although this may be in reference to the soul exiting the land of the living and going beneath the earth as opposed to the sun setting, it still emphasizes a shift from light to dark.

Darkness and the night were very important in orgiastic possession rites. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that many orgiastic rites were performed at night. The *oreibasia* “took place at night in midwinter” (Dodds 1951, 271) and one component of the *Leniaia* in civic worship “was a midnight revel of women devoted to Dionysos” (Parke 1977, 106). Demosthenes called the orgiastic rites “a nocturnal ceremony” in his account of their worship (Burkert 1987, 96). The chorus in the *Bacchae* references Dionysos “holding up the blazing flame of the pine torch” (Eur. *Bacch.* 145-146). Furthermore, during the confrontation between Pentheus and Dionysos, Pentheus asks Dionysos “do you perform the rites at night or by day?” and Dionysos responds “at night for the most part: darkness possesses solemnity” (Eur. *Bacch.* 485-486). Seaford goes on to note that *nuktelios*, “at night,” was in fact one of Dionysos’ titles based on a reference from Plutarch (Plut. *Mor.* 389a). Torches were specifically used during these nocturnal festivals according to Aristotle (Arist. *Frogs* 342) and Pausanias (Paus. *Description of Greece* 2.7.5, 7.27.3). Torches used during the nighttime orgiastic ceremonies are a clear parallel to the torches used in the bride’s procession during the evening of the *gamos*. Thus, the emphasis on nighttime, nightfall, darkness, and torches, is in fact a reflection of yet another one of Dionysos’ binary oppositions: light and dark.

Another structural ritual similarity between possession, weddings, and funerals was music and dance. They were major components of the wedding celebrations in ancient Greece. During the feast on the afternoon of the *gamos*, celebrations occurred in which the men would dance on one side of the room and women on the other side. They also performed songs about the bride and groom (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 22). Laments were a major component of funerals and the mourning process in ancient Greece. They are well documented in many ancient Greek tragedies including Aeschylus’ *the Persians*, Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and Euripides’ *Electra* to

name a few. A lament in a play was called a *kommos* and was often performed by a dramatic character, or by the chorus. In practice, laments were performed at funerals and were “carefully controlled in accordance with the ritual at every stage” (Alexiou 2002, 4). They often occurred at the *prothesis* and were led by the women (Alexiou 2002, 6). The physical accompaniments to lamentation, including both hands raised to the head, are seen in vase paintings, as previously mentioned.

Music and dance were also key features of Dionysian possession rites. In an account of Dionysian worshippers at Delphi, it was custom for female worshippers “to dance at various places on the road from Athens” (Nilsson 1957, 5) and in Demosthenes’ description of their customs, he added that the initiates often “dance and utter rhythmic cries” (Dem. 18.260). A later ancient source from the first century CE, Aristides Quintilianus explained that the goal of “Bacchic initiation” was to clear away *ptoiesis*, “depressive anxieties,” and achieve “catharsis” “through the melodies and dances of the ritual in a joyful and playful way” (Aristid. Quint. 3.25). Dodds goes on to discuss this catharsis during possession, claiming that it was achieved “by means of an infectious ‘orgiastic’ dance accompanied by the same kind of ‘orgiastic’ music” (Dodds 1951, 78). Thus, music and dance were key features for possession rites, weddings, and funerals.

Another similar feature of possession rites, wedding, and funerals were processions. As mentioned above, the *gamos* featured a procession at nightfall in which the bride was led to her new *oikos*. Similarly, a procession occurred during ancient Greek funerals during the *ekphora*. After the *prothesis*, when the women prepared the body, the men led a procession of the body to the burial site (Stears 1998, 113). I argue that the procession in both of these ceremonies represents the journey from one stage of life to another—the bride’s procession symbolized her

journey from the house of her family of origin to the house of her family of marriage, whereas the procession of the deceased symbolized their journey to the Underworld. This further emphasizes the initiatory change in status and identity during these rites that suggests a rite of passage and liminal period.

Processions were a common feature in many civic festivals, including those dedicated to Dionysos. The *Oschophoria*, the *Lenaia*, the *Anthesteria*, and the *Dionysia* all prominently featured processions. These processions, at times, integrated aspects of orgiastic worship. For example, during the procession in the *Hieros Gamos* in the *Anthesteria* the *Basilinna* and *Basileus* were led by a priestess, who may have been connected to the orgiastic rites of Dionysos.

Liquids were another major feature for all three rites. I discussed liquidity in Dionysian possession rites at length in Chapter Four, but one liquid that I have not yet focused on and that played a major role in weddings and funerals as well was water. On the first day of the wedding, during the *proaulia*, the bride and groom both took separate ritual baths. “Washing is one way to establish divisions, between different activities or from the rest of the world, and the Greeks performed some kind of purification with water before every sacrifice or other contact with the sacred” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 15). A wedding was one of those occasions in which the bride (and to a lesser extent the groom) had to be purified. They were both undergoing a transition of status and identity, thus ritually washing themselves with water was important. The ancient Greeks emphasized this so much that the water for the baths even had to come from a particular source depending on the city or area that the wedding was taking place in—for example, in Athens, the water for the bride’s bath had to come from *Enneakrounos*, a fountain that drew from the spring *Kallirrhoe* (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 15).

In this context, water was both purifying and invigorating. It was thought to have a “fertile power” thus “brides who came into contact with this water were symbolically cleansed of their maidenhood” (Oakley and Sinos 1993). During a wedding, water marked a bride’s transition from single to married, virgin to mother. On the night of the *gamos*, she became sexually active within the rules of the *polis* and engaged in sex as “work” (Carson 1990, 149) for reproduction. While I outlined the boundlessness and violating nature of liquids in Chapter Four, I now point out the power of, specifically water to draw a boundary and establish a divide between different stages of life.

Water further established boundaries in the context of death. In many inscriptions associated with deceased, the instructions on how to enter the Underworld include the consumption of water. For example, an inscription found in a grave in Thessaly dating at 350-300 BCE provided instructions to the deceased participant on how to enter the Underworld:

You will find in the house of Hades, on the right side, a spring,
And standing by it a white cypress.
Do not even approach this spring!
Ahead you will find from the Lake of Memory,
Cold water pouring forth; there are guards before it.
They will ask you by what necessity you have come.
You, tell them the whole entire truth.
Say, “I am a child of Earth and starry Sky.
My name is ‘Starry.’ I am parched with thirst. But
Grant me
To drink from the spring.’

(Graf 2013c, 35)

A number of other inscriptions from Italy, Crete, and mainland Greece provide similar instructions, all of them emphasizing the particular source of water to drink from. It is clear that not everyone was permitted to drink from the Lake of Memory, but because of their special status as initiates of Dionysos, participants were allowed to drink from this source. The Lake of Memory thus clearly acted as an exclusionary method to separate initiates from non-initiates after death. It also acted as a method of division between the living and the dead. Water thus works as a boundary and a dividing agent between different stages of life, unlike the other liquids in worship which acted as boundless and mediating substances.

In both weddings and the journey to the afterlife water was a purifying substance that marked a change in identity and status and mediated between single and married, virgin and sexually active, life and death, and initiate and non-initiate. Water was not as explicitly emphasized in spirit possession rites. As mentioned in Chapter Four, it was in fact a rational liquid because of Herodotus' belief that "drinking unmixed wine could cause madness" (Hdt. *Histories* 6.84). Thus, within the context of possession rites, water may have been excluded because it probably didn't assist in pursuits of ecstasy and loss of control. Spirit possession was an attempt to temporarily collapse boundaries, thus water, a liquid that uniquely drew boundaries, may not have been welcome.

Boundaries thus bring me to the overarching common theme between possession, weddings, and funerals—all three rites were a rite of passage and yet another method of boundary crossing from one status to another. Along with the crossing of boundaries between single and married, living and dead, not possessed and possessed, these three rites were also

methods of boundary-crossing specifically from the human to the divine. To discuss this, I now point to marriage and death as metaphors for possession and then go on to explain how each rite alludes to boundary-crossing from human to divine.

Marriage as a metaphor for possession is a common theme in the anthropology of spirit possession. Dionysian worship was one of “those cases in which the subject was believed to be attacked by, married to, or in some way influenced by the spirit to produce the alteration of consciousness. The definition includes... both states of possession and obsession” (Crapanzano 1976, 9). Lewis also recognizes this cross-gendered relationship between a spirit and the possessed, stating “the relationship between a medium and his or her attendant familiar should regularly be expressed in terms of marriage” (Lewis 1966, 310). He later said that “ecstatic possession seizures are sometimes explicitly interpreted as acts of mystical sexual intercourse between the subject and his or her possessing spirit” (Lewis 1978, 58).

Female worshippers of Dionysos may have considered themselves “married” to him, at least during spirit possession rituals. In the *Bacchae*, note that the messenger saw both married and unmarried women in ecstatic worship to Dionysos in the mountains (Eur. *Bacch.* 694). This evidence suggests that it may not have mattered whether or not women were civically married in order to participate in spirit possession rituals in which they became married to Dionysos. The union between Dionysos and his participants was probably considered separate from any union they had to their mortal spouses in the *polis*. Although both relationships were sexual, participants’ relations to their mortal spouses were legal and civic, whereas their relations with Dionysos were religious and symbolic. In general, “men and women contract such unions which are much more binding and strongly sanctioned than those in mortal society” (Lewis 1978, 63), thus their bond with Dionysos may have been a deeply set religious one that was not in conflict

with the civic relation to their everyday spouses. I argue that marriage works as a metaphor for possession in that both weddings and possession rites were a transitional or liminal state. They both temporarily heighten the status of the involved mortals by bringing them closer to the divine.

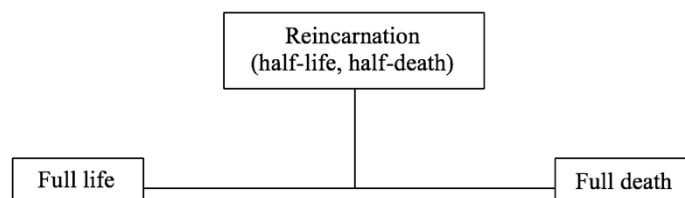
The *Hieros Gamos* was a clear example of marriage as a metaphor for possession specifically in Dionysian worship. I argue that despite the *Hieros Gamos* being a part of the civic worship of Dionysos, it was also a reference to or representation of the orgiastic worship of Dionysos. This is due to the secret aspects of the ceremony which mirror the mysterious qualities of the orgiastic groups. Furthermore, the term *hieros*, “sacred,” was used in an orgiastic context as well—many groups used a *hieros logos*, a sacred text concerning their worship, though none survive today (Burkert 1987, 52). Thus, the Basilinna could be seen as a maenad and the Basileus was clearly Dionysos himself. In this way the Basileus attained, at least symbolically, a temporary divine status. The Basilinna was thus deeply attached to the divinity both legally, religiously, symbolically, and sexually. This represents a possessed state and intimate and private unity to the god.

Like possession rites, weddings in ancient Greece were a time when humans became closer to the divine. Divinities were often seen mixed with mortals in depictions of weddings. An *amphora* dated at 540-530 BCE represents a mortal bride and groom being led by Hermes. Another image on a *hydria* depicts a wedding scene with some figures holding objects that identify them as mortal while others, including Dionysos, are identified as divine, thus “the anonymity of some figures allows the scene to float between the mortal and divine levels” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 29). Featuring the divine in depictions of weddings “is only one device for raising the level of mortal weddings by linking it to the divine sphere” (Oakley and Sinos

1993, 29). In fact, the ancient Greeks believed that weddings brought them so close to the divine, that they worried the gods would get jealous and remedied this through sacrifices and offerings (Stears 1998, 11).

Singing during the *gamos* was also a method of growing closer to the divine. One ancient Greek wedding song, with apparent comedic elements, described the bride as “surpassing all other maidens, better than Aphrodite and Helen herself” and goes on to note that the groom is “better than Nereus, and the son of Thetis” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 23). This temporarily heightened the status of the bride and groom to the level of the divine. “The praise of the bride and groom by means of comparison to gods, heroes, and their peers is the stuff of almost every wedding song that has been preserved” (Oakley and Sinos 1993, 23-24). This was a dangerous, temporary, and liminal state. Thus, both possession and weddings were attempts to reach a non-human status and temporarily heighten ones’ self to the divine.

Dionysos’ association to death also serves as a metaphor for possession. Dionysos’ participants worshipped him with the intention of receiving a better afterlife. Thus, the afterlife is a mediator between the binary opposition of life and death. This is illustrated in the structure below (Lévi-Strauss 1977, 18).



Upon death, participants believed that the deceased traveled to the afterlife and collected the rewards they were promised. I argue that a smaller iteration of this journey from life to the afterlife was symbolically performed by living participants during spirit possession rites. Lewis recognized this link between death and some spirit possession rituals, noting that “full possession itself is widely perceived as a form of temporary death, sometimes called ‘half-death,’ or ‘little death’” (Lewis 1978, 58). Note Levi-Strauss’ structure above recognizes “half-death” as the mediator between life and death. Dernbach adds that spirit possession “blurs the line between living and dead, being and not being, self and other, corporeal body and ethereal spirit” (Dernbach 2005, 100).

In the context of Dionysian worship, participants underwent a half-death not only in the form of their journey to the afterlife, but also in the form of possession while they were still amongst the living. “Literary testimonies concerning Bacchic rites performed right at the tombs of the deceased members of Bacchic associations; mourning and ecstasy somehow seem to fuse” (Burkert 1987, 23). Dionysos’ association with death was not forgotten, but rather emphasized during possession rites—he brought his worshippers closer to a temporary death and, in turn, a temporary divine status.

Ritual death in spirit possession was apparent in the common ancient idea that participants undergoing initiation rituals had “to die to be reborn... It was through this experience and the following transition to joy that the initiate conquered the fear of death and came to know of the joy after death” (Seaford 1981, 261). During possession, participants died “to be reborn” in the same way that Dionysos was reborn in myth. They incorporated the idea of death in possession in order to grapple with it. Death was something to fear, but it was also something to look forward to because it led to the “joy after death.” *Telete*, “initiation rite”

relates to *teleute*, “end” or “death.” “The emotional and presumably also the ritual progression of initiation plays out the factual and emotional experience of death” (Graf 2013a, 158). Initiation and death mirrored one another because they were both heightened states of liminality.

In spirit possession and initiation rites in ancient Greece, the experience was often related to death. Plutarch explained that the soul of the deceased traveled to the underworld and “has an experience like that of men who are undergoing initiation into great mysteries... and the actions they denote, have a similarity” (Plut. *Mor.* 178). Plutarch even recognized the similarity in root between *teleutan*, “die,” and *teleisthai*, “to be initiated.” Thus, death served as a method of initiation which is illustrated in the possession rituals of Dionysian worship.

During spirit possession rites, participants obtained a temporary divine status, whereas upon entering the afterlife, participants obtained a permanent divine status. This is apparent in many inscriptions found with deceased participants. The final line of one of the Thurii tablets reads “happy and blessed, you will be a god instead of a mortal” (Graf 2013c, 13). Another one of the Thurii tablets similarly reads “you have become a god instead of a mortal” (Graf 2013c, 9). A line from the Pelinna Gold Leaves reads “now you have died and now you have come into being” (Graf 2013c, 37). Johnston suggests that the phrase “coming into being” “does not refer to a regular sort of corporeal life, but rather to a new sort of ‘life’ that the initiate will find within the Underworld” (Johnston 2013, 133). Life in the afterlife was not the same as life amongst the living—it was a “new” and heightened version of life. So, upon the participant’s death, she was in fact born into this new kind of life. Dionysos, “the Bacchic one,” released her from life as if death was the reward and the end goal.

These statuses after death were obtained through worship during life. This heightened status was temporarily obtained during life through possession and initiation rituals. Seaford notes that during initiation into the orgiastic groups, the initiate underwent “a secret and frightening ritual that consists of a transition from the anxious ignorance of the outsider, through an experience that might be like death and that involves revelation... into a new blissful state as an insider. As a pre-enactment of death, it might remove... the fear of death” (Seaford 2006, 49). The correlation between death and divinity for participants is well established. I argue that the temporary divine status pursued by participants during possession was an imitation of and preparation for the permanent divine status they would eventually obtain upon their deaths. But until their death, they strived to *temporarily* attain this status of divinity through possession. Spirit possession accomplished this by symbolically and ritually alluding to death.

In conclusion, weddings, funerals, and possession rites significantly related in structure and theme. This is apparent in the opening three passages concerning the ceremonies—placed side by side, it is clear that these three rites evoked similar themes and emotions. All three ceremonies were rites of passage at which point those involved underwent a liminal state and transitioned from one stage of life to the next. Marriage and death were also inherently gendered concepts in ancient Greece due to women’s constructed connection to weddings (as the bride) and death (as the “polluted” figure). Dionysos had a special connection to marriage and death which was apparent in his possession rites. Possession was a temporary death and a ritualistic marriage to Dionysos. Thus, weddings and funerals were both metaphors for Dionysian possession.

Chapter 6: The Other Inside Me

The Greek-Barbarian and Self-Other Dichotomies in Geography

There are at least three points where chaos—a tumult of events which lack not just interpretations but *interpretability*—threatens to break in upon man: at the limits of his analytic capacities, at the limits of his powers of endurance, and at the limits of his moral insight (Geertz 2000, 100)

...

This above passage speaks to the ancient Greek belief that Dionysos and his possession rites, were, above all, beyond the capacity of mortal comprehension. He collapsed every boundary that ancient Greeks constructed to help make sense of their surroundings. In that state, mortal worshippers believed themselves truly at the limits of their capacity, endurance, and insight. In this way, the Dionysiac state of possession was chaotic and impossible to interpret. Yet, Dionysos himself was constructed by the very people who believed his presence often elicited chaos.

As a possessing spirit, Dionysos dissolved the boundaries between self and other. I explore the categories of self and other, and the way in which Dionysos and his participants mediated between them in two veins: the geography of place and the geography of the mind. Geography of place is in reference to the physical space of the ancient Greek world. Geography of the mind is in reference to the inner-workings of the self, and the ways in which it was divided by mind, body, soul etc. Ancient Greeks constructed the idea of self as opposed to other in geographical place with the Greek-Barbarian dichotomy. Dionysos explored this dichotomy as the god who was both Greek and Barbarian, constantly made other as a Barbarian and constantly arriving upon Greece. In turn, Dionysian possession investigated the self-other dichotomy in the context of the geography of the mind. During possession, participants believed that Dionysos dissolved the boundary between self and other, entering their bodies and exploring the

unconscious versus the conscious self. I argue that the boundaries constructed in geographical place to establish a Greek-Barbarian dichotomy were a metaphor for the boundaries between self and other, conscious and unconscious that dissolved during Dionysian possession within the geography of the mind.

Self	Other
Greek	Barbarian
Conscious	Unconscious

Chapter 6.1: The Greek-Barbarian Dichotomy

The Greek-Barbarian dichotomy explored the ancient Greek ideas around self versus other in terms of physical place. It was difficult to draw an indisputable line on a map between Greek lands and Barbarian lands. The ancient Greek definitions of who was Greek and where Greece was, were constructed and varied based on context and perspective.

Ancient scholars held varied opinions on what it meant to be Greek. Demosthenes argued that freedom was key to being Greek, while Strabo emphasized the importance of political, artistic, and philosophical knowledge (Strab. 2.5.26). Ancient scholars also emphasized the significance of behavior, education, and refinement in Greek identity (Saïd 2001, 290). In ancient times, identity was more regionally specific, and populations or Greeks as whole were referred to as “Danaans,” “Argives,” or “Achaean” by Homer and “Ionians” by Assyrians (Malkin 2001, 3). Although Greek identity was not easily agreed upon, there was still a collective Greek “we” that formed throughout ancient times.

Up to and partially through the Archaic period, identities in the Greek world were primarily regional. Homer had “little or no trace of ethnocentric and derogatory stereotyping of

barbarians... nor is any such process of ‘othering’ apparent in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE” (Cartledge 1993, 53). As more foreign threats such as the Persians grew prevalent, the “us” identity began to encompass more Greek areas. In turn, the “they” identity ascribed to Barbarians began to form—by the fifth century BCE, “the process of ‘othering’ and indeed inventing ‘the barbarian’ as a homogenized stereotype was well underway in Greece” (Cartledge 1993, 54)

The “us” identity was “a solidification of ‘oppositional’ Greekness” and this “us” identity “demarcated lines of difference from hinterlands of non-Greeks and consolidated identities of Greeks of varied origins” (Malkin 2001, 7). By the Classical period, this “us” identity became even more collective and focused “on the active role of sharing and doing, looking for connections... A Greek ‘we’ identity also involves exclusion and selection of relevant traits as well as a highlighting of differences among Greek polities and intra-Hellenic entities” (Malkin 2001, 7). Greek identity was not clearly based on ethnic or geographical restrictions, but ancient Greek people could still decide who was Greek and who was not based on the context.

Even as these collective identities formed, there were still factions and regional identities within this larger “us.” This is an example of segmentary identity, a concept originally established by Radcliffe-Brown. These identities are a part of systems that “are divided at each level into segments” (Keesing 1975, 30). Within a larger “we,” there were smaller collective identities. This larger “we” may have been one cohesive identity when facing a threat that was foreign to everyone within that group (such as the Persians). But, the smaller identities within that larger “we” could create an oppositional identity against another smaller identity within that “we” (such as the Athenians and the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War). This was a segmentary identity.

Greek identity was also related to geographical place. Physically, the boundary drawn between Greek and Barbarian in this context was almost as relative and contextual as Greek identity. Malkin argues that the construction of a Greek geographical center and a Greek geographical periphery was vague, and no clear boundary could be drawn between Greek land and Barbarian land. According to Malkin, ancient colonization challenged the boundary drawn between center and periphery--“since there was no ‘Greece,’ but a multitude of political communities, the starting point for Greeks was not one of concentration, but one of diffusion” (Malkin 2001, 14). Although I do not go as far as saying that there was no “Greece,” colonization and diffusion did complicate the dichotomy between center and peripheral geographical place. Yet, one of the reasons the Barbarian identity was constructed by the Greeks was to justify their rulership over the geographical periphery. “Because the Greeks were ‘naturally’ free and the barbarians ‘naturally’ servile... it was right and proper for the Greeks to rule barbarians, if only for their own good” (Cartledge 1993, 55). Colonization both blurred and solidified the geographical boundaries between the Greek center and the periphery.

There was a fluidity between the Greek center and periphery. Euripides referred to this place as “cities full of Greeks and barbarians mixed up together” (Eur. *Bacch.* 18). Movement occurred along the border between Greek land and Barbarian land, but that did not completely discredit the cultural boundaries between places. “Categories persist despite a flow of personnel across them” (Barth 1969, 9). Greeks and Barbarians “mixed up together” interacted, exchanged culture, and perhaps even language, but there was still a distinction between these categories, though the boundary was blurred.

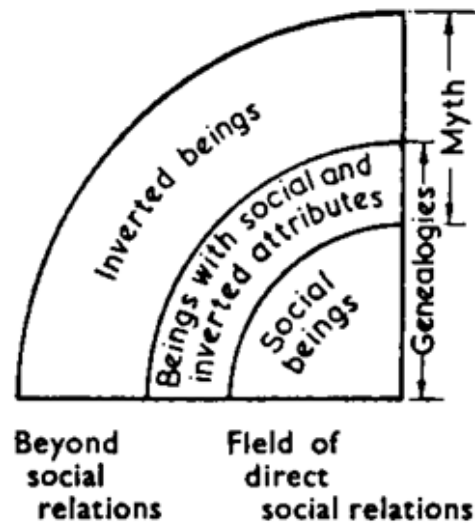
Culturally, center and periphery in geographical place was related to social norms and expectations. Endsjø argues that, in general, sexual deviance was projected onto the cultures that

lived on the geographical periphery, far from the conceptual center. In turn, acceptable sexual conduct according to that culture was ascribed to the geographical center (Endsjø 2008, 12). Yet sexual deviance—oftentimes, defined as sex between two men in this context—was present and acceptable at the ancient Greek geographical centers. The Greeks viewed the Barbarians on the geographical periphery as asexual. More specifically, they believed that sexual promiscuity that worked outside the established societal rules of same-sex relations (there had to be a dominant and a submissive and the submissive had to be the dominant’s social inferior), was also ascribed to barbaric and peripheral behavior. Those who were too sexual or not sexual enough were placed in the geographical periphery—they were outside of Greece and they were not Greek (Endsjø 2008, 12-16).

The conception of self and other in the context of geographical place was rooted in the Greek Barbarian dichotomy. Although it is difficult to define who was Greek and where Greece was exactly, Greeks clearly existed and distinguished themselves from the geographical and cultural “other.” These distinctions were in fact partially determined by cultural interaction between Greek and Barbarian. “Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built” (Barth 1969, 10). Constructing the Barbarian to make other, allowed the Greeks to further solidify and define their own identity and geographical place.

Despite the permeability of the ancient Greek identity, self versus other, and center versus periphery, many ancient Greeks attempted to establish and reinforce a binary opposition between Greek and Barbarian. The “Greek-Barbarian antithesis is a strictly polar dichotomy, being not just contradictory, but jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive” (Cartledge 1993, 11). In ancient Greek culture, the Greek identity was associated with self and the geographical center,

whereas the Barbarian was associated other and the geographical periphery. Thucydides stated that “the manners of the ancient Greek world resemble the manners of barbarians today” (Thuc. *PW*. 1.6.6). Thucydides’ statement aligns with Middleton’s concept of Social Space and Time (Middleton 1977, 60). Part of his diagram, shown to the right, displays the relationship between geographical space and time and how that relates to determining self and other. Middleton argues that as something gets further away from direct social relations (the geographical center), the closer it gets to “beyond social relations” (the geographical periphery). In turn, the further something gets from genealogical relations (Greek identity), the closer it gets to myth and is thus projected back in time.



Thus, an “inverted being” is anything “beyond social relations” and attached to myth—this being is a peripheral other.

In the context of ancient Greek identity, Greeks were the social beings and Barbarians were the inverted beings, projected back in time and placed in a peripheral geographical place. The distinction between myth and history often blurred and was “ambiguous” and “permeable” (Cartledge 1993, 21). They were inverted as sexual deviants, ascribed as asexual or hypersexual (Endsjø 2008, 16), primitive beings with an undeveloped and primitive language. Ancient writers noted that the term for Barbarian, *barbaros*, came from the babbling “bar-bar” sound that the Greeks believed the Barbarians to make (Liddell and Scott 1940).

Despite the construction of binaries between Greek and Barbarian, there were clearly many mediators that operated within the space between. A symbolic line was drawn between self

and other, center and periphery, in the context of distinguishing between Greek and Barbarian. Yet in reality that line was very permeable, constantly crossed and had many mediators operating within. Dionysos was a god who thrived in that place. He was the Greek Barbarian who lived at the center and on the periphery, and who constantly challenged the distance ancient Greeks created between self and other. Dionysos was the mediator between the Greek centered self and the Barbarian peripheral other.

Although their conceptions of identity, self, other, and place, were clearly contested, ancient Greeks still attempted to reinforce them through societal norms, so why develop the worship of a god who was so critical of the binary and who lived in the mediatory place between oppositions? I argue that because the binaries were so blurred and undefined in reality for the Greeks, they overemphasized them in their worship of Dionysos—Dionysos became their means to grapple with their own inability to remain within the binary. This god who stood on either side of most boundaries was in fact a symbol of the ancient Greek's own frustration with a binary that they could not seem to follow despite all of their attempts to come to terms with it.

Chapter 6.2: Dionysos the Greek Barbarian

Dionysos mediated between center and periphery as both a Greek and a Barbarian. He was Greek partially because of the way ancient Greeks regarded their religion in general. Like any other Greek god, Dionysos was everywhere and simply worshipped in varying ways throughout the entire ancient Greek world (Malkin 2001, 15). Thus, he was Greek in a historical or religious sense because all or most Greeks recognized him as a component of their own religious beliefs. He was also Greek in a mythical context because he was the son of Zeus and Semele. Zeus was a Greek god and Semele was a local Theban princess. Thus, hereditarily and

geographically speaking, Dionysos was Greek. He was Greek also because he was historically worshipped within the Greek world for a very long time. As previously mentioned, evidence of his existence first appeared in the Linear B tablets from the Mycenaean era during the Bronze Age.

But Dionysos was also foreign. Not only was he worshipped in geographical centers, but also on the geographical periphery. Evidence of versions of his worship appeared as far as East Asia (Otto 1965, 52). Ancient sources speculated that Dionysos may have come to Greece from Thrace, Phrygia, or Lydia (Otto 1965, 52). In the *Bacchae*, he arrives upon Thebes as a foreigner in one sense. In his opening monologue, he says:

Leaving the gold-rich lands of the Lydians and Phrygians, going on to the sun-beaten upland plains of the Persians, and the Baktrian walls, and the harsh land of the Medes, and wealthy Arabia, and the whole Asia that lies along the salty sea with fine-towered cities full of Greeks and barbarians mixed up together, I come to this city first of the Greeks, after having there set them dancing and established my initiations so as to be a visible god for mankind.

(Eur. *Bacch.* 13-22)

Here, he lists all of the different foreign lands he has already been to before coming to Thebes. He establishes a clear attachment to Lydia and Phrygia, some of his potential origins according to ancient thought. Referenced earlier, the line that mentions cities “full of Greeks and barbarians mixed up together” speaks to the permeability of boundaries and exchange of culture between Greek and Barbarian. Mixing Greeks and Barbarians up together implies not only physical mixing in place, but also mixing of cultures, families etc. Euripides also speaks to Dionysos as a mediator between periphery and center with this line. Dionysos’ passage through these places emphasizes his connection to the permeable border in which Greek and Barbarian interacted and decreased the geographical place between self and other. Regardless, this list of foreign lands

emphasizes Dionysos' entrance from places that weren't Greek to places that were Greek. It is not a coincidence that, while in his mortal disguise during the play, that Dionysos was referred to as, "the Stranger."

During the confrontation between Pentheus and Dionysos later on, Dionysos and his rites are placed further into the periphery.

P: Is this the first place you have come bringing the god?

D: Everyone of barbarians is dancing these rites.

P: Because they have far less sense than Greeks?

D: In these things at least, rather they have good sense. But their customs are different.

(Eur. *Bacch.* 481-484)

Dionysos himself calls his participants Barbarians here, placing them further away in place from Thebes. Pentheus takes this distancing to be negative, but Dionysos simply says they "have good sense." Euripides aligned Dionysos with the Barbarian other, but also challenged the negative conceptions of Barbarians—though they were still clearly distinguished from Greeks in terms of place, their religion gave them more sense than Greeks like Pentheus because they were initiated into Dionysos' rights.

In this way, Dionysos was able to mediate between Greek and Barbarian because he identified with both. This can be applied to geographical place as Dionysos had ties to the periphery and the center—he was "at once present within and without the city" (Detienne 1979, 68) The boundary between the *polis* and the mountains was often times a physical gate or wall. In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus references the Elktran gates (Eur. *Bacch.* 780), the southern gates of the city that led to Mount. Kithairon, the foundations of which can still be found (Seaford 1996,

211, footnote 780). Constantly inside and outside the *polis*, Dionysos blurred this physical boundary in place.

Chapter 6.3: The Self-Other Dichotomy in Dionysian Possession

Spirit possession was a collapse of the boundary between self and other, conscious and unconscious. The geography of the mind was made up of a conscious self and an unconscious self. Most of the time, this boundary was a clear line, but, during spirit possession, that line dissolved and the unconscious self became conscious. In this way, the geography of the mind was just as vague in its borders as the physical geography between Greek and Barbarian. The boundaries drawn in geographical place are thus a metaphor for the very boundaries between unconscious and conscious which dissolved during spirit possession. Participants believed that Dionysos was the mediator between Greek and Barbarian, so he, in turn, helped them mediate between conscious and unconscious in order to explore the space between self and other and how the dichotomy interacted.

Dionysos helped his participants mediate between self and other because he was a god who was constantly arriving. The very first word of the *Bacchae*, from Dionysos' opening monologue is *heko*, "I have come" (Eur. *Bacch.* 1). A major theme of the play is in fact Dionysos' personal arrival upon and return to Thebes (Seaford 1996, 149, footnote 1). Dionysos' arrival was always imminent and unexpected which is paradoxical to his actual presence in ancient Greek religion. How could a god who was worshipped by Greeks since the fourteenth century BCE be considered a god who has only just arrived? First, his constant arrival further supported his role as a foreigner. Despite his roots in Greece, Dionysos was constantly made

other and conceptually distanced from the Greek world in time and place. To paint him as a god who was constantly arriving supported him as a foreign and newly introduced deity.

Dionysos as a god who was constantly arriving also supported his doubled and reflective nature. This is a major theme of the *Bacchae* as well. The confrontation between Dionysos and Pentheus is doubled in image and language. In their initial conversation, Pentheus asks the Stranger how the god “compelled” him into his rites, thinking that participants became initiated by brute force. Instead, Dionysos responds, “face to face, he gives me mystic rites” (Eur. *Bacch.* 470). *Horon horonta*, “face to face,” literally translates to “seeing and being seen.” The god’s physical presence is felt in here in two senses. First, the Stranger alludes to his true identity as Dionysos, recognizing the visibility of the god himself though Pentheus does not understand this. Second, to see and be seen by a god is a very personal and intimate connection. This experience could occur during possession rites when participant and Dionysos, self and other, conscious and unconscious meet and mix together.

Later on, when Pentheus is disguised in Bacchic dress, he and Dionysos look identical on the outside. “But as much as they might seem doublets of one another, the power relations between them have been decisively reversed” (Zeitlin 1996, 342). The doubled nature of their relationship is fractured and more complex than a simple reflection. Dionysos as a doublet could foster extreme joy or fatal deterioration, as in Pentheus’ case. Dionysos acted as the double, reflective god in theater and in ritual—“the tragic performance itself exists in a kind of contradiction... tragedy is the meeting point between the civic Dionysos worshipped by the citizen choruses... and the ecstatic Dionysos worshipped by the maddened women” (Segal 1982, 14).

Reflectivity was apparent in orgiastic rites with the use of mirrors especially during initiations, according to Seaford. A mirror was found buried with a participant at Olbia from the late sixth century BCE (Seaford 1998, 130). A mirror is also seen in a vase-painting from the early fourth century BCE, depicting Dionysiac scene with a woman performing a sacrifice and a man beside her looking at his reflection in a hand mirror (Seaford 1998, 130). Mirrors and the reflective themes found in the *Bacchae*, support Dionysos as a doubled, “twice-born” god. This highlights his constant arrival and cyclical nature—Dionysos continued to arrive and arrive again, thus, his presence and appearance was often disorienting and doubled.

Lastly, Dionysos was considered a god who was constantly arriving because of his role as an ever-present god. Ovid recognized that “there is no god more present than Dionysos” (*Ov. Met.* 3.658-9). In the *Bacchae*, Dionysos makes “himself manifest” through his actions as both a character in the play and a director of the stage (Foley 1985, 219). Seaford argues that Dionysos was a god “most manifest, or most given to epiphany” (Seaford 2006, 39). In other words, Dionysos’ divine arrival and presence was felt very strongly and physically. This physical presence in tragedy can be seen in Dionysian worship and, more specifically, Dionysian possession. In civic worship, Dionysos was very present—the opening of the *pithoi* during the *Anthesteria* symbolized Dionysos’ arrival into the *polis* (Maurizio 2001, 29). He was present in the *polis* during processions and as the Basileus himself, who represented the god.

In orgiastic worship, Dionysos was present as a possessing spirit who established an intimate relationship with his participants. Lambek supports this claim, stating that “spirit possession has to do with intimate relationships” (Lambek 1998, 104). It was during these intense moments of physicality and intimacy in possession that a longer lasting relationship between spirit and participant was established. “Between such moments of manifest possession,

a long-term relationship between host and spirit continues to be recognized and is marked by such things as the attribution of particular dreams or illnesses to the spirit and by certain actions” (Lambek 1998, 104). This type of relationship was very apparent in Dionysian possession.

Although Dionysian possession was an intimate and individualistic relationship with the god, it was also, paradoxically a breaking down of the individual self and an exploration of communality. Dionysos was accessible to everyone and considered “a god of the people” (Dodds 1951, 76). During possession, Dionysos broke down “individual self-containment and may replace it with a sense of wholeness” (Seaford 2006, 2006). This sense of wholeness comes from the collective identity formed with an orgiastic group. “Possession appears to collapse at least temporarily the defining other—the spirit’s carrier—by which the other is constituted in a dialectic of identity formation” (Crapanzano 1976, 19). An individualistic identity dissolved during spirit possession and gave into Dionysos’ identity and also the larger identity of the orgiastic group.

Within the Greek Barbarian paradox, Dionysian worship was in opposition as both individual and collective. Remember that the orgiastic groups were specifically individualistic (Burkert 1987, 52) yet, in Dionysiac performance and ritual “the individuality of personal identity gives way to fusion” (Segal 1982, 13). Possession by Dionysos was a deeply personal and intimate experience (Eur. *Bacch.* 470). The ancient orgiastic groups were a “personal... form of religion” (Burkert 1987, 87) and joining a group was “a matter of individual decision” (Burkert 1987, 44). Yet the Dionysiac experience was “collective or congregational... and is so far from being a rare gift that it is highly infectious” (Dodds 1951, 69). Thus, Dionysos was both Greek and Barbarian, individualistic and collectively-based. The boundaries between self and other dissolved in his presence. The *Bacchae* “contributes to knowledge of the other and to an

understanding of what constitutes a positive relationship with that other. Such a response initiates a dialogue between self and other which promises to be a liberating experience for them both” (Danforth 1989, 305). As a Greek and Barbarian, Dionysos collapsed the space between self and other for his participants.

This paradox of Dionysos as a god who was constantly arriving, establishing an intimate yet communal relationship with participants, speaks to the participants’ belief in Dionysos’ ability to mediate between self and other. He did this by temporarily dissolving the boundary between conscious and unconscious in possession rites. Ancient Greek terms for spirit possession included *entheos*, implying that a god is in the body, which was related to *pleres theou*, “filled with the god” (Maurizio 1993, 76). When a participant was “filled with” Dionysos, there was an obvious collapse of boundaries between self and other, conscious and unconscious. The Greek conception of ecstasy simply meant an altered state. It “can refer to an abrupt change of mind and indicates that one does not quite seem to be one’s self. That is, it does not indicate that the soul has left the body... but that the person has abandoned his usual way” (Maurizio 1993, 76). I argue that in Dionysian possession, the soul did not leave the body, but the conscious self did and was replaced by the unconscious self.

A participant was conscious during their day to day. The conscious self worked within the *polis* and adhered to every day societal norms. Consciousness could thus be symbolically equated to the geographical center. But during possession rites, Dionysos entered into the participant’s body and altered their mind. At this moment, the participant’s conscious self stepped outside the body and the unconscious self became visible because of Dionysos’ physical presence inside the body. Consciousness was the geographical center within the mind whereas unconsciousness was the geographical periphery within the mind. Dionysos constantly crossed

the boundaries between center and periphery in geographical place. In turn, during possession, participants stepped outside of the geographical center of their minds (consciousness) into the geographical periphery of their minds (unconsciousness). The geography of place works as a metaphor for the geography of mind here.

Lambek considers a mind-body dualism in the context of spirit possession by considering the body and mind in the mind versus the body and mind in the body. He argues that mind body dualism was transcended in some form or another by every culture though it was manifested in different ways. The ways in which mind and body interact in cultures

“speak to fundamental tensions of human experience: connection to and separation from others, the boundary between the subjective and the objective, the relation of concepts to objects, or reason to sensation, experiences of the voluntary and the involuntary, morality and desire, being and becoming, active and passive, male and female, the transient and the enduring, culture and nature, life and death”

(Lambek 1998, 107)

The concepts, constructions, and emotions ascribed to mind versus body shift and blend during spirit possession. During this event “the fact that two persons are thought to share the same body complicates the way the body personalizes” (Lambek 1998, 108). Dionysos as a possessing spirit, thus challenged the ancient Greek conceptions of individuality by putting himself in a participant’s body. During this experience, they shared their body with a foreign other, and their mind became altered by the deity’s presence—Dionysos gave participants the mind they should have, based on Euripides’ language (Eur. *Bacch.* 948). The space between mind and body and, in turn, conscious and unconscious collapsed in this way.

Within this collapse of self was a dangerous instability. Dionysian worship was in violation of the balance which was so important to Greek identity—“to the Greeks, being human

meant behaving in accordance with their own understanding of what was considered normal in relation to gods and beasts... This meant that the mores of the barbarians could be either superior or inferior, but they would never reflect the ideal balance, which, to the Greeks, signified a proper human state” (Endsjø 2008, 16). But Dionysian possession opposed balance—the god could inspire joy or madness, release or, in Pentheus’ case, death. The *Bacchae* was “a drama of extreme ambivalence, and nowhere is love more confused with devouring rage, lust with destruction” (Simon 1978, 114). Dionysos was believed to have blurred the boundaries between these extreme oppositions.

The practice associated with the ecstatic worship of Dionysos “opens into the unknown, the boundless, the wild realms beyond the ordered framework of the city-state, the places where the individual, surrendering too much to that joy, may lose himself entirely” (Segal 1982, 9). These realms were beyond the self and the *polis*. The transcendence of the conscious-unconscious dichotomy is symbolic of the movement from the *polis* to the mountains. In walking through the gates and into the mountains, participants stepped beyond the conscious self and into the unconscious self, when a foreign other (Dionysos) entered them. By crossing that physical boundary from inside to outside the *polis*, the participant crossed the boundary from inside to outside the self.

Dionysos could bring about joy or madness, but never control and balance—the results of his possession were unpredictable and always extreme. He was “the cause of madness and the liberator from madness” (Dodds 1951, 273). In the *Bacchae*, Teiresias says to Pentheus “you are behaving madly in the most painful way, and would get a cure for your illness neither with drugs nor without them” (Eur. *Bacch.* 326-327). Resisting Dionysos, as Pentheus did at the start of the *Bacchae*, caused *mania* “madness,” yet embracing Dionysos, as Pentheus did at the end of the

play, also caused *mania*. It was just a matter of whether or not that madness was positive or negative. “Dionysiac madness is a good thing, but Pentheus’ painful madness in resisting Dionysos must be quite different” (Seaford 1996, 179, footnote 326). In this way, Dionysos was two sides of the same coin. He was the ambivalent god—joy or death, god or beast, he could bring about one or the other amongst humans, but rarely was he relied upon to find the happy medium between the two.

When participants looked at Dionysos, they saw themselves or at least a part of themselves. This is supported by the doubled nature of Dionysos and the use of mirrors in ritual, mentioned above. “Face to face” with the god during possession, participants saw their potential for joy, but they also saw their potential for destruction. They saw the civilized self and the foreign other, the conscious and the unconscious. Thus, participants explored Dionysos’ multiple facets as a Greek and as a Barbarian with the ultimate goal of understanding the mediations between self and other that existed within themselves. Spirit possession was “a system or function of cultural communication” (Lambek 1989, 37) Thus, participants’ intimate and personal experience with the god was a reflection of the complex aspects of their own identities. The spirit idiom in possession rites “provides people with a means for self-articulation and a vehicle for making statements to others about themselves and their experiences” (Danforth 1989, 59). Dionysos was the vehicle for this self-exploration.

In stepping outside of themselves, participants were able to better understand themselves. Dionysos was the idiom they used to do this. In this way, during possession, participants mediated between self and other. Note that spirit possession as a phenomenon “blurs the lines between... being and not being, self and other” (Dernbach 2005, 110). Dionysian possession was no different— “we take from the god what we bring to him. He reflects back upon us the

destructiveness or the creativeness hidden deep in our own natures, our capacity both for ecstasy and for annihilation of self and others, both joyful self-affirmation and tragic disintegration” (Segal 1982, 19). He had the ability to strip away constructions and show a participant what their true potential was. He had the capacity as a savior or a destroyer only because of his participants’ own capacities within themselves. Dionysos gave them the power that they had all along.

Although participants saw themselves in Dionysos, he was still made other as a foreign deity. The ancient Greek distancing of Dionysos is a reflection of their attempt to distance or remove themselves from the foreign or indefinable parts of their own identities. In spirit possession “the locus of the problem is situated outside the individual, and responsibility is attributed to an external spiritual agent” (Danforth 1989, 61). During possession, participants believed that Dionysos was responsible for their actions and they had no control over what they did. This was a temporary freedom from their normal responsibilities.

As the *Lusios* “the Liberator,” Dionysos “enables you for a short time to stop being yourself, and thereby sets you free” (Dodds 1951, 76). If participants believed that temporarily not being themselves was a form of liberation, it may suggest that there were parts of themselves they wanted to distance their conscious selves from. Also, if participants believed that during possession rites, when their unconscious self was brought to the surface and the god was inside of them, they did not believe that that was themselves. Rather, their conscious self did not recognize their unconscious self as a part of their identity.

To make a version of the self other suggests that there was a fear or threat lying in, not necessarily Dionysos, but rather the self and the other within a participant. In the *Bacchae*, “the revealed truth is that the denied god, the outsider, the alien, has belonged inside all along” (Hall

2010, 294). Dionysos belonged inside in the geographical sense (he was undeniably Greek), the physical sense (he was literally inside participants during possession), and in the sense of identity—Dionysos represented the disruptive and “other” qualities of a Greek person’s own identity. Dodds argues that Dionysiac ritual “purged the individual of those infectious irrational impulses which, dammed up, had given rise, as they have done in other cultures, to outbreaks of dancing mania and similar manifestations of collective hysteria; it relieved them by providing them with a ritual outlet” (Dodds 1951, 76). His worship was “an irresistible craving” (Dodds 1951, 77). Crapanzano adds that “spirit possession may symbolize a magical route of escape from the burden of responsibility.” Dionysos, as the Liberator, thus offered a temporary escape from societal norms and an outlet for socially unacceptable behavior. Even during these moments of ecstasy, participants still distanced their conscious self from their unconscious self by making Dionysos and their possessed selves other.

Dionysos was a Greek god who was constantly projected away from the Greek center and self. This was partially because Dionysian possession elicited an emotional and, at times, disturbing experience in which self and other, conscious and unconscious blurred and inverted. Fearing this, Dionysos was simultaneously distanced from the center of the geographical place and mind, yet also embraced to the very center of self and *polis*. Geertz’s opening quote on chaos and interpretability speaks to this paradoxical inversion of self and other. Participants believed that in Dionysian possession, boundaries collapsed, and this state was beyond their own capability or understanding. Yet it was these very people who constructed this state of being. In one sense, Dionysian possession was chaotic and impossible to interpret, according to his participants. In another sense, it was entirely within the interpreting capacities of his own worshippers.

Conclusion

Dionysian possession was a means to self-exploration through a process of ritual mediation. Participants developed a long-term and intimate relationship with Dionysos that extended into the afterlife. The reciprocity of the relationship was built on participants giving themselves to Dionysos in possession and Dionysos giving himself back. He was an ever-present god who gave his participants the joy, ecstasy and bliss that was rooted in his own divine status. But there was an changeability to the worship of Dionysos. As we have seen, in some cases, the reciprocity and intimacy of self-exploration and a “blissful afterlife” could also be a disruptive and painful experience, leading to death in Pentheus’ case.

Dionysos simultaneously occupied the space between animal, human and divine at all times. He was the “bull-horned god” who often took mortal shape and was the son of the mortal princess, Semele. His participants explored the non-human realms in possession rites as a way to grow closer to the god. They were only able to permanently gain a divine status upon their death and entrance into the afterlife. Through *sparagmos*, *omophagia*, and dressing in animal skins, participants were able to embody the god’s animal qualities. Participants further interacted with the animal world through distortions of nursing by nursing animals or nursing from animals.

Milk, blood and wine, were all liquids integral to the worship of Dionysos. Semen and honey are also notable liquids to discuss but due to time constraints, they were not my focus. Regardless, all of these liquids were mediators, metonyms, or symbols that, at times, brought participants closer to the god, if used correctly. Although only briefly discussed in Chapter Four, the colors of these liquids are deeply significant. As mentioned, wine and blood are red which according to Turner represents “discontinuity” and “strength acquired through breach of certain

rules” (Turner 1967, 58). In turn, milk is white, a color that represents “the entire moral order plus the fruits of virtue; health, strength, fertility” etc. and whiteness “differs from redness in that it stresses harmony, cohesion, and continuity” (Turner 1967, 57). In orgiastic rites, milk was used as a method of growing closer to the god and had specifically gendered components due to its symbolization of fertility and caregiving. In the *Bacchae*, milk was only seen as a liquid during the positive ecstasy that the Theban women experienced. And in the death tablets, “falling into milk” was a reference to joy and bliss. Thus milk, blood and wine as white and red liquids respectively, adhered to Turner’s color triad theory.

Ancient Greek weddings and funerals are metaphors for possession. They were all methods of growing closer to the divine and held many structural similarities. These similarities reveal the underlying emphasis on gender, pollution, sexuality and death in ancient Greek culture. Women were considered more “liquid” than men in ancient Greece, according to Carson, and thus had more potential for pollution. Their proximity to the boundless and the polluted was related to their involvement with death, sex, and possession. All three acts were extreme, heightened states that involved a loss of control or journey, and, above all, a liminal state.

Rites of passage brought about transitions from one stage of life to the next in three stages—separation, margin (liminal) and aggregation (Turner 1967, 94). During marginality or liminality, the “state of the ritual subject... is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner 1967, 94). The bride (and groom), the deceased, and the possessed participant all experienced disorienting states that were unlike their previous identities (virgin, alive, or not possessed) and also unlike the state they would enter (married, dead, or not possessed). Dionysian possession was a liminal state that was repeated throughout a participant’s life. But to relate Dionysos himself to liminality would

simplify his complex and constant interactions with the many states and categories he occupied. Regardless, weddings and funerals were not only metaphors for possession, but also rites of passage.

As opposed to structural anthropology, non-representational theory is a different method of interpreting Dionysian worship. This theory focuses on “the fleeting, viscous, lively, embodied, material, more-than-human, precognitive, non-discursive dimensions of spatially and temporally complex lifeworlds” (Vannini 2015, 318). The theory incorporates weak theory, the “theory that comes unstuck from its own line of thought to follow the objects it encounters” (Stewart 2008, 72). Non-representational theorists consider “tangles of associations, accrued layers of impact and reaction” (Stewart 2008, 72). Anzaldúa steps away from categorization and notes that “living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an ‘alien’ element” (Anzaldúa 1999, preface).

Despite the fact that non-representational theorists are potentially critical of structuralism, I argue that these theories could work together in the analysis of Dionysian worship. In my thesis, structuralism was a method for interpreting the meaning behind the categories put in place by the ancient Greeks. Dionysos was the mediator between these categories. Structuralism helped to comprehend the seemingly strict dichotomies constructed in ancient Greek culture, and the ways in which these dichotomies were questioned and challenged in everyday life, such as the worship of Dionysos. Non-representational theory breaks down these ancient Greek categories all together and investigates the subtleties and issues behind the labels. These two theories are simply different methods for interpreting Dionysian worship.

Anzaldua considers the geographical in between of two defined places, and what it is like to live in that borderland. “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa 1999, 3). In ancient Greek culture, Greece was considered safe while Barbarian lands were unsafe. Greeks were “us” and Barbarians were “them.” In turn, during possession when these “self” and “other” distinctions temporarily dissolved, participants operated within the borderland. Their identities were vague, undetermined, and in a state of transition.

Spirit possession raises questions for all human beings about “the sources of human agency, or the relationship between action and passion, or autonomy and connection, in selfhood” (Lambek 1989, 104). This is why I am drawn to spirit possession in the orgiastic worship of Dionysos. Dionysos embodied the oppositions, contradictions and gaps that ancient Greek society grappled with. For all the pain and chaos he caused, he forced humans to face what was often times ineffable within the limits of what was socially acceptable at that time. He challenged societal norms, and the lines that people drew and constructed in the every day. In a modern lens, he challenged the categorization that subjugates and oppresses people who have been labeled as other. I argue that Dionysos is still relevant because of the ways in which he challenged, redefined, and shook culture to its core. And yet he did all of this within a culturally constructed framework in and of itself, because he was constructed by the very people he was challenging, creating yet another paradox.

In ancient Greece, Dionysos was a means of self-articulation and expression. He helped ancient Greek worshippers grapple with restrictive binaries involving, gender, mortality, and

identity. He was a means of release, liberation, and ecstasy. In his presence, participants believed they were able to temporarily dissolve boundaries, step outside of themselves, and look inwards. Today, people still grapple with the same themes that the ancient Greeks were grappling with. Members of many cultures continue to question and temporarily step outside of the very categories that they constructed. In ancient Greece, Dionysos was the way in which people could question these categories. Today, this exploration no longer uses Dionysos, but it serves the same purpose that the god did two thousand years ago.

Bibliography

- Alexiou, Margaret. 2002. *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Edited by Dimitrios Yatromanolakis and Panagiotis Roilos. Second ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1999. *Borderlands: La Frontera*. Second ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Barth, Fredrik. 1969. "Introduction." In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, edited by Fredrik Barth. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Beazley. 2019. "Beazley Archive Pottery Database." Oxford University Press.
- Boddy, Janice. 1994. "Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1):407-434.
- Bowden, Hugh. 2010. *Mystery cults of the ancient world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bremmer, Jan N. 2014. *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*. Vol. Bd. 1. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Burkert, Walter. 1987. *Ancient mystery cults*. Vol. 1982. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Caballero, Silvia Porres. 2013. "Maenadic Ecstasy in Greece: Fact or Fiction." In *Redefining Dionysos*, edited by Alberto Bernabé Pajares, Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, Jiménez San Cristóbal, Ana Isabel and Raquel Martín Hernández. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Carson, Anne. 1990. "Putting Her in Her Place: Woman and Dirt." In *Before Sexuality: the Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, edited by David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Cartledge, Paul. 1993. *The Greeks: a Portrait of Self and Others*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Casadio, Giovanni, and Patricia A. Johnston. 2009. *Mystic cults in Magna Graecia*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Christodoulou, Niovi. 2014. "Dionysian Religion: A Study of the Worship of Dionysos in Ancient Greece and Rome." Classics, Philology, University of Patras.
- Clarke, Simon. 1981. *The Foundations of Structuralism: a Critique of Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralist Movement*. Totowa, N.J.;Brighton, Sussex;: Harvester Press.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1976. "Introduction." In *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*, edited by Vincent Crapanzano and Vivian Garrison. New York: Wiley.
- Danforth, Loring M. 1982. *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Danforth, Loring M. 1989. *Firewalking and Religious Healing: the Anastenaria of Greece and the American Firewalking Movement*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

- Dernbach, Katherine Boris. 2005. "Spirits of the Hereafter: Death, Funerary Possession, and the Afterlife in Chuuk, Micronesia." *Ethnology* 44 (2):99.
- Detienne, Marcel. 1979. *Dionysos Slain*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dodds, E. R. 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Vol. 25. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dodds, E. R. 1960. "Introduction." In *Euripides' Bacchae*, edited by E. R. Dodds. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Endsjø, D. Ø. 2008. "The Queer Periphery: Sexual Deviancy and the Cultural Understanding of Space." *Journal of Homosexuality* 54 (1-2):9-20. doi: 10.1080/00918360801951939.
- Faraone, Christopher A. 2013. "Gender Differentiation and Role Models in the Worship of Dionysos: The Thracian and Thessalian Pattern." In *Redefining Dionysos*, edited by Alberto Bernabé Pajares, Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, Jiménez San Cristóbal, Ana Isabel and Raquel Martín Hernández. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Flower, Michael Attyah. 2008. *The Seer in Ancient Greece*. 1 ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foley, Helene P. 1985. *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
- Frazer, James George. 1890. *The golden bough*. Abridg ed. New York: The Macmillan company.
- Geertz, Clifford. 2000. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. 2000 ed. New York: Basic Books.
- Gernet, Louis. 1981. *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Girard, René. 1979. *Violence and the Sacred*. Johns Hopkins paperback ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Goff, Barbara E. 2004. *Citizen Bacchae: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Graf, Fritz, and Sarah Iles Johnston. 2013. *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*. Second ed. London: Routledge.
- Graf, Frtiz. 2013a. "Dionysiac Mystery Cults and the Gold Tablets." In *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, edited by Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston. London: Routledge.
- Graf, Frtiz. 2013b. "A History of Scholarship on the Tablets." In *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, edited by Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston. London: Routledge.
- Graf, Frtiz. 2013c. "The Tablets: An Edition and Translation." In *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, edited by Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston. London: Routledge.

- Guía, Miriam Valdés. 2013. "Redefining Dionysos in Athens from the Written Sources: The Lenaia, Iacchos and Attic Women." In *Redefining Dionysos*, edited by Alberto Bernabé Pajares, Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, Jiménez San Cristóbal, Ana Isabel and Raquel Martín Hernández. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Hall, Edith. 2010. *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Henrichs, Albert. 1982. "Self-definition in the Graeco-Roman world." In *Changing Dionysiac identities*, edited by Albert Henrichs, 137 - 160. London: SCM.
- Henrichs, Albert. 1990. *Between City and Country: Cultic Dimensions of Dionysus in Athens and Attica*. University of California
- Johnston, Sarah Iles. 2013. "The Eschatology Behind the Tablets." In *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, edited by Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston. London: Routledge.
- Kalke, Christine M. 1985. "The Making of a Thyrsus: The Transformation of Pentheus in Euripides' "Bacchae"." *American Journal of Philology* 106:409.
- Karoglou, Kiki. 2013. "Mystery Cults in the Greek and Roman World." Department of Greek and Roman Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Keesing, Roger M. 1975. *Kin groups and social structure*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Kraemer, Ross Shepard. 1992. *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lambek, Michael. 1989. "From Disease to Discourse: Remarks on the Conceptualization of Trance and Spirit Possession." In *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health: a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Colleen A. Ward. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Lambek, Michael. 1998. "Body and Mind in Mind, Body and Mind in Body: Some Anthropological Interventions in a Long Conversation." In *Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia*, edited by Michael Lambek and Andrew Strathern, 103 - 125. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Leach, E.R. 1977. "Introduction." In *Myth and Cosmos: Readings in Mythology and Symbolism*, edited by John Middleton. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1977. "Four Winnebago Myths: A Structural Sketch." In *Myth and Cosmos: Readings in Mythology and Symbolism*, edited by John Middleton. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. *Structural anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969. *The Raw and the Cooked*. First U.S. ed. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lewis, I. M. 1966. "Spirit Possession and Deprivation Cults." *Man* 1 (3):307-329. doi: 10.2307/2796794.

- Lewis, I. M. 1978. *Ecstatic Religion: an Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Liddell, Henry, and Robert Scott. 1940. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Malkin, Irad. 2001. "Introduction." In *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*, edited by Irad Malkin. Cambridge: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University.
- Maurizio, Lisa. 1993. "Delphic Narratives: Recontextualizing the Pythia and her Prophecies." Princeton University (Dissertation).
- Maurizio, Lisa. 2001. "Performance, Hysteria, and Democratic Identities in the Anthesteria." *Helios* 28 (1):29.
- Métraux, Alfred. 1959. *Voodoo in Haiti*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Middleton, John. 1977. "Some Social Aspects of Lugbara Myth." In *Myth and Cosmos: Readings in Mythology and Symbolism*, edited by John Middleton. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1872. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Edited by Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nilsson, Martin P. 1957. *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman age*. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup.
- Oakley, John Howard, and Rebecca H. Sinos. 1993. *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Oesterreich, T. K. 1929. "Das Problem der räumlichen und zeitlichen Kontiguität von Ursache und Wirkung." *Kant-Studien* 34 (1-4):125-131. doi: 10.1515/kant.1929.34.1-4.125.
- Otto, Walter Friedrich. 1965. *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Parke, H. W. 1977. *Festivals of the Athenians*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Rohde, Erwin. 1950. *Psyche: the Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks*. Edited by William Bernard Hillis. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Saïd, Suzanne. 2001. "The Discourse of Identity in Greek Rhetoric from isocrates to Aristides." In *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*, edited by Irad Malkin. Cambridge: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University.
- Sanders, Ed. 2013. *Erôs and the polis: love in context*. Vol. 119. London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London.
- Sapir, J. David, and Jon Christopher Crocker. 1977. *The Social use of metaphor: essays on the anthropology of rhetoric*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Schlesier, Renate. 2011. "A Different God?: Dionysos and Ancient Polytheism." Berlin.

- Schmidt, Bettina E., and Lucy Huskinson. 2010. "Introduction." In *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Bettina E. Schmidt and Lucy Huskinson. London; New York;: Continuum.
- Seaford, Richard. 1981. "Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries." *The Classical Quarterly* 31 (2):252-275. doi: 10.1017/S0009838800009575.
- Seaford, Richard. 1996. Euripides' *Bacchae*. edited by Richard Seaford. Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips.
- Seaford, Richard. 1998. "In the Mirror of Dionysos." In *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, edited by Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson. London: Routledge.
- Seaford, Richard. 2006. *Dionysos*. London: Routledge.
- Segal, Charles. 1982. *Dionysiac poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Simon, Bennett. 1978. *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: the Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
- Simon, Erika. 1983. *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Stears, Karen. 1998. "Death Becomes Her: Gender and Athenian Death Ritual." In *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, edited by Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson. London: Routledge.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2008. "Weak Theory in an Unfinished World." *Journal of Folklore Research* 45 (1):71.
- Storm, William. 1998. *After Dionysus: a Theory of the Tragic*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, Victor W. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vannini, Phillip. 2015. "Non-Representational Ethnography: New Ways of Animating Lifeworlds." *Cultural Geographies* 22 (2):317-327. doi: 10.1177/1474474014555657.
- Zeitlin, Froma I. 1996. *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.