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Katharsis & Tragic Pathos

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By

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Table of Contents

"It took no computation to dance to the rock and roll station, and it was all right."

-The Velvet Underground, *Rock and Roll*

I. *Introduction*

The purpose of this essay is to encourage students and critics of Greek drama to pay more attention to tragic *pathos,*[1] and the *katharsis*[2] they arouse. These are subjects in which classical understanding faces a deficit. Lack of evidence has made progress difficult, but this is not sufficient reason to turn away from examining what must have been a vital aspect of the original production of these plays. It has been commonplace for some time now to factor in the extra-textual elements of the plays. In doing so, there is constant reminder that the tragedies were composed for a live *performance* in competition, and that this was held at the annual Great Dionysia, in honor of the god Dionysos. Despite the emotional power of live musical and theatrical performance, relatively little attention has been given by the classical community to understanding in what way and by what means these performances have emotionally affected the audiences that have encountered them, both within and without performance, over the last two and a half millennia.

A common feature of recent criticism on tragedy is a focus on political rhetoric, civic ideology, and norms in social behavior determined by the citizens' new position in the democratic *polis*. Scholarship mostly focuses on the literary, cognitive side of tragedy. Taking into account the nature of what is left of these plays – literary remains, the impulse to direct attention here is understandable. It seems though, that by taking a more purely rational approach, scholarship fails on many occasions to account for the basic reason for the lasting popularity of these plays. Bertrand Russell gives an accurate depiction of the Greeks of the 5th century when

[1] Emotions.
[2] *Katharsis* is the purging of emotions or relieving of emotional tensions, especially through art.

he says, "[they were] driven along one road by the intellect and simultaneously along another by their passions." [3] He claims that it was this combination of intellect and passion that made them great, while they were great. Moreover, Aristotle in *Poetics* defines tragedy specifically as having an emotional purpose.[4] There is no shortage of evidence from ancient critics, nor a lack of modern understanding of ancient audiences' propensity for *pathos*. Tragedy extends beyond the purely rational in a similar way to Russell's description of the Greeks. Drama affects not only what the audience thinks, but also what they feel. The emotional *katharsis* is not the totality of the tragic experience, but it is the key function. The importance of *katharsis* will be further illustrated in connection to Dionysos and tragedy, by means of its mutual participation in *coincidentia oppositorum*. [5]

There has been a great deal of interest in Dionysos over the last 150 years, especially since the 1970s. And, it is with Dionysos that this inquiry properly begins. When looking into the figure of the god, it soon becomes clear that he is embodied by constant duality. Evidence for Dionysos comes from ancient representation of the god and his cult in mythology, art and iconography. The logic of *coincidentia oppositorum,* characteristic of tragedy, is mirrored within the entity in whose image the genre was created. The *coincidentia* is shown, in the character of Dionysos, by his drawing out into various alternate categories; and it is shown in tragedy, by the conflictual nature of its form and general composition.

After expressing similarities between Dionysos and tragedy, primarily by the exposition of their common embodiment of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the question is raised of the role and importance of *katharsis*, the characteristic affect of the tragic god. There is evidence from

[3] Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* p. 21.
[4] "Tragedy is a *mimesis* of a serious and complete action, having magnitude, which through pity and fear brings about a *katharsis* of such emotions." Aristotle *Poetics* 1449b.
[5] Coincidence of opposites.

ancient criticism, which gives priority of place to *katharsis* and its importance within the realm of the tragic spectacle. What is particularly interesting about the subjects here is that, at the present moment, contemporary science is becoming able to empirically account for *pathos* and *katharsis* in response to aesthetic experience. As a result of the subjective nature of these elements, an argument for their importance within tragedy cannot be fully emphasized by a purely classical account. It is for this reason that my project must take a multi-disciplinary approach, also taking into consideration recent insights in philosophical aesthetics and neuroscience, in order to fully convey the potential for tragedy to arouse emotions and effect *katharsis* within or without performance.

Before beginning the discussion of Dionysos, it is first necessary to say a few words about the history of the philological tradition, in order to situate the historical context and critical climate into which this project will be introduced. Philology is a discipline with a long history. It began in the Egyptian city of Alexandria near the turn of the 3rd century B.C.E. with scholars at the famous library there. They are responsible for creating a collection of what they felt to be the most important manuscripts available in the ancient world. Their archival work is largely responsible for many of the antique authors whose work is still extant today. Aside from compiling these works, the scholars' job was to keep them alive, copying them so that more volumes may exist, and replacing those that had worn out. In addition to copying of the original text, the manuscript tradition also consisted of providing commentary, the purpose of which was to give notes on things such as difficult grammar and contextual information. That is, to make the clarifications necessary for the reader to get a sense of what the author originally intended. Meaning inevitably gets muddied, and each new copy made by hand increases potential infidelity

to the original. Philologists used both synchronic and diachronic[6] inspection of the texts in order to spot these problematic sections, and the resolving of spelling mistakes and later interpolation was a large part of their job. The critical edition includes an *apparatus criticus,* in which the philologist notes appearances of variations in other copies of the manuscript, places where alternate words or spellings have been used. With such an overwhelming task in terms of textual restoration, preservation and the production of sufficient commentary, works in classical philology tend to be long and dense. And, although these methods are applied to a wide range of literary genres and styles, they are bound to be more suitable for some than others.

Philology enjoyed an unprecedented new position of privilege in 19th century German universities. The classics were regarded with such an air of cultural importance that formal understanding was taken to new heights. It was in Germany in 1872 that literary criticism is first introduced into philology. This was in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy From the Spirit of Music*, the book, which created the field Simon Goldhill refers to as 'modern classics'.[7] With this development, the classics were opened up to many new approaches and interpretations, which stretch far beyond the means that were previously thought to have been available. The critic is no longer provided only with what classical learning can say about the text, but what trends in intellectual critical thought, philosophy, etc. can say as well. Works in this new field, like Nietzsche's, can be very short and often leave as many questions open as they answer.

The Birth of Tragedy itself is a strange fusing of philology with philosophy, in which Nietzsche, by reducing tragedy to the ever-opposing duality of the Apollonian and Dionysian, attempts to account for its mysterious origin (as well as its decline). The Apollonian impulse

[6] Synchronic analysis inspects linguistic phenomena within a fixed period of time. Diachronic on the other hand looks to compare and contrast use in different periods.
[7] Goldhill (1997) p. 327.

consists of imagery, form and purity. It is represented in the art of sculpture[8] and other visual arts. In music, the Apollonian are forms of poetry such as Epic and Lyric.[9] The Dionysian impulse consists of abstract feeling, the formless and plurality;[10] and the characteristic Dionysian genre prior to tragedy was dithyramb.[11] Nietzsche sees the totality of Greek poetry prior to tragedy embodied by one of these two impulses. Because the Apollonian and Dionysian culminate in tragedy, he frames this as the greatest expression of the Greek poetic genius. He likens the dependence that tragedy has on this opposition to that which procreation has on the duality of the sexes, "involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations".[12] At the most general level, Nietzsche saw the Apollonian and Dionysian *coincidentia oppositorum* present within the form of tragedy: Dionysian choral music complemented by the Apollonian dialogue of the actor. What is important is that the *coincidentia oppositorum* of tragedy is not a conflict of subjects or themes, but of the elements that constitute the genre.

It was his radical new conclusions (as well as irregular scholarly methods) that created a distance between Nietzsche and the philological community. This is most notable in the publication of a review by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's. This was a polemical pamphlet entitled *Philology of the Future! A reply to Friedrich Nietzsche's "Birth of Tragedy"*. It was an all out rejection of Nietzsche's work, which "in twenty-eight breathless pages

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[8] Nietzsche, Section 1.
[9] Apollo, like Dionysos, is a musical god. However, it is the music of the Dionysian *aulos* that finds a voice in tragedy, not the Apollonian lyre. Likewise, the chorus that sings the music is a Dionysian feature, structurally similar to the chorus that performed the dithyramb. Apollonian music was characterized by the performance of a single singer, like the epic bard.
[10] Nietzsche, Section 1.
[11] Choral song performed in honor of Dionysos at his festivals - invented in Corinth ca. 600 B.C.E. *Oxford Classical Dictionary* p. 291.
[12] Nietzsche, Section 1.

attempted a total demolition of [his] book and its author's classical credentials".[13] Wilamowitz disagreed with Nietzsche at every turn. He disliked the book's tone and style among other things, but his greatest objection was to its lack of scholarship. Nietzsche's book contained few of the citations one commonly expects to find in a scholarly piece of writing. Wilamowitz charges Nietzsche of attempting to argue his views not by means of evidence but by some sort of intuition, which he believes to be due to the fact that Nietzsche has no supporting evidence to back his claims.

In the time since this dispute, the two fields have merged into one. The use of literary criticism was retained, but it is now typically supplemented with footnotes and other evidence that was lacking in *The Birth of Tragedy.* Also, recent classicism has come to regard this book more highly than it has in the past, despite its defects. It was a very important work mainly for two reasons. Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* is the first to articulate the operation of tragedy in respect to the *coincidentia oppositorum*. The other most important aspect is that *The Birth of Tragedy,* in its 19th century romantic style, is the first to consider tragic *pathos* as being of considerable importance to the classicist dealing with tragedy. Nietzsche considered *katharsis* in many ways to be the purpose of tragedy, and describes his conception of it at length. This lays the groundwork for the projects undertaken in the 20th and 21st centuries, which are discussed in the following chapter.

II. *Discourse Community*

It is with *The Birth of Tragedy* that the lineage of this project begins. It is Nietzsche who is responsible for the popularization of the elusive god, Dionysos as a figure in the imagination

[13] M.S. Silk & J.P. Stern (1981) p. 95. For a full account of the dispute between Nietzsche and Wilamowitz see Silk & Stern pp. 90-107.

of Greek scholars contemplating tragedy. Prior to the inception of literary criticism, the contextual importance of the patron deity of the tragic festival had not been widely considered. But, ever since, Dionysos has been the most prominent deity in the mind of Greek scholars dealing with tragedy.[14] Along with interest in Dionysos, inquiries into the context within which the tragedies were performed, as a feature of the religious festival of the Great Dionysia, have yielded significant results. The context of the festival has also urged classicists to come to regard these plays as pieces intended for live *performance.*[15] Looking at the festival itself, many ways in which the nature of tragedy mirrors the personality and character of Dionysos become apparent,[16] and by investigating the god in whose image the festival was created, much has been learned about its most highly complex feature, tragedy.

With Dionysos having so long ago been stripped of his music and dance (likely the most emotive tragic elements), it is understandable that these features would not be at the forefront of many scholars' thoughts on tragedy. It is also very true that with how little evidence has been handed down for either (only a few fragments of musical notation and no choreography) it is difficult to do much. Everyone understands that Greek tragedy featured song and dance, but the magnitude of its impact on the whole of the tragic experience seems often neglected. This is partially inherent in our field of study as the manuscript tradition was concerned with preserving literary content. Philologists were only concerned with the text for thousands of years, so many today still are. Besides, consider the way Greek students are trained. The main building blocks of

[14] See, beginning of Easterling (1997), Seaford Section 2 (1996), Goldhill (1997) p. 126.
[15] Regarding these pieces as having been composed for performance places greater importance on the role of *pathos,* as the potential emotional impact of live performance is greater than that of the alternative. The rise of opera during the Italian Renaissance was no doubt a result of the recognition of the advantage the live aesthetic experience possesses in emotionally affecting its audience, especially when song and dance are introduced.
[16] See Easterling (1997), Seaford (1996), J. P. Vernant "The Historical Moment of Tragedy in Greece: Some of the social and psychological conditions".

the education are acquisition of the language, and metrics is the only commonly covered area of *mousikē.*[17] This is just how it is; the text is what there is to work with, so it is what is used.[18] But the true shape of tragedy can be more fully embraced, even if it is only in the form of a simple reminder that there are artistic mediums that were at play here, which range beyond the literary. When the performative aspects are recalled, the music of the singing chorus and their dance in unison is remembered, as well as the *pathos*[19] they must have excited in the audience.

As was mentioned, the discourse begins with Nietzsche, and was furthered in the 20th century. In 1951 E. R. Dodds breathed new life into the subject with the publication of his work *The Greeks and the Irrational,* which drew heavily from the work of Nietzsche, although with a noticeable psychological and anthropological twist. Dodds points out that people tend to look back on the Greeks of the Golden Age in Athens as hyper-rational, especially in regard to the wave of philosophy and scientific understanding that swept the region in that period. Even their art has a distinctly rational quality and orderliness. Although as Dodds points out, this is a common modern view, he argues that these Greeks also had an equally present *irrationality* amongst their collective temperament, which arose partially from their propensity for passion.

Another major addition to this discourse comes in 1983 with William Stanford's publication of *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions: An Introductory Study.* It is in this work that Stanford teases out many of the ways in which tragedy can elicit emotion within and without performance. After enumerating the many different emotive factors, he moves on in the final section to an inspection of Aeschylus's *Oresteia,* in which his methods are put to work. His

[17] The Greek term is used here as it denotes more than our English cognate. In Greek it goes to mean any art over which the muses preside. This was especially poetry sung to music, but included music in general as well as visual art or letters. Definition from *LSJ*.
[18] With how ingrained this tendency is in classicism, the revelation of the importance of these dramas written for performance can be seen as a monumental breakthrough.
[19] Emotional response.

findings are that in the hands of the master dramatists, the spoken word alone had all of the intricacies of our modern day symphony, and that the possibilities are further expanded when consideration is broadened beyond the spoken word alone, into music, dance and the setting of the performances. He frames his book as an introductory study, a cursory glance at what can be done with this mode of inquiry, compelling others to follow up his work.[20]

Nicole Loraux takes the thread that begins with Nietzsche and hems in the other two authors mentioned above.[21] In her book, *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy* (2002) she argues that tragedy was an outlet for the Athenians' pent up grief. There was a ban put on public displays of mourning in Athens, but as a *polis* almost constantly engaged in war throughout the 5th century, the Golden Age of tragedy, there must have been an extreme amount of sadness in the hearts of the people. Loraux posits a decidedly *antipolitical* reading of tragedy, considering political rhetoric of significantly less importance than the emotions felt by the Athenians in the theatre. She returns time and again to the idea of the *coincidentia oppositorum,* claiming that it is the characteristic feature of Greek tragedy, by virtue of its sheer number of appearances.[22] In highlighting some of the ways in which tragedy operates in respect to the *coincidentia oppositorum* she suggests that tragic experience goes beyond the means of the linear dialectic of rhetoric and therefore has more content than the purely political. In a manner very reminiscent of Nietzsche, she claims that tragedy is made up of two eternally conflicting key elements – *logos* (dialogue) and *phonē* (noise and music).[23] This expands on the trope of

[20] Another important study on this subject emerged a few years later: Malcolm Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (1987).
[21] Loraux cites each of the authors described above in her work, as well as taking an epigraph from Nietzsche to begin each and every chapter of her book.
[22] Loraux (2002) p. 63.
[23] For Loraux, *logos* is analogous to the Nietzschean conception of 'Apollonian', and *phonē* to 'Dionysian'.

contrariness that was already briefly discussed. Between these constitutive elements of the genre, one Dionysian and the other Apollonian, the noise (*phonē*) of the music and the interjecting moans and groans gives tragedy a dimension beyond pure *logos*. She maintains that this discordance reduces the emphasis placed on the literary aspects alone, and should encourage us to view tragedy as concerned with, prior to all else, an emotional impact. By foregoing the typical political reading, she is able to arrive at a conclusion that is much more sensitive to the circumstances of the everyday Athenians that witnessed the tragic spectacle. She highlights the importance of the emotions for the average spectator and again reaching back to Nietzsche, emphasizes the role of *katharsis*. In doing so, she specifies that the theatregoer, upon feeling this *katharsis* "will arouse him to transcend his membership in the civic community and to comprehend his even more essential membership in the race of mortals."[24] [25]

Although this project is concerned with emotivism rather than politics, many works with an interest in the political have been very useful. Dionysos has been studied very frequently in connection with the *polis* and tragedy as civic instruction.[26] In fact, when turning to current scholarship on Dionysos, it is surprising to find an overwhelming tendency to politicize the spectacle of tragedy. These readings are characteristic of a prominent group of classicists that came on the scene in the 1970's. The political readings appear in work in fields ranging from social and political history to cultural and archaeological anthropology, and there is a large

[24] Loraux (2002) p. 93.
[25] Loraux harkens back to Nietzsche not only in the emphasis she places upon the *katharsis,* but also in her description of it as characterized by an overwhelming feeling of oneness. This oneness of the plurality is an early glimpse into one of the many *coincidentia* involved with *katharsis*.
[26] This is characteristic of many of the selections compiled in *Nothing To Do With Dionysos?* (1990) eds. John J. Winkler and Froma Zeitlin. This political bent is also predominant in other popular compiled editions over the last 25 years such as *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (1997) and *The Soul of Tragedy* (2005).

amount of citation across disciplines. These authors include John J. Winkler, Richard Seaford, Simon Goldhill, W. R. Connor, Oddone Longo, Christian Meyer, Jean-Paul Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Froma Zeitlin.

III. *Thesis*

When turning to the figure of Dionysos, there are many different features that become immediately apparent. One thing that all of the above authors strongly agree on is the multi-lateral view of his character. The principle of contrariness is a fundamental element of this, and it is his most important and distinctive quality. Dionysos is the god that shakes regularities and dissolves boundaries. He is rightly given dominion over the mimetic sphere, which the Greeks and many since have astutely perceived as operating by this same logic of contrariness – being governed by the *coincidentia oppositorum.* Tragedy, being constituted by the Dionysian and Apollonian opposition, achieves a concordant harmony of conflict by which it achieves wholeness. Dionysos has a unique ability to effect a drawing out of one category into its opposite, always temporarily, which evokes a similar image. This image of Dionysos embodied on all fronts by duality calls to mind an image from the *Symposium*.[27] When Aristophanes gives his speech on love, he uses the example of the mythical "androgynous" to explain why people who fall in love feel a previously absent wholeness. It is this wholeness that was originally felt by the two cognitively separate beings, present in the same physical body, which was lost when Zeus separated them. Contemplating this image, it becomes clear the way in which Dionysos obtains a quality of oneness by means of multiplicity, unity in opposition. Socrates evokes a similar image in his first words of the *Phaedo* where he states,

[27] Plato, *Symposium* 189e.

> "How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought the opposite of it; for they never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other. They are two, and yet they grow together out of one head or stem".[28]

A clear aim of much of the scholarship done on Dionysos has been to discover what makes him particularly apt to be god of the theatre – in other words, what is particularly Dionysian about tragedy? Most of these inquiries come around at some point to the adherence of both Dionysos and tragedy to the logic of contrariness. Nietzsche characterizes tragedy as at the same time Apollonian and Dionysian. But Apollo is not the god of the theatre. The music of tragedy is Dionysian, this is the oldest element. By the time of Euripides, the focus shifted more toward the Apollonian aspects of tragedy, but when attention is shifted to the Dionysian, the importance of *pathos* and *katharsis* is raised.

In the first episode of the *Bacchae,* what compels the old men Kadmos and Teiresias to go to Mt. Kithairon is to partake in the dances and Dionysian ritual. They describe the joy they will experience dancing and participating in the Bacchic revel. Kadmos says, "I would not tire, neither all night nor all day, striking the earth with my *thyrsos*.[29] Joyfully forgetting that we are old".[30] In the *parodos*[31] just prior to this scene there is a similar illustration of the benefits of Dionysian celebration: "oh blessed is he who, truly happy, knowing the initiations of the god is pure in life, joining his soul to the *thiasos*[32] in the mountains performing Bacchic ritual with holy

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[28] Plato, *Phaedo* 60b.
[29] A *thyrsos* is a wand wreathed in ivy and vine leaves with a pinecone at the top, and is carried by worshippers of Dionysos. *LSJ.*
[30] Euripides, *Bacchae* (187-9).
[31] The *parodos* is the entrance song of the chorus. Their entrance was typically made to the accompaniment of marching anapaests, in addition to the lyric ode, which follows when the chorus is in position for dancing. *OCD* p. 918a.
[32] A group of Bacchic revelers. *LSJ*.

purifications (*katharmoisin*)".[33] *Katharsis* is a word that comes down to us in relation to tragedy via Aristotle. It has a wide range of applications and is used to describe the therapeutic effect of both Dionysian ritual and tragedy (among other things). In recent years modern science has come to better understand this idea that was received by way of ancient criticism, and evidence from both science and criticism go to emphasize the importance of tragic *katharsis*. Perceiving that tragedy has a primary interest in the Dionysian, and that *katharsis* is affected by means of the contrariness of the dramatic form,[34] there is no other choice than to regard *katharsis* (and as a result of this, *pathos*) worthy of increased attention.

In a larger context it is easy to sense the importance of *katharsis* in any aesthetic experience. Everyone is familiar with this feeling from personal encounters with art. There are varying sorts of *katharsis,* the specific type treated here being the *tragic katharsis*. Grkinic says, "a tragedy will evoke Katharsis if it succeeds to elicit emotions; it will evoke tragic Katharsis if it elicits its proper emotions".[35] But one way or the other, every person has experienced *katharsis* in one form or another. It is the feeling of being swept away from the mundane troubles of every day life and immersed in a state of distraction and enthusiasm. There is no doubt that the *katharsis* felt by those viewing the ancient performances differed from that of those reading the extant dramas today. But there is no doubt that these texts still elicit emotion in the reader and a

[33] *Bacchae* (71-6).
[34] More will be said about the contrariness of drama and *katharsis* later (See Ch. V & VI). However, for the present moment, it helps to think about the simultaneous reality and fiction employed by drama, and how a subconscious understanding of this duality (contrariness) allows us the comfortable space in which a certain class of emotions particular to the viewing of aesthetic creations can be felt. This class of emotions will come to be called "aesthetic emotions", and they differ from those aroused by mundane experiences of reality. By way of the "comfortable distance", aesthetic emotions are aroused which affect a katharsis.
[35] Grkinic, *Katharsis and Aesthetic Emotion* (2010) p. 82.

katharsis takes place.[36] With increased attention to *pathos* and *katharsis,* we attempt to put ourselves in the seats of the theatre, within earshot of the orchestra; and if we are lucky, hear the music of tragedy.

IV.1. *The Role of Dionysos in Coincidentia Oppositorum*

In 1997, P.E. Easterling wrote an article concerned with how exactly Dionysos is related to Greek drama and the festival of the Great Dionysia. She concludes that it should not surprise us if the dramatic performances come to be seen as reflecting every aspect of the unique personality of Dionysos – as if he had always been the god of the theatre.[37] Because many aspects of Dionysos are mirrored in tragedy and in other features of the dramatic festival in general, it is through a sort of *sparagmos*[38] of these objects that these reflections can most easily be sorted. Throughout this section, similarities between the god himself and the festival will be examined, all with an eye toward the persistence of the *coincidentia oppositorum.*

Dionysos is known as god of music and dance. He also has dominion over masking and disguise as well as wine, religious ecstasy, and is capable of evoking the pleasurable *katharsis.* It is Dionysos in the form of *Eleutherios* (The Liberator), who presides over the tragic competitions. Beyond this the details get somewhat more complicated. For example, on the one hand Dionysos was a god of the city-state. His was a cult of the *polis,* initiation into his mysteries being common among all classes of the population of ancient Athens.[39] However, at the same time, he is constantly represented as very close to wild nature. For every aspect in which

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[36] Throughout the *Poetics*, Aristotle maintains that tragic *katharsis* can still be felt upon reading (aloud). 1450b, 18-20; 1453b, 4; 1462a, 12.
[37] Easterling (1997) p. 53.
[38] *sparagmos*: a tearing, rending apart. *LSJ*.
[39] Easterling (1997) p. 52.

Dionysos is civil, there is incivility in equal balance. Despite his prominent place within the city of Athens he is able to cross over into the wild. Celebration of Dionysos tends to always take place outside of the city.[40] He has associations with plant growth as he brought the grape vine to Greece and taught the Greeks to cultivate the sacred drink.[41] Ivy is also sacred to Dionysos.[42] Also representative of nature is his identification with many wild as well as domestic animals. He is shown turning into both lion and bull,[43] as well as riding or wearing the skin of a leopard.[44] His followers wear fawn skins,[45] and the maenads wear snakes in their hair.[46] Part of the god's entourage, the satyrs themselves are half-man, half-goat, an image of civilization fused with wild nature. On top of this, Dionysos carries the *thyrsos*,[47] which is a long wand made of pine branch, topped with a pinecone[48] and wrapped in ivy.[49] The *thyrsos* is emblematic of Dionysian ritual, and in stories it can be deadly in the hands of the god or the maenads.[50] There are also depictions

[40] All throughout *Bacchae* Mt. Kithairon is the place where the revels take place. It is "The place of the sacred dances" (32, 135), and as soon as the Bacchants are freed from prison, they return to the mountain (445-6). *Eis oros eis oros* (to the mountain, to the mountain) is a recurring chant (116, 986). The mountain is given the epithet *euion oron* (joyfully-crying mountain), (791). *Euioi* is the joyful Bacchic shout, Dionysos being *euiou theou* (the god of joyful cries) (1167).
[41] Dionysos giving the grape vine to the Greeks is referenced throughout the *Bacchae* (12, 535 and 651). There is mention of "setting up full mixing-bowls in the middle of the *thiasoi* (221-2) and how he gave the vine to mortals (772).
[42] In *Bacchae* there are ivy crowns (106, 177, 205, 323, 341-2), the maenads wear them (702-3) and there is also mention of the "crown-wearing *thiasoi*" (531-2).
[43] The bull is present in *Bacchae,* Dionysos is referred to as *taurokeron theon* (bull-horned god) (100); he appears to Pentheus as a bull (920), and when the chorus describes Pentheus' misfortunes, they say "with a bull as leader of the disaster" (1159).
[44] See Appendix I, Images 1-3.
[45] *Bacchae* (24, 111, 137, 176, 696, 835).
[46] *Ibid* (697).
[47] In *Bacchae* Dionysos leads the thiasoi with his *thyrsos* (556-8), a *thyrsos* is given to Pentheus as part of his maenad disguise (835), the *thyrsos* can cause water and wine to spring from the ground (704-7), it drips honey (710-1), and it is referred to as ivy staff (363, 495, 554).
[48] *Ibid* "pine torch" (307).
[49] *Ibid* "ivy staff" (363, 495 and 554).
[50] *Ibid* "ivy weapon" (25, 79), "violent fennel rod" (113, 176), "deadly weapon" (733, 799). The *thyrsos* is the weapon used by the maenads to ransack small villages on the slopes of Kithairon

of the *thyrsos* dripping honey[51] or causing springs of water and wine to rise up from the ground.[52]

It is important to note that this ability of Dionysos to draw himself out of the city and become a god of wild nature is never permanent. Although there are many borders that Dionysos is able to effortlessly transgress, his drawing out into opposing categories is always only temporary and bound to shift again temporarily back in the other direction. Dionysos's ability to fluctuate between a god of the *polis* and a god of nature is given greater depth by his tendency in representation to be portrayed as both a native-born Greek, citizen of the *polis* and as a barbarian foreigner. He is portrayed in some cases as born in Thebes, but in other stories comes from Mt. Nysa (which is believed by some to be where the –nysos in the name comes from).[53] Regardless of his place of origin he always occupies the role of an outsider. Dionysos is always depicted as just having arrived from somewhere, underscored in the *Bacchae* by the first word, *hēkō* (I have come). This necessarily has to do with his task of traveling from town to town, spreading his initiations, and establishing himself as a deity in cities across the Greek world.[54] Often the content of Dionysian myth is persecution of the god and his cult by the ruler of whatever territory they have entered. This inevitably ends with the capital punishment of the impious king

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(762) and it is upon the *thyrsos* that Agaue mounts Pentheus's severed head after tearing him limb from limb (1141, 1157, 1386).

[51] *Ibid* (710-1).

[52] *Ibid* (704-7).

[53] Despite the fact that the Dionysos of the *Bacchae* is the son of Zeus and Theban Semele (Kadmos's daughter), he is nevertheless seen by Pentheus and other Thebans as a foreigner, "there has arrived some stranger a sorcerer, an enchanter from the Lydian land …" (233-4), who is accompanied by a *thiasos* of Asian women (55-7, 64-5). For Nysian Dionysos, see Diodorus Siculus 4.2.5.

[54] It is after Dionysos discovers the vine and is shown the initiations by Rhea that he sets to wander the Greek world spreading both. Pseudo-Apollodorus 3.5.1.

and reverence for the god on the part of the people, as was the case in Aeschylus's *Lykourgos*[55] and Euripides's *Bacchae*.[56]

Worship of Dionysos is done in the *thiasos* (Bacchic revel), and as a god of mystic initiation, his rites were intended to provide practitioners, in addition to the benefits of *katharsis* in the here and now, a more pleasant time in the afterlife. The power that Dionysos possesses over the hereafter is a result of another of his internal coincidences. This is his fluctuating position between living and dead. One version of his living deadness is present in the *Bacchae*, in which Dionysos, having been born premature, is inserted into Zeus' thigh to continue to form and be *reborn* later. Other myths of a young Dionysos show this coincidence, and in some it is more remarkably apparent. When the baby Dionysos encounters the Titans, they lure him with toys, and once they have caught him they tear him to pieces.[57] Then they continue by boiling and eating his remains. Zeus destroys the Titans with a thunderbolt, and the boy's grandmother, Rhea is able to bring him back to life, having put some of his pieces back together. These features of his mythology make the god Dionysos capable, unlike most other Olympians, to travel down to hades to retrieve his mother, whom he had not seen since birth, in order to place her among the stars.[58]

The contrariness of Dionysos runs so deep that it is even somewhat difficult to classify

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[55] *Lykourgos* by Aeschylus was lost, but the story is told by Pseudo-Apollodorus 3.5.1 and is referenced in Homer *Iliad* (130-40).

[56] The events of *Lykourgos* take place directly before Dionysos travels to Thebes where the events of the *Bacchae* take place. After this, he continues on to Argos where another similar story takes place. Pseudo-Apollodorus 3.5.1-2.

[57] The theme of *sparagmos,* the tearing apart, is very prominent within Dionysian myth. In the *Bacchae,* the messenger fears being torn to pieces (*sparagmon*) by the maenads (735). Pentheus dies being torn limb from limb by the maenads. His death is likened to that of his cousin Aktaion before him, who was torn apart by hunting dogs after his own person offense to the gods. In *Lykourgos,* both Lykourgos and his son die by means of *sparagmos*.

[58] This is related in Pseudo-Apollodorus 3.5.3 and Diodorus Siculus 4.25.4. For the trope of resurrection giving power over afterlife, cf. Osiris, Jesus.

him as a god, as he has certain trappings of a mortal, and is often able to draw over into that category, or at least seem to. First off, as the son of Zeus and Semele, he only has a divine father. In a manner quite similar to Heracles, another figure of semi-divine ancestry, Dionysos must travel around the world working. He is often led to the extent of having to *prove* that he is a god in order for mortals to believe.[59] Often in myth he is blasphemed against and called a fake or an enchanter. In the end, everyone always comes to realize that Dionysos is in fact a very powerful god, but this recognition of his divinity usually comes too late. The recognition of the god Dionysos is very similar in this way to the tragic recognition. It only comes after it is too late. In tragedy, Jocasta only realizes that Oedipus is her son after the unspeakable deeds are done. In the same way, Agaue only comes to understand the terrible powers of Dionysos after she has killed her son, and Lykourgos after he has killed his. Throughout Dionysos's travels he has many occasions to prove his power. It is this constant struggle to prove his holiness that suggests that Dionysos was nowhere immediately and unquestioningly accepted as a god. It is only after his travels and deeds are complete that he is able to ascend to Olympus. Ovid sums this up nicely when he says, "[Dionysos], conqueror of India, worshipped in the *new-built* shrines of Greece … was placed among the gods of heaven."[60]

There is no such same difficulty in placing the basic description upon Dionysos of "man". However, his characteristic effeminacy is one of his most talked-about qualities. He is often represented as crossing over into the realm of the feminine. To briefly illustrate this, many different sources could be turned to. The man's female appearance is noted throughout the entirety of the *Bacchae.* He is referred to as *thelumorphon xenon* (womanish stranger; 353), and "[is] not ugly in body as far as women are concerned … [having] long locks, not by wrestling,

[59] This similarity to Heracles is pointed out by Seneca, *Hercules Fuerens* (65).
[60] Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book 4, 605; my emphasis.

flowing down right by [his] cheeks, full of desire … skin white by contrivance, not by the rays of the sun, but under shade hunting Aphrodite with beauty." (454-9). He has "fragrant hair, light-colored locks, wine-colored face and the graces of Aphrodite in his eyes" (235-6). His "delicate locks" are also referenced at line 493. This androgyny extends to Pentheus, as he slowly comes under the control of Dionysos in the second half of the play. Here Pentheus appears "like one of Kadmos's daughters" at 917, "a man dressed up as a woman" (980) and as one who "took female dress" (1155).

In representation of the worship of Dionysos, the procession of the *thiasos* is characterized by the accompaniment of maenads and satyrs, some of which carry *thyrsoi*, while others play music or dance.[61] These figures that accompany and worship Dionysos also embody duality. The satyrs, as was mentioned before, are half-man, half-goat. The maenads, named for their religious madness (*mania*), on the other hand draw out of the feminine into the masculine. This is portrayed especially vividly in the *Bacchae*. The woman's place in ancient Greece was inside the household. However, these Theban maenads have left their homes and gone out to the mountain, "stung to frenzy from their looms and shuttles by Dionysos."[62] They have ventured out to engage in what were typically regarded as masculine activities, such as religious ritual and hunting.[63]

The dancing mania represented in dionysiac scenes is in fact an observable phenomenon

[61] See Appendix I, Images 2 & 4.
[62] *Bacchae* (117-9); also (32-4). In the larger mythological context, Dionysos is shown drawing the women out of their respective cities and to the mountainside. He does it to the Edonian women before coming to Thebes, and then to the Argive women directly after he leaves.
[63] The maenads let their hair down to hunt at *Bacchae* (695, 734), and wage war (751), in which they are impermeable to men's spears.

throughout history,[64] especially in societies enduring especially hard times and repression. These frenzies affected people of all ages, drawing many by-standers into the dancing band, whether or not they wanted to be. As the dancing groups travelled through the streets their numbers would increase with revelers gyrating until they dropped from exhaustion. When the maenads are shown hunting and killing, it is obviously an exaggerated mythological representation, but their religious function has been ably argued to have its basis in reality. Because maenadic activity has been documented throughout the ages, in different cultures, Dodds argues that the maenads, unlike the satyrs, are an observable human type.[65] They had different names in different cultures, but these seemed to be congregations of women who would gather every other year. The character of each of these festivals varied from place to place, but they involved the women's ecstatic *orgia*[66] and often included mountain dancing (*oreibasia*) through the night in mid-winter. Unmarried girls would carry the *thyrsos* and maenads would indulge in *sparagmos*, sacrificing animals, and possibly *omophagia*.[67] It is the freedom inherent in Dionysos's world turned upside down, which allowed women in Greece the unheard of role they occupied in service of Dionysos. This must have served a purpose, as there were allegedly uncontrollable floods of pent up emotion spilling forth in places where these impulses were not safely discharged.

IV.2. *The Role of Dionysos In Tragedy*

[64] See St. John's Dance – Liège, 1374; St. Vitus' Dance – Alsace, 1518; and the Tarantism of southern Italy.
[65] See Dodds (1951) Appendix I and Seaford (1996).
[66] Secret rites.
[67] *Omophagia* is the raw-eating associated with Dionysian cult, mentioned no doubt in relation to him at *Bacchae* 139. The "raw-eating" (*omositoi*) dogs that tore apart Pentheus' cousin Aktaion are also referenced at 337-8.

Having thus outlined some significant ways in which Dionysos is governed by the principle of contrariness, it will now be shown how he relates to tragedy itself. To do this, some primary details of the Dionysia will first be described. Then, there will be a discussion of Dionysos's role in the beginning of the tragic phenomenon; followed by an interpretation of the decline of tragedy, and its relation to the Dionysian.

IV.2.A. *The Dionysia*

The Dionysia took place once a year and consisted of two parts. These were the Rural Dionysia, which took place in the villages of the Attic countryside in December, and the City or Great Dionysia, which took place in the spring at Athens. The festival being in honor of Dionysos, there was a building, the theatre, which was consecrated in his name, and within its precinct, was a temple to the god where his image was housed. Also, in the center of the dance floor (*orchēstra*) was a stone altar (*thymelē*), and front row center there was a carved seat for the guest of honor, the priest of Dionysos.[68]

The competitive events of the festival took place over the course of five days. Before the festival proper began, sometime in the weeks leading up to it, there was an event called the *proagōn.*[69] This was an event in which the poets would unveil their cast and announce the subject they would be presenting for the dramatic competition. There was also a preparatory ritual that had to be performed before the festival could begin. This was called the leading in from the sacred hearth.[70] This was the reenactment Dionysos's original coming from Eleutherai to be established as a deity at Athens. A statue of Dionysos Eleutherios was taken to a temple on

[68] Vernant "The God of Tragic Fiction" p. 181.
[69] Goldhill (1990) p. 99.
[70] *eisagōgē apo tēs escharas.*

the road to Eleutherai where a sacrifice was offered. Then the statue was escorted back to Athens. When the statue returned, there was a grand procession leading the statue into the precinct of Dionysos where a sacrifice was given. After these two ceremonies were completed, the final section and main body of the festival, the revel (*kōmos*) began. The revel started with a feast and lasted throughout the musical competitions that comprised the rest of the festival.

The first day of the *kōmos* saw the dithyrambic competition in which choruses of fifty would perform. There were twenty dithyrambic performances: first, ten choruses of boys, followed by ten choruses of men. In both categories each of the ten choruses were representative of one of each of the ten *demes* of Attica. The second day of the *kōmos* held the comedic competition in which five comedies were staged and judged.[71] The tragic performances consumed the remaining three days. Each day, three tragedies and one satyr play, all by the same author were performed. The tragedies and satyr play followed each other in quick succession with no intermission, beginning early in the morning and lasting throughout most of the day. There were ten judges chosen to arbitrate the competitions, and they were originally selected by drawing of lots. However, at the festival in 468, the ten *stratēgoi*[72] of Attica appeared in the theatre to make libations and were insisted upon as judges. From that point on, the tradition stuck and the generals elected each year also served as the judges at the Dionysia.[73]

Aside from the performances, there were various ceremonies carried out each day before the competitions began.[74] There was a ceremony, which consisted of libations made to the gods, poured by the judges. A list of the names of people who had been of significant service to Athens

[71] Comedy was not a part of the festival until 486.
[72] Military generals.
[73] Plutarch, *Life of Kimon* 8. 7-9.
[74] Information on this is found in Goldhill (1990) pp. 101-5, most of which is gleaned from Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals of Athens.*

in the past year was also read aloud. There were also a couple of processions, the first being that of the orphans of the war dead, dressed in full military outfit. The other was a procession of the tribute paid Athens by its allies.[75]

IV.2.B. *Dionysos in the Birth of Tragedy*

A feature of the Dionysia much older than tragedy is dithyramb. By looking at similarities between tragedy and its predecessor dithyramb, characterized by the lyric poet Archilochus as the "lovely song of lord Dionysos",[76] [77] tragedy's association with the god is given depth beyond their mutual embodiment of *coincidentia oppositorum* and the ostensible events of the festival. Seeing his role at the genesis of tragedy makes his connection fundamental, as he has been present all throughout its lifespan.

The Corinthians believe dithyramb to have originated there under the rule of Periander (ca. 625-585 B.C.E.), having been invented by Arion (ca. 600 B.C.E.).[78] It was from the beginning a choral song to Dionysos.[79] A chorus of fifty, who sang and danced in a circular formation, performed the dithyrambic songs. They were accompanied by a single aulete, playing a reeded set of double-pipes (*aulos*), which was placed in the middle of the circle. Lasos of Hermione brought the dithyramb to Athens, and it soon became subject for competitions at festivals of Dionysos.[80] Tunes were often composed in the Phrygian mode,[81] and they contained

[75] Evidence of these two processions comes from Isocrates *De Pace,* 82.
[76] For this see Pickard-Cambridge (1997) p. 1.
[77] Dionysos is Dithyrambos at *Bacchae* 526.
[78] Herodotus 1.23, Pickard-Cambridge (1997) p. 2, West (1992) p. 339.
[79] *Oxford Classical Dictionary* p. 291.
[80] *Ibid.*

highly wrought language and considerable narrative content, usually having to do with some incident in the life of Dionysos. In this way, the dithyramb has the capacity to portray scenes in a very dramatic way on subjects very much like those of tragedy.

By the late 6th century B.C.E., if not before, the composition of dithyrambs for city festivals had been taken up by the leading musicians of the time.[82] By this point, the dithyramb was a sophisticated art form, as demanding as any other put before the public. It was in the middle of the 6th century that the Panathenaea was established, just before Peisistratos's rise to power, and here the dithyramb was also a prominent feature of the musical competitions that took place.

When modern people first think about Greek drama, the idea of the chorus seems rather odd. This is a dramatic feature that is largely abandoned today. Our drama is wholly concerned with a cast of actors, much more like tragedy became at the end of the 5th century. At first though, for the Greeks it must have been the other way around. For them, the actor was a brand new invention, which must have had quite a striking novelty. The chorus, on the other hand, had been a long established feature of their musical tradition. Nietzsche says that the one thing that is known for certain about tragedy is that it was born from the tragic chorus.[83] Before tragedy, these "tragic", dionysiac choruses would act out mythical scenes of the heroic past, accompanied by a single aulete. There is evidence of tragic choruses such as these portraying the story of Adrastus

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[81] The Phrygian mode is the musical scale most closely associated with the *aulos*. In *Politics,* Aristotle writes, "… of the modes, the Phrygian has the same potential as the *aulos* among instruments: both of them are exciting (*orgiastika*) and emotional … all Bacchic celebration and that sort of dancing is predominantly accompanied by *auloi*, and goes most appropriately with the Phrygian mode." He also points out, "The dithyramb, for instance, is by general consent held to be a Phrygian thing." (1342a-b).

[82] West (1992) p. 16.

[83] *Birth of Tragedy*, Section 7.

at Sicyon in the early 6th century B.C.E.[84] These choral performances evolved into drama, specifically tragedy, when in 534 B.C.E., Thespis covered his face in white lead and portrayed a character not himself. He did not do so as a member of the chorus, but opposite them, interacting with them. It was in this way that he invented the concept of actor and won the first dramatic competition.[85] This is the point at which it became tragedy, as this was the first time the abstract Dionysian music met with the form of Apollonian dialogue.

Aristotle lends credibility to this interpretation of tragedy's root in the Dionysian dithyramb with a passage from the *Poetics*. Here he says, "Tragedy came from an improvisation of those who led off the prelude to the dithyramb" (1449a 9-15). This evidence is not conclusive as there are other ancient sources that contradict it. However, the Aristotelian hypothesis of tragedy as rooted in the Dionysian is far from the least popular theory. The question of the origin of tragedy has plagued scholars for a long time, and it is a question that must be left open for a number of reasons. However, it is only intended here to show similarities, to find probable cause. Placing Dionysos on the scene at the beginning of tragedy is enough to suggest his role as a fundamental element of the phenomenon that took root in his personality.

IV.2.C. *Dionysos in the Death of Tragedy*

An area much more readily available for inspection than the mysterious world of Archaic Greece in which tragedy developed is the Classical Age from which it perished. The decline of tragedy is a complex historical event with many contributing factors, the complete elucidation of which would necessitate at least its own paper. However, an argument will here be given for what seems to be the primary cause of tragedy's untimely death. It is the unbalancing of the dual

[84] Herodotus 5.67.5.
[85] West (1992) p. 340, Vernant p. 181.

opposition of Apollonian and Dionysian at the heart of the genre. This was a result of the integration of rationalism throughout the Greek world, especially in the later 5th century B.C.E. Rationalism in the Greek Enlightenment directly opposed the Dionysian poetic and musical impulse, and this is exhibited when this new way of thinking finds its way into the tragic sphere. This section will begin by explaining the main causes of enlightenment in Athens, and how this new intellectual attitude created a profound sense of skepticism there, because of which, many aspects of Athenian life were dramatically reconsidered and reevaluated. After this is complete, it will be shown how the rationalistic impulse makes its way into Euripidean tragedy, and how it results in a lessening of the Dionysian. Following the integration of rationalism into Greek thought, drama evolves beyond the dimensions of tragedy, leaving behind Dionysos in pursuit of something more Apollonian.

Tragedy coincided with a turbulent time in Greek history. There was a major cultural shift occurring in the 5th century, as a wave of rationalism swept through Athens. This created an environment increasingly divergent from the superstitious religiosity that was characteristic of the earlier Archaic Period in which tragedy was created. This rationalistic impulse was present in many corners of the Greek world in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E., from Asia Minor to Athens to Sicily, and there was good reason why it took root especially deep in Athens.

The majority of rationalistic impact made in Athens was by the sophists. The sophists were not grouped together so much by means of sharing a common set of ideas, but rather by the fact that they made up a distinct class of the population: professional paid teachers of young men. Their goal was to educate a gentleman, who would be able to gain political power within the city, and become a distinguished citizen. They saw themselves as the educational successors

of the poets, but it has also been said that they were just as much heirs of the presocratics.[86] They charged a hefty rate for their services, which ensured that a sophistic education was attainable only by the wealthy, learned class of Athens, which was quite a small percentage of the overall population. The general aim of a sophistic education was the cultivation of *aretē*,[87] and indeed all of the sophists but Gorgias claimed to teach this. However, *all* sophists taught rhetoric, because the art of persuasion was a singular means by which one could obtain power in the *polis*.

A key skill cultivated in rhetorical training is the ability to make the weaker argument seem the stronger and vice versa. The goal was to argue either side of the debate with the same amount of success. In this way, rhetoric maintains a built in tendency toward skepticism. A student of the sophists learns early on that the only thing necessary to make something true is for people to be persuaded that it is such. In the hands of the orator, the truth is whatever the audience can be convinced of. This is a view of truth not as objective, but as temporary and relative to the perceiving subject. Because all of the sophists studied and taught rhetoric, Guthrie argues that all of the sophists developed a naturally skeptical disposition as a result of their training, which was then imparted on the populous of the city.

Skepticism is one main respect in which the sophists resembled the presocratics. The sophists had a larger cultural impact in establishing rationalism at Athens, but it is important to note that they were not the only ones spreading this mode of thought. The skeptical nature of these groups was exhibited in many different ways. One of the most interesting examples is their religious skepticism. There is certainly no shortage of criticism of popular Greek religion amongst either the presocratics or the sophists.

[86] Guthrie p. 45.
[87] Virtue, excellence, goodness.

Turning to the presocratics, there is Xenophanes, who attacked the myths of Homer and Hesiod from a moral angle, claiming that both authors have attributed to the gods all things that are shameful and a reproach among mankind.[88] Likewise in another fragment he claims that they have narrated every possible wicked story of the gods: theft, adultery and mutual deception.[89] In further defiance, he denied the validity of divination (*mantikē*),[90] as well as other general aspects of the religion. Xenophanes's greatest achievement was his discovery of the relativity of religious ideas, claiming that men fashion gods in their own image.[91] There is similar defiance of the myths of Homer in Heraclitus, where he states that, "[the poet] deserves to be flung out of the contests and given a beating".[92] He also clearly does not believe in mystic religions such as the cult of Dionysos,[93] and criticizes ritual katharsis, comparing those who purge blood as similar to a man who tries to wash off dirt by bathing in mud.[94] Heraclitus also shrugs off other major features of Greek religion, such as burial practices.[95] When looking at the sophists, there is a similar sort of religious skepticism. Protagoras, the first sophist, was agnostic,[96] and Diagoras,

[88] Freeman Fr. 11.
[89] *Ibid* Fr. 12.
[90] Cicero *Divination* 1.5.
[91] Freeman Fr. 15: "But if oxen and horses and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the form that each species itself possesses."
Ibid Fr. 16: "Ethiopians have gods with dark hair and snub noses, Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair."
[92] *Ibid* Fr. 42.
[93] *Ibid* Frs. 14 & 15.
[94] *Ibid* Fr. 5.
[95] *Ibid* Fr. 96.
[96] Guthrie p. 234.

Prodicus and Critias were atheists.[97] The sophist Antisthenes seems to have been a monotheist, much like both Heraclitus and Xenophanes.[98]

The skepticism instilled within the Athenians of the Enlightenment caused for a radical revaluation of many aspects of Greek life. Religious criticism is only one example, but a significant one in that it shows that their new skeptical attitude was aimed toward even the most essential facets of every day experience. Religion was not at all a modest aspect of experience in ancient Athens. It was so deeply ingrained within social and political spheres that there were few activities totally separate from it.[99] Despite the reputation of Athens as a safe haven for free speech, the sophists and philosophers must have been fully aware of the potential consequences of these utterances, which were not being made quietly. And indeed these consequences arose, with the prosecution of many of the leading intellectuals at Athens on religious grounds. Dodds points out that Athens prosecuted Anaxagoras, Diagoras, Socrates, almost certainly Protagoras, and possibly Euripides, and all but the last were successful.[100] The sophists were raising major objections, and this skeptical attitude made for a great deal of change in Athens, making the world from which tragedy perished strikingly different from that into which it was born.

Euripides shows the Enlightenment influence, and some of his tragedies and tragicomedies show the result of this mixing tragedy with rationalism. The effect of Euripides's

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[97] *Ibid* pp. 235-247.
[98] *Ibid* p. 248.
[99] The Athenians had three separate calendars, the first for determining festival days and religious holidays, another for civic events, and a third based on the stars, which was used for farming and navigation. The calendar of greatest importance was the first, which was made up of 12 months consisting of 29 or 30 days apiece (Mikalson *The Sacred and Civil Calendar of the Athenian Year* pp. 25-181). It contains over 100 days dedicated to religious celebration. Days 1-4 and 6-8 of each month were sacred to particular gods (83 days of the Athenian year) (*Ibid*, p. 186). In addition there were about 28 additional holidays dedicated to annually recurring festivals (*Ibid*, p. 187).
[100] Dodds p. 189. Anaxagoras may have been fined and banished; Diagoras and probably Protagoras escaped by flight, and Socrates drank hemlock.

new tragic formula is a lessening of the Dionysian element, disturbing the balance of opposition at the heart of tragedy. Euripides was known to be a part of educated circles in Athens. He was the first Athenian that it can be said with any confidence had read Xenophanes,[101] and was a pupil of Anaxagoras.[102] Euripidean plays were distinctly influenced by sophistic thought. For example it was their influence that inspired Euripides and his whole generation to discuss fundamental moral questions in terms of *Nomos* (Law, Custom, Convention) versus *Physis* (Nature).

This is not the first time that the claim has been made that the plays of Euripides reflect the Enlightenment influence. There are numerous instances in which Euripides has his characters speak in a contemporary sophistic style. A good example of this is found in *The Suppliants*. Here, Creon's herald engages in an argument with Theseus about the merits of monarchy versus democracy.[103] When the herald lauds monarchy as opposed to democracy, Theseus says to him: "Since you yourself have started this competition (*agōna*), listen to me; for it is you who have proposed a contest of words (*amillan logōn*).[104]

Euripides plays also voice critical views on many of the same subjects as the sophists and philosophers. Xenophanes did not believe that god resembled man in appearance or mind. He was of a monotheistic belief that there was one god, greatest among gods and men, not at all like mortals in body or thought,[105] who always remains in the same place moving not at all.[106] This

[101] See similarity between Eur. Fr. 282 (preserved in Athenaeus X 413) and Xenophanes Fr. 2, Freeman. Also see Euripides *Heracles* 1341-6 with Freeman, Xenophanes Fr. 11, 12 & 32.
[102] Diogenes Laertius 2.2.
[103] This Section from lines 399-563 is a formalized debate.
[104] Compare *agōna* and *amillas* here with Protagoras, the first professional sophist, represented in Diogenes Laertius 9.52 *kai prōtos … logōn agōnas epoiēsato,* and Plato *Protagoras* 335a where he says *pollois ēdē eis agōna logōn aphikomēn anthrōpois.*
[105] Freeman, Xenophanes Fr. 23.
[106] *Ibid* Fr. 26.

view finds a voice in *Heracles* (1341), "But I do not believe the gods commit adultery, or bind each other in chains. I never did believe it; I never shall; not that one god is tyrant of the rest. If god is truly god, he is perfect, lacking nothing. These are poets' wretched lies".

Euripides voicing various skeptical religious viewpoints does not entail his belief in them, and likewise rational tendencies in his plays do not prove him a champion of rationalism. Some such as Dodds see Euripides as not just a product of the Enlightenment, but a reaction against it. He was not simply preaching these new perspectives, but was instead using tragedy in order to examine them and provide commentary. It is not of great concern what the playwright believed, but rather that rationalism found a voice in Euripidean tragedy, and that it affected the style and content of the drama he produced. As was mentioned above, his new style changed the nature of tragedy. His brand of tragedy steers away from the Dionysian aspect of the music of the chorus and more toward dialogue and monody of single actors.

The *OCD* says that in Euripides, unlike earlier tragedy, "the chorus seems to be on the spot accidentally and may even be in the way".[107] This point can be illustrated using a side-by-side comparison of the number of spoken lines given various voices in the plays, contrasting our earliest glimpse of the chorus in Aeschylus with that of its later remains in Euripides (especially his late works). The relatively uninvolved chorus is particularly evident in Euripides' middle group of "unorthodox" Trojan War tragedies.[108] So let us take Aeschylus' *Suppliants.* It is composed of 1,074 lines of which about 653 (60%) are sung by the chorus. The chorus of this play is special in that it is the only one extant that also functions as the protagonist. *The Persians* is 1,078 lines of which the chorus speaks about 479 (44%). Compare this to that of Euripides' *Electra* (ca. 410 B.C.E.). This play is composed of 1359 lines, of which the chorus utters a mere

[107] *Oxford Classical Dictionary* p. 918a.
[108] "Introduction to Electra" in *Euripides V*, p. 2.

241 (18%). Electra herself speaks almost twice this many (465; 34%). This extremity was also characteristic of many other works of Euripides: *Helen* (412 B.C.E.) has a whopping 1692 lines; the chorus sings 273 (16%). Again, Helen has considerably more dialogue herself than the chorus.

There are several features of Euripidean drama that affects this lessening of the role of the chorus. Euripides uses the largest number of characters in his plays, necessarily detracting from the lines given the chorus. [109] He also tended to neglect the *Parodos*, the entrance ode of the chorus, which was a common feature of earlier tragedy. In many Euripidean plays, monodies, (typically astrophic) solo arias,[110] are regularly substituted in place of traditional strophic choral odes.[111] Moreover, Euripides is fond of the *deus ex machina* device, which, although he did not invent, he employs in over half of his extant plays. [112] The *deus ex machina* occurs when the events of the plot seem to have reached an impasse. This is when a deity appears in order to resolve the matter. This technique too detracts from the role of the chorus as in older tragedy

[109] Returning to those discussed above, Aeschylus's *Suppliants* has the chorus of Danaids as well as only three speaking roles: Danaus, King Pelasgus and the herald. Likewise in *The Persians* there is the chorus of Persian elders, and a speaking cast of four: Atossa, a messenger, Xerxes and the ghost of Darius. Contrast this with Euripides's *Helen,* which, aside from the chorus of Greek slave women has a speaking cast of ten (as well as the silent role of Polydeuces). In Electra, there is a chorus as well as six speaking roles and two silent.

[110] See for example *Helen,* (515-27).

[111] The odes of tragedy are typically strophic, meaning that there is a metrical pattern that appears and then is repeated. The first appearance of the pattern is called "*strophe*" and the second "*antistrophe*" (which are sometimes then themselves both repeated in order). The strophe and antistrophe are then typically followed by the *epode*, although sometimes this is omitted. *Oxford Classical Dictionary* p. 568.

[112] *Medea, Hippolytus, Andromache, Helen, Orestes, Bacchae,* et al. Used by Aeschylus in *Eumenides* and Sophocles in *Philoctetes*.

they often took part in the resolution of the story. However, in Euripides this responsibility falls into the hands of whatever deity appears.[113]

These are some of the innovations characteristic of the dramatic style of Euripides, which collectively diminish the role of the chorus piecemeal. By the last quarter of the 5th century there was a more acute sense than ever of an opposition between old and new styles.[114] By continued innovation, tragedy eventually evolved beyond its original dimensions based in the Apollonian/Dionysian conflict. When the Apollonian aspect is increased in Euripides at the expense of the Dionysian, the drama is enriched with a new sense of dialogue and wit, but in achieving this novelty, it has lost the grand music of old tragedy. It is important to keep in mind the aural experience of the performance. To modern critics, the bigger picture is more obscure as we do not hear the difference between the odes, which are sung, and the dialogue which is composed in a meter much more similar to ordinary speech. Many of these innovations introduced by Euripides and Agathon were said to have caught on, [115] and as a result tragedy was a recognizably different entity at the beginning of the 4th century. When the fundamental *coincidentia oppositorum* of the genre is upset, and the music of tragedy is diminished, it becomes something different. Tragedy comes to more resemble the "New Music", which followed after in Attica, as well as the Roman drama of the Hellenistic Period. The creative impulse pushes beyond the genre to create something new.

V. *Tragedy & Coincidentia Oppositorum*

[113] Agathon strayed even further than Euripides from tradition, substituting for the choral passages songs that were mere interludes, having nothing to do with the main action of the play. Aristotle *Poetics* 1456a, *OCD* p. 918a.
[114] West p. 356.
[115] Plutarch *Quaest. Conv.* 645e, Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* line 68, *Oxford Classical Dictionary* p. 918a.

With all that has been said about the fundamental importance of the *coincidentia oppositorum* in relation to Dionysos, as well as his relation to tragedy, is it possible to imagine the genre devoid of either of these two elements? Indeed it would be formally impossible for tragedy to exist (according to the Aristotelian conception) without the *coincidentia oppositorum,* because this coincidence is present in *the* characteristically tragic narrative element, the reversal. Aristotle defines the reversal as "a change from one state of affairs to its exact opposite, in conformance with probability or necessity". [116] This is triggered at the moment of recognition, when the tragic characters go from ignorance to knowledge, learning their fate to be the opposite of what they had been expecting. Aristotle refers to the recognition and reversal as "the principal means by which tragedy exerts its fascination",[117] and as such this device is located close to the heart of tragic dynamics. When Loraux declares the *coincidentia oppositorum* to be the ultimate tragic figure, she is sure to specify that this coincidence is a conflict in terms of the constitutive elements of the genre.[118] This same idea is embodied within Nietzsche's reduction of tragedy to the ever opposing Apollonian and Dionysian – the constitutive elements of tragedy, based on Apollo's association with dialogue and imagery, and the association of Dionysos with music and passion. This clash of elements is reflected in the reversal. An Apollonian recognition by the characters in the drama sets off an inverse flood of Dionysian *pathos* in the audience.

Drama itself even operates in respect to a more purely Dionysian coincidence. It is the contrariness that is found here which allows theatrical scenes the ability to *come to life* on stage before the audience. When the audience views a play, they are aware throughout its entirety that the events portrayed on stage are fictitious and far from real. Drama has a unique ability to

[116] *Poetics* 1452a.
[117] *Poetics* 1450a.
[118] Loraux (2002) p. 63.

"mimic action" and "depict presence" that allows it to portray incidents that occur directly before our eyes, but keep them at the same time equally in unreachable distance. Although the spectator understands that he or she is witnessing a mere depiction, the drama is nevertheless able to be very deeply emotionally involving, and the audience can become very invested in the outcome. It is the recognition by the viewer that these events are somehow simultaneously both real and contrived that allows for drama's characteristically pleasurable effect, known as the *katharsis.* More will be said on this point in the following chapter.

It has been the purpose of Chapters IV and V to elucidate the connection between the god Dionysos and tragedy. Seeing how the god and his genre both operate governed by a principal of contrariness, the reader becomes aware of their most distinguishing and fundamental similarity, almost constant embodiment of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Not only are Dionysos and tragedy closely intertwined within this concept, but also, (as will be shown in Ch. VI) the contrariness of the dramatic form allows for the *katharsis*. There is ancient as well as modern evidence for the prominence and importance of *katharsis* in the experience of the Dionysian spectacle. The following chapter will consider *katharsis* as it appears in Aristotle and give a brief explanation of the range of modern interpretations. This will culminate in the assertion of a new and contemporary perspective on *katharsis*, which positions it as the general function of tragedy, purely bound up with the emotions, and in itself made possible by the contrariness of drama. Having shown the way in which *katharsis* is non-cognitive and purely emotional, insights from contemporary neuroscience are drawn upon that illuminate the vast potency of tragedy to excite these emotions in its audience, within and without performance. Taking a cue from modern science, tragic *pathos* as well as the tragic *katharsis* becomes invested with a new sense of importance for work in classicism.

VI. *Katharsis* and *Pathos*

The concept of *katharsis* comes to us from Aristotle, and appears both in *Poetics* and *Politics.* The most important appearance is in *Poetics*, where he gives his definition of tragedy. He defines it thus, "Tragedy is a *mimesis* of a serious and complete action, having magnitude, which through pity and fear brings about a *katharsis* of such emotions." [119] If the quote is flipped on its head, it reads "a *katharsis* is brought about through pity and fear, (aroused) by a *mimesis* of a serious and complete action, having magnitude". Seeing it this way, an emphasis is placed on the role of emotions, as the *katharsis* is dependent upon the arousal of pity and fear – *pathos.* This is however about all that can be gleaned from Aristotle's conception of this notion in *Poetics.* There was a second volume of Aristotle's *Poetics* that focused on comedy, which was lost. It is possible that the concept received further elaboration therein. The other appearance of this term in Aristotle is in Book VIII of *Politics.* Here his comment comes in regard to the *aulos*, the instrumental that provided musical accompaniment on the tragic stage. He says, "The *aulos* is not a moralizing but rather an exciting influence, so that it ought to be used for occasions of the kind at which attendance has the effect of purification (*katharsin*) rather than instruction".[120]

Although these two appearances do not leave us with much to go on, some preliminary observations can be made. Most important for our purposes is that Aristotle's definition in *Poetics* seems to point to *katharsis* as the primary function of tragedy ("Tragedy … through pity and fear brings about a *katharsis* of such emotions"). Second is the fact that both of these passages link katharsis to an excitement of emotions. In the passage from *Poetics, katharsis* is

[119] 1449b 22-28.
[120] 1341a.

dependent upon the arousal of pity and fear, the characteristically tragic *pathoi.* In *Politics,* it is the ability of the *aulos* to excite emotions that make it more apt for *katharsis* than instruction.

Because Aristotle's extant treatment of this concept is so scarce, *katharsis* has a mysterious allure for many, and this scarcity of treatment leaves a great deal of inverse room for interpretation. Many different conflicting interpretations have been offered, especially beginning in the 19th century and continuing into the 21st. Grkinic says,

> "… a history of the notion of Katharsis […] is one of continuous discordance and conflict, and of refutation and advocation of different approaches to the notion of Katharsis. Moreover, the countless viewpoints do not appear in chronological order; rather, the continuous published treatises and remarks on Aristotle's Katharsis do oscillate between a set of perspectives on the aesthetic category that generally seems to expand. To make matters worse, aspects of interpretation that seemed to exclude each other are combinated and reconciled, so that new interpretations emerge."[121] [122]

Some of these problems are caused by difficulty in translation. Grkinic points out problems with translation of "*katharsis*" into various languages.[123] English commonly employs several different equivalents. It is not unusual to see "*katharsis*" as "purification", "cleansing" or "purgation". The particular interpretation that an author has of *katharsis* will go far to determine which of the variants is employed. There are interpretations that deal with *katharsis* as primarily moral, or intellectual, medical (in terms of psychology), or emotional; and some that argue for a combination. The "intellectual" approach takes *katharsis* as intellectual clarification,[124] while the "moralistic" approach considers it a means to curb certain passions, which if not properly subdued would lead to "suffering and tragedy" in mundane life.[125] The "moderation" view of *katharsis* posits it as a psychological homeopathy. It is a means by which an emotional balance is

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[121] Grkinic p. 17.
[122] For a more detailed account of various interpretations of *katharsis,* see Grkinic pp. 17-29.
[123] Grkinic pp. 17-18.
[124] Leon Golden, *The Clarification Theory of Katharsis.*
[125] This view is common in the period of Neoclassicism. Grkinic (p. 20) gives Pierre Corneille and John Dryden as examples of this position.

achieved, which leads to a moderate temperament and ultimately towards virtue.[126] The most common modern trend is the "outlet" interpretation, which considers *katharsis* to be purely emotional.

The notion of *katharsis* has become so weighed down with connotations that all that everyone can agree on is that tragedy excites emotions, and that having these emotions roused somehow is pleasurable. Indeed almost as much is said in Aristotle's definition of tragedy. In both of the quotes from Aristotle, he connects the process of *katharsis* to the arousal of emotions, (in *Poetics*) specifically pity and fear. It is obvious that tragedy employs these emotions primarily, but experiencing pity and fear in the real world, unlike in tragedy, is not pleasurable. So how is it that the arousal of these unpleasant emotions by means of a representation can have a distinctly *pleasurable* effect?

This is the point at which the contrariness of *katharsis* comes into view, and it is the same contrariness that was examined at the end of Chapter V in respect to the drama in general. Grkinic is correct in positing the fundamental precondition for *katharsis* to be the insight into the non-existing appearing lively in front of us.[127] This means a subconscious understanding by the spectator that the action occurring before them is both real and fictitious. This contrariness is also embodied in the image of the mask, at once alive in use by the actor, but still hollow. It is in the intervening space that Dionysos appears, and it is this "comfortable distance" created by this ontological duality, which allows for the flow of aesthetic emotions. The "aesthetic" is a particular quality of emotion, which is to be differentiated from the "mundane". Mundane emotion is aroused by every day experiences in the real world. It is fear as a mundane emotion that is felt by someone being held at gunpoint or chased by a stranger. Aesthetic emotions are

[126] This was the view held by Gotthold Lessing.
[127] Grkinic p. 91.

evoked however by aesthetic experiences: by watching a movie or viewing a play, a painting, sculpture, or hearing music; even a natural scene or religious experience.[128] Aesthetic emotions, however can only be evoked when the fundamental prerequisite is met. It is the experience of fear and pity as aesthetic emotions, such as in tragedy, in which they become distinctly pleasurable and effect *katharsis.* Such is the way that *katharsis* operates in relation to the *coincidentia oppositorum*, and this further underscores its relevance in the Dionysian spectacle.

In line with modern scholarship, this project maintains that *katharsis* is a purely aesthetic phenomenon, exclusively concerned with *pathos.* It is true that tragedy does have a moral side, but the *katharsis* takes no interest in this aspect. It is true also that tragedy has a considerable intellectual aspect. However, it must also be pointed out that *katharsis* is distinctly non-intellectual.[129] In the *Politics,* the *aulos* is invested with the ability on its own to affect *katharsis*. *Katharsis,* like the emotions that affect it necessitate no particular effort. Thus, tragedy's key function is not something *actively* grasped by means of one's intellect, but is rather something that *happens to* someone. Insight into this is gained by a closer look at the term "*pathos*". *LSJ* defines "*pathos*" as "that which happens to a person or a thing." It primarily falls into three categories 1) an incident/accident: what one has suffered, one's experience or a misfortune. 2) *Pathos* of the soul: a passion or emotion. 3) Any passive state, a condition. The noun "*pathos*" is related to the verb "*paskhō*", which means to suffer, experience or entertain feelings of. Both the noun and the verb ought to be seen as having an inherent passive quality. This is underscored by

[128] Richard Lazarus *Emotion & Adaptation* p. 292.
[129] There are however rational cognitive processes upon which tragic *katharsis* has a vital dependence. At the point of reversal, one must recognize that the situation has changed, and then must make a judgment that the change was for the worse (tragic).

the fact that our English term "passive" is etymologically related to the Latin equivalent of the Greek "*paskhō*" – "*patior*".[130]

Having shown *katharsis* to be completely bound up with *pathos*, evidence put forth by modern neuroscience will now be considered, which suggests the special power that drama and fiction in general possess in stimulating these emotions. Seeing such great potential to effect emotional response in the audience, the prominent role of *katharsis* is reaffirmed. Aesthetics is traditionally a branch of philosophy concerned with the notion of aesthetic (e.g. notions of beauty, ugliness, sublime, etc.) as well as the subjective aesthetic experience. However, it is easy to see why the field of aesthetics would benefit from integration with other fields such as psychology, cognitive and neuroscience. In the past there have been perceived difficulties reconciling the philosophical aesthetic approach with certain conflicts with the methodology of another field with which it is attempting to integrate. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that aesthetics necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, and no modern aesthetic theory that does not account for findings in neuroscience can stand up to scrutiny. As a result, a new field, neuroaesthetics has emerged, the most general purpose of which is the empirical assessment of the affects of art on a creator/performer and on the spectator. For our purposes the focus is on the spectator.

Emotions have typically been a difficult subject for empirical studies. It is much easier to assess the brain as an information-processing device than in terms of secreting feelings. In this way, emotions fell victim to the 'cognitive turn' as it had a predominant paradigm of computation and information processing.[131] However, in recent years, there has been movement away from the cognitive model toward the study of neurons, and as a result better empirical understanding of human emotions has been reached.

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[130] The similarity is most apparent in its third principal part "*passus sum*".
[131] Grkinic p. 103.

The first part of the discussion of studies will emphasize differences between "normal" and aesthetic processing. Neuroscientists Anna Abraham and her colleagues (2008) investigate how humans are so easily able to make the distinction between fictional and "real world" events. They find that processing "real" scenarios activates the anterior prefrontal cortex as well as the posterior cingulate cortex, which are commonly associated with episodic memory. Processing fictional events on the other hand activates areas along the left lateral frontal gyrus, associated with semantic memory.[132] They conclude, "the more self-relevant and familiar the information, the higher the activation in the anterior medial prefrontal cortex as well as the precuneus and posterior cingulate cortices".[133] Grkinic highlights their achievement of showing that "real" events are considered as being of higher relevance than those of fiction. It is suggested though that reality and fiction should not be accounted for in dichotomical terms, it should rather be thought of as a continuum of the degree of personal relevance. In a study the next year, Abraham and Craymon (2009) show that scenarios which involve friends or family rank higher on this continuum.[134] These findings are in line with this project as it allows for a particular *disinterest* amongst the audience, which is the necessary condition for aesthetic emotion. The fact that neuroscientists have proven that our brain distinguishes between fact and fiction, using different loci to perceive them adds weight to this claim.

Gerald Cupchik and his colleagues make further progress in their 2009 study. Here they explicitly describe "aesthetic experience as a special kind of experience in which pleasure is produced by the disinterested contemplation of objects".[135] This is related to principles of focusing attention on the aesthetic object and the suppression of mundane concerns. Aesthetic

[132] *Ibid* p. 135.
[133] Abraham et al. (2008) p. 973.
[134] Grkinic p. 136.
[135] Cupchik et al. (2009) p. 84.

perception is opposed to object recognition, which is aimed at "identification of meaningful objects" in the realm of the mundane. This is associated with higher activation in the fusiform gyrus. On the contrary, aesthetic perception elicits in us an activation of neural systems that range beyond those employed in object recognition. This study shows that our attention can be consciously shifted towards aesthetic perception, as well as that artwork must be viewed *as artwork* to cause aesthetic experience.[136] It also shows that different neural processes underlie this aesthetic experience, than that of object recognition.[137]

Having seen differences between the ways in which the brain processes real versus aesthetic experience, it will now be shown that there are likewise neurological *similarities* between these two activities as well. In fact, there is a great deal more similarity than difference, adding validity to the claim of the importance of *pathos*. Grkinic points out that neurologically the difference between "real" and "fiction" is only shown in a small shift of activation.[138] So, the brain actually processes these two different types of experience in almost the same way. Abraham et al. (2008) claim that the majority of overlap between the neuron reaction involved in perceiving reality and perceiving fiction is "indicative of the similarity of the underlying processes involved when engaging in these scenarios…"[139] Going back to the notion that *katharsis* is made possible by recognition of a "realistic contrivance", it is clear how neuroscience accounts for our fulfillment of the fundamental prerequisite, as it shows activation patterns which indicate that the human brain processes the fictional aesthetic object in a way that takes it to be at the same time both real and fictional. The similarity and difference of neural activation patterns when perceiving reality versus perceiving fiction both work to further the

[136] *Ibid* p. 85.
[137] Grkinic p. 136.
[138] *Ibid* p. 139.
[139] Abraham et al. (2008) p. 972.

argument posited above about the nature of *katharsis*, and the importance of this notion in regard to the aptitude for a human audience to feel emotion.

Speer (2009) assesses the neural activation of reading fiction, taking as her starting point the earlier claim that brain regions involved in reading action words are some of the same areas involved in actually performing those same actions.[140] This is the idea that our brain actually stimulates what is being read. This is generally referred to as "mirror neuron system hypothesis". A mirror neuron is a neuron that fires both when a one performs an action, as well as when one *perceives* that same action being performed by another. The brain exhibits the same neuron activation when perceiving the action as a means to understand. It mirrors in order to comprehend. The human brain has an especially elaborate and effective mirror neuron system that spreads throughout all cerebral lobes.[141] And not only do these neurons mirror motor actions, they code facial expression and hence mirror emotion. So, people automatically share the emotions they perceive to be expressed by others, albeit they may not act the same way. It is more like a participation of one in the emotion of the other. This accounts for the identification of the audience with the actor on stage, and as a result, the drama has an easier time drawing the audience members into its emotional flow.

Studies such as the one undertaken by Speer tend to combine research on the mirror neuron hypothesis with current neurological understanding of the reception of fiction and the arts as it was discussed earlier. Not only will a spectator mirror emotions in real life, but because our brain functions in a similar manner with respect to both mundane and aesthetic experience, the spectator will also mirror emotions of spectacle. In this way, reading about an action is neurologically quite similar to either performing or witnessing the performance of the same

[140] Speer (2009) p. 989.
[141] Grkinic p. 144.

action. This accounts for tragedy's ability to maintain its property of *katharsis*, despite its mutilation into the form of a pure text, and is also an affirmation of the power of *language.*

There is a reason why all of the violent scenes of Greek tragedy take place off stage. The ancient playwrights understood that language had a superior ability, compared to their limited operations of performance, to create a plausible representation. It is for this reason that in the *Bacchae* Euripides portrays Agaue's murder of her son Pentheus by way of a messenger, who had just witnessed the act on the mountain. Through the messenger's words, the dramatist is able to paint a picture of the event, he can show the young man's flesh being ripped from the bone by his raving mother. The images conjured in these scenes are more vivid than they would be if portrayed, and they excite a deeply passionate response. Human brains respond in a similar way to the image of Agaue murdering Pentheus when read about, as they would if they had witnessed or even committed the murder.

Any time modern science becomes able to account for ancient intuition, it can breathe new life into the subject. Neuroscience helps us understand *katharsis* by furthering our comprehension of the aesthetic experience. It also offers new insights into drama's potential, through performance or as a text, to excite emotions in its audience, and indeed no treatment of tragic *katharsis* will be complete which does not take into account current positions in classics, aesthetics, psychology,[142] as well as neuroscience. Having looked generally into what these fields have to say about the nature of this notion and its place in the theatre, I argue that both *katharsis,* and the *pathos* that arouse it deserve higher priority among classicists dealing with Greek tragedy. These two elements are the best answers available at the present time to explain the lasting appeal of tragedy, and as such it is imperative that they become better understood

[142] For corresponding psychological information, see Grkinic's thesis.

Appendix I: Supplementary Images

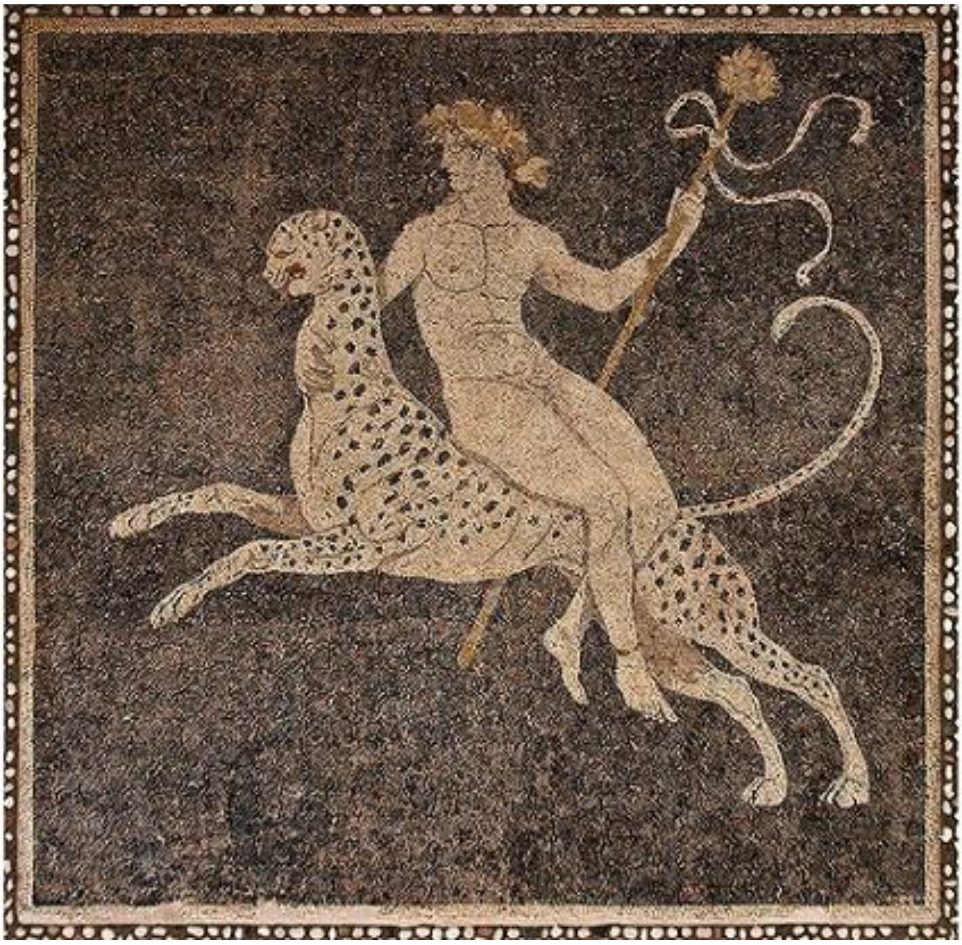

Image #1

Image #2

Image #3

Image #4

Appendix II: Abstract

This project is bound up with the old question of what gives tragedy its lasting appeal. The majority of contemporary criticism on tragedy focuses on aspects having to do with the democratic *polis.* Many of these studies take this musical genre as primarily a means for exposing Athenian civic ideology and norms in social behavior. But this does not account for continued interest in Greek drama. To answer the question at hand, more attention needs to be paid *pathos* and *katharsis,* by students and critics of Greek tragedy, as these are vital aspects of the tragic experience, both within and without performance. Over the last 40 years there has been a wealth of insight brought forth from many studies looking at the god of drama, Dionysos, in relation to tragedy. The connection between these two is shown to be strongest in their simultaneous, constant embodiment of *coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of opposites). Throughout the course of the essay it is shown that *katharsis*, the characteristic affect of Dionysos, operates by means of the same contrariness. *Katharsis* therefore deserves increased attention as its proximity to the tragic phenomenon is defined. This argument is also coupled with evidence such as Aristotle's definition of tragedy, in which *katharsis* is given preferential placement. Because of the subjective nature of aesthetic experience, no treatment can exhaustively deal with *katharsis* and aesthetic emotion (*pathos*), which does not align with contemporary findings in several fields. It is for this reason that this project is carried out by means of a multi-disciplinary approach, taking into account classics, aesthetic philosophy and neuroscience. The inquiry concludes with an examination of contemporary neurological understanding of aesthetic experience, which supports the claims of the contrariness of *katharsis* as well as the immense human aptitude for *pathos* as a result of aesthetic perception.

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