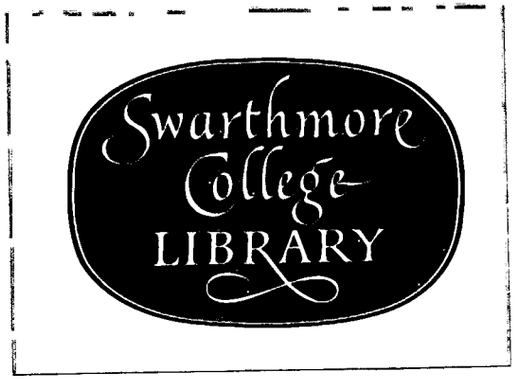

VIOLENCE AND THE SACRED

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Violence and the Sacred

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Chapter Five

Dionysus

ALMOST EVERY SOCIETY HAS FESTIVALS that have retained a ritualistic character over the centuries. Of particular interest to the modern inquirer are observances involving the deliberate violation of established laws; for example, celebrations in which sexual promiscuity is not only tolerated but prescribed or in which incest becomes the required practice.

Such violations must be viewed in their broadest context: that of the overall elimination of differences. Family and social hierarchies are temporarily suppressed or inverted; children no longer respect their parents, servants their masters, vassals their lords. This motif is reflected in the esthetics of the holiday—the display of clashing colors, the parading of transvestite figures, the slapstick antics of piebald "fools." For the duration of the festival unnatural acts and outrageous behavior are permitted, even encouraged.

As one might expect, this destruction of differences is often accompanied by violence and strife. Subordinates hurl insults at their superiors; various social factions exchange gibes and abuse. Disputes rage in the midst of disorder. In many instances the motif of rivalry makes its appearance in the guise of a contest, game, or sporting event that has assumed a quasi-ritualistic cast. Work is suspended, and the celebrants give themselves over to drunken revelry and the consumption of all the food amassed over the course of many months.

I have no doubt that these festivities commemorate a sacrificial crisis. It may seem strange to memorialize a traumatic event in such an uproarious manner, but the explanation lies ready to hand. The specifically "festive" aspects of the celebration, those that most effectively capture the attention, that dominate the spectacle, and that are the only ones to survive the evolutionary transformations of the festival—these aspects have nothing to do with the festival's underlying cause. The fundamental purpose of the festival is to set the stage for a sacrificial act that marks at once the climax and the termination of the festivities. Roger Caillois has pointed out the sacrificial origin of fes-

tivals.[1] If the crisis brought on by the loss of distinctions and the subsequent advent of reciprocal violence can be celebrated in such a jubilant fashion, it is because these holocausts are seen in retrospect as the initial stages of a cathartic process. The beneficial character of the generative unanimity tends to be projected onto the past, affecting the initial impression of the crisis and making it seem other than it was. The violent dismissal of distinctions now acquires a favorable connotation, which will eventually manifest itself as a festive display.

I have already advanced a number of interpretations that may prove relevant to the subject of festivals. For example, ritual incest ultimately acquires a beneficial aspect that seems to be almost wholly independent of its sacrificial quality. In certain societies the aristocrats, and even the artisans, have recourse to ritual incest, more or less furtively, to bring them good luck before a difficult or hazardous undertaking. The rites performed during the enthronement of certain African monarchs or in the course of renewal ceremonies often resemble festival practices. Conversely, in festivals in which the monarch plays no direct role we encounter a substitute king—sometimes a "king of fools"—who is himself nothing more than a sacrificial victim endowed with sacral privileges; at the conclusion of the festivities, he or his representative will be sacrificed. The king's sovereignty—real or imagined, permanent or temporary—seems to derive from an original, generative act of violence inflicted on a surrogate victim.

The function of the festival is no different from the function of other sacrificial rites. As Emile Durkheim perceived, the festival revitalizes the cultural order by reenacting its conception, reproducing an experience that is viewed as the source of health and abundance; reenacting, in fact, the moment when the fear of falling into interminable violence is most intense and the community is therefore most closely drawn together.

Primitive peoples regard their cultural tradition as a fragile and precious inheritance to be carefully nurtured and protected from any change, for change could only serve to damage it, perhaps mortally. The skepticism and resentment we moderns feel toward taboos of any kind, which feelings we tend to assume are shared by primitive peoples, play no part in their festivities. The often-cited syndrome of "release of tensions" or that much-ridden hobby-horse of psychosociologists, the "necessary outlet," has relevance only to a single aspect of the ritual process, and an exclusive emphasis on these syndromes distorts the original spirit of the ritual.

Festivals are based on the assumption that there is a direct link

[1] Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, Ill., 1959), chap. 4, pp. 97–127.

between the sacrificial crisis and its resolution. The crisis is inseparable from its happy ending and becomes itself a cause for jubilation. But this interpretation is not the only one possible. As we have already noticed in the case of royal incest, religious thinking on the relationship between the crisis and its conclusion can result in two divergent viewpoints. Either it is the continuity between crisis and conclusion that strikes the imagination, or it is the rupture; in each instance, the resulting interpretation must be both partially true and partially false. Yet religious thinking tends to adopt one or another of the two solutions and cling to it for dear life—even if, at the outset, the choice could easily have gone the other way.

It can be assumed almost a priori that certain societies will opt for the second solution, the one that emphasizes the rupture between the crisis and the founding violence. In such cases another kind of festival will arise, one that, in comparison with the festival we have been describing, might perhaps be called an antifestival. The rites of sacrificial expulsion are not preceded by a period of frenzied anarchy, but by an extreme austerity and an increased rigor in the observance of all interdicts. Extraordinary precautions are taken to prevent the community from falling prey once again to reciprocal violence.

In fact, both solutions can be observed. In some societies we encounter ritual occasions that resemble festivals—there is the same periodicity, the same interruption of normal activities, the same rites of sacrificial expulsion—and yet are so very different from festivals that they constitute a vexing problem for ethnologists, one similar to the enigma of royal incest, which is accepted in some societies and forbidden in others. Far from being temporarily suspended, in the antifestival all cultural prohibitions are strongly reinforced.

The rites of the Swazi Incwala correspond closely to the definition of the antifestival. Throughout the period of observance all sexual activity, including the most legitimate, is forbidden. Sleeping late in the morning is regarded as a crime, and physical contact between individuals is to be avoided, even physical contact with one's own body (the celebrants are not supposed to wash or to scratch themselves). A threat of imminent pollution—that is, of violence—hangs over the entire community. All singing and loud noise are prohibited. Children are scolded if they grow noisy at play.

In *The Golden Bough* Frazer offers a fine example of an antifestival. For several weeks in the year the Cape tribe on the Gold Coast permit no sound of tom-toms or musket fire. Public conversations are forbidden. If a dispute arises and voices are raised, the contesting parties are summoned before the chieftain, who deals out stiff fines to everyone involved. To avoid arguments over strayed livestock, all lost animals

become the property of their finders, and the original owners are obliged to relinquish all claim.

It seems clear that such measures are intended to prevent the outbreak of widespread violence. Frazer offers no explanation for them, but his anthropological intuition (far superior to his theorizing) prompted him to classify these practices under the rubric of festivals. The logic of the antifestival is as strict as that of the festival. The goal is to reproduce the beneficial effects of violent unanimity while abbreviating as much as possible the terrible preliminaries—which, in the case of the antifestival, are perceived in a negative light. The longer the interval between any two purifying rituals, the greater the danger of a violent explosion. Impurities accumulate; and in the period immediately preceding the celebration of the rite, a period saturated with the memory of the sacrificial crisis, everyone moves with extreme caution. It is as if the community had suddenly become an arsenal piled high with gunpowder. The Saturnalia has been transformed into its opposite, the feast changed to a fast; but the purpose of the ritual remains the same.

In addition to the festival and the antifestival, one finds, as might have been expected, "mixed" ceremonies resulting from a more complex, more nuanced concept of the relationship between the crisis and the restoration of order, a concept that takes into account both the continuity and the discontinuity between them. In some instances at least these variations can be seen as a late development, resulting from the sheer remoteness of the original violence; that is, from the cumulative effect of mythological elaboration.

All too often we go astray when examining the nature of the festival and allow our attention to be diverted to secondary aspects. Under these circumstances the events hidden behind the rite become increasingly inaccessible, and the rite's unity of purpose splinters into many incompatible segments. At the very point when the religious aspects of the rite have begun to reflect an ignorance equal to our own, the rite suddenly appears to have a timely and original function, whereas this function is in fact belated and derivative. The asceticism and mortifications of the antifestivals seems very far removed from the kind of activity we associate with a festival. We fail to grasp that they share a common origin and that in those communities where the ritual has retained its greatest vitality they often achieve a "dialectical" equilibrium. The more the rites diverge from their true function, the more differentiated they appear and the more interesting they become to scholars, who can sort them out in different categories.

Modern scholarship, notably since Frazer, is no longer unaware that certain festivals entailed human sacrifice. Nonetheless, we are still far

from suspecting that the distinctive traits of this practice and their innumerable variations can be traced back directly or indirectly to a generative act of collective violence, a liberating gesture of mob anger. The origin of the festival can still be discerned, even in those instances where sacrificial immolation has been eliminated from the proceedings. The disappearance of the sacrificial event may lead to new rites whose sacrificial character is easily identifiable—rites of exorcism, for example. These rites occupy the same place as the vanished sacrifice, and even when they are not directly linked to sacrifice they serve the same function in the ceremonies. In short, they can be said to be a replacement for the sacrifice.

What is the correct procedure for ridding a person or place of devils and evil spirits? Often it is a matter of shouting, clanging weapons or cooking vessels, and beating the air with a stick. Nothing seems more natural than to take a broom to the devil—if, that is, one is stupid enough to believe in his existence. The modern intellectual, the "liberated" Frazerian, therefore concludes that primitives liken the spirit of evil to some great beast that takes to its heels when frightened. The rationalistic mind does not bother with customs that seem not only puerile in conception but lacking all reason.

In this case as in many others a complacent intellect and the seeming "naturalness" of the circumstances can serve to conceal their most interesting aspects. In principle, the act of exorcism is an act of violence perpetrated against the devil or his associates. In some festivals this terminal violence is preceded by mock combat *between the exorcists themselves*. We recognize here a pattern repeated in many sacrificial rites: the actual immolation is preceded by ritual disputes between the sacrificers, in which the violence is to some extent simulated. This phenomenon of mock combat must stem in all instances from the same general source.

In an example adduced by Frazer, the young men of the village go from house to house, pausing at each to perform the rites of exorcism. The tour begins with a quarrel about which house to visit first. (As a good positivist, Frazer takes care to include even those details that do not fit neatly into his own scheme; for this reason alone he deserves our gratitude and respect.) The preliminary quarrel is a reminder of the sacrificial crisis; the sacrifice or exorcism that follows emulates the unanimous violence which is, in effect, promptly grafted onto the reciprocal violence and distinguished from it only by its miraculous results.

At the conclusion of the quarrel unanimity is achieved, and the moment has come for the surrogate victim, for the performance of the sacrifice. The object of the quarrel is ostensibly the sacrifice itself; that is, the selection of the victim. In the course of the quarrel each

disputant strives to put in a final word, reducing his antagonist to silence; each wants to get in the decisive blow, the one that permits no response and that will therefore serve as a model for the rite itself.

Greek legends often contain vague reference to a sacrifice—a human sacrifice—offered by a community, city, or army to some god. The persons involved agree on the need for such a sacrifice but disagree on the choice of victim. To understand the situation the investigator must reverse the order of events. First comes the violence, spontaneous and senseless; then comes the sacrificial explanation, genuinely sacrificial in that it conceals the senseless and basically intolerable aspect of the violence. The sacrificial explanation is rooted in an act of terminal violence, violence that can only be labeled sacrificial retrospectively, because it brought all hostilities to an end. These stories may represent the minimal form of mythological fabrication. A collective murder that brings about the restoration of order imposes a kind of ritualistic framework on the savage fury of the group, all of whose members are out for one another's blood. Murder becomes sacrifice; the angry free-for-all that preceded it is transformed into a ritual dispute over the choice of the most suitable victim, one that satisfies the piety of the faithful or has been selected by the god. In effect, the real question behind these preliminaries is, Who will kill whom?

The dispute concerning *the first dwelling to be exorcised* screens the same conflictual process, leading to the violent resolution of the crisis. Exorcism represents the last chain in a series of reprisals.

Having succumbed to reciprocal violence, the celebrants as a group vent their fury *on the empty air*. We see here manifested a truth common to all rites, but never more clearly displayed than in this type of exorcism. Ritual violence awakens no hostility, confronts no antagonist; as long as their blows are directed *as a group* against an insubstantial presence, which for excellent reasons shows no tendency to retaliate in kind, the exorcists are not likely to resume their quarrel. And here the rite reveals its origin and function. The unanimity attained through the intervention of the surrogate victim must not be lost. The community stands united before the onslaught of "evil spirits" and remains faithful to its vow to reject mutual hostility. The rite reaffirms and reinforces this resolution. And religious thought returns again and again to that supreme wonder, that last word of violence, which is all the more precious for being pronounced so late in the day. Sacrifice is the boon worthy above all others of being preserved, celebrated and memorialized, reiterated and reenacted in a thousand different forms, for it alone can prevent transcendental violence from turning back into reciprocal violence, the violence that really hurts, setting man against man and threatening the total destruction of the community.

THIS GENERAL THEORY of the sacrificial crisis and violent unanimity seems to clarify aspects of the festival that have hitherto remained obscure. As the ritualistic aspects of the festival dwindle, it degenerates into a communal "letting off of steam"—the very idea of the festival held dear by modern scholars. The gradual loss of ritualistic structure and the constantly increasing misunderstandings surrounding the festival seem to go hand in hand. The disintegration of myths and rituals, and indeed of religious thought in general, leads not to genuine demythologizing, but to the outbreak of a new sacrificial crisis.

The joyous, peaceful facade of the deritualized festival, stripped of any reference to a surrogate victim and its unifying powers, rests on the framework of a sacrificial crisis attended by reciprocal violence. That is why genuine artists can still sense that tragedy lurks somewhere behind the bland festivals, the tawdry utopianism of the "leisure society." The more trivial, vulgar, and banal holidays become, the more acutely one senses the approach of something uncanny and terrifying. The theme of holiday-gone-wrong dominates Fellini's films and has recently surfaced in various different forms in the work of many other artists.

The holiday-gone-wrong serves nicely to symbolize decadence. As an artistic motif it is rich in fruitful paradoxes. What is more, it is a very real part of the scene in any decadent society. To ascertain this we have only to look at the festal practices of obviously failing societies, such as the Yanomamö, who are torn apart by perpetual civil war, or even more strikingly, of societies in the final stages of disintegration, such as the Kaingang. The festival as celebrated in these societies has lost all its ritual characteristics; it has "gone wrong" in the sense that it has reverted to its violent origins. Instead of holding violence in check, the ceremonies inaugurate a new cycle of revenge. By a process of inversion that can befall all rites and that we have already had occasion to observe in the case of sacrificial rites, the festival ceases to function as a preventive measure and lends its support to the forces of destruction:

> The killing was to be done in traditional Kaingáng style; they [the future victims] were to be invited to a festa, made to drink, and then slaughtered. Although the Kaingáng associate festas with quarreling and murder they never refused an invitation to one even though they knew their lives were in danger. One might imagine that at a festa where large

sections of the tribe came together to enjoy themselves the bonds of kinship would be renewed and strengthened and old attachments of man for man would draw new warmth from the general good feeling.

Although this was true of some Kaingáng festas they were as often the scene of violent quarreling and disruption as they were of friendliness and solidarity. The men and women got drunk, and the men boasted to their children of their invulnerability and their deeds of blood. The men 'told their *waikayu*' [hubris] 'walking about, shaking either clubs or lances, slashing at the air, crying out the deeds they had done and the murders they would yet commit. As the beer and the excitement mounted to their heads they turned on their neighbors and quarreled with them because they suspected them of adultery with their wives or because they themselves had had affairs with their neighbors' wives and themselves felt suspected and hated.[2]

Kaingang folklore abounds in accounts of festivals that turn into massacres, and the Kaingang expression "We shall make beer for him" has decidedly sinister connotations.

LET US NOW APPLY our newfound concept of the festival to the myth of Dionysus, as portrayed in Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*. This analysis will concern itself with issues referred to in the discussion of the Oedipus myth; I hope it will help to clarify my thesis of the role of violence while also directing attention to new problems of significance.

A bacchanal is a festival in the sense just defined; it displays all the characteristics previously discussed. *The Bacchae* begins as a ritual bacchanal. The poet underlines the destruction of distinctions as the god sweeps away all the barriers that usually divide mortals: wealth, age, sex, and so on. Everyone is called on to worship Dionysus; the chorus proclaims that graybeards will now mingle with youths, women will be on a par with men.

The bacchanal portrayed by Euripides involves the women of Thebes. Having established his worship in Asia, Dionysus arrives in his native city in the guise of a young disciple of his own cult who exerts a potent influence over almost everyone who encounters him. Seized by the spirit of the god, Dionysus's own aunt Agauë, his cousin Ino, and all the women of Thebes desert hearth and home to wander the slopes of Mount Cithaeron, celebrating the first bacchanal.

Idyllic at first, the bacchantes' revel soon becomes a bloodthirsty nightmare. The delirious women hurl themselves indiscriminately on men and beasts. Only Pentheus, king of Thebes and son of Agauë,

[2] Henry, *Jungle People*, pp. 56–57.

persists in denying the divinity of his cousin. Like Tiresias and Creon in *Oedipus the King*, Pentheus is an outsider who, before succumbing to the universal frenzy, lucidly defines the situation: "I have just returned from my travels to hear news of the strange illness that afflicts our city."

The "strange illness" is clearly the sacrificial crisis. It has struck with lightning speed, inciting its victims to irrational acts. The sacrificial crisis makes no distinction between those who submit to its demands out of prudence or opportunism—like the two old men—and the only man who has the boldness to reject it—the unfortunate Pentheus. Whether one chooses to fight or to submit, violence triumphs.

Throughout the tragedy the Bacchic spirit is presented as indistinguishable from the infectious evil. Pentheus rebukes his grandfather, who has attempted to persuade him to join in worshiping the god: "Do not breathe your infection on me; go and play the bacchant." The Dionysiac outbreak spells the disintegration of social institutions and the collapse of the cultural order; both of which disasters are dramatically symbolized by the destruction of the royal palace at the climax of the action. It is futile to attempt to restrain the god of violence. Pentheus tries to imprison the defiant youth whose form Dionysus has assumed; but even as everything around him is engulfed in flame, the god steps forth unharmed from the ruins.

The Bacchae takes as its subject a festival that goes wrong. And we will hardly be surprised at this unpleasant turn of events when we consider that this bacchanal is none other than the original bacchanal; that is, the sacrificial crisis. The tragedy seems to offer strong evidence in support of my theory of the meaning of festivals. It traces the festival back to its violent beginnings, back to its origins in reciprocal violence. Euripides subjects the myth and worship of Dionysus to the same sort of treatment that Sophocles applied to the Oedipus myth. He brings into play the conflictual symmetry behind the mythological message (and, as with Oedipus, behind the rite)—a message that conceals this symmetry at least as much as it displays it.

The playwright's task was made easier because the bacchanal perpetuates an essential aspect of the sacrificial crisis: the destruction of differences. Beginning as a gesture of harmony, the Dionysiac elimination of distinctions rapidly degenerates into a particularly virulent form of violent nondifferentiation. The abolishment of sexual differences, which appears in the ritual bacchanal as a celebration of love and brotherhood, becomes in the tragedy an act of hostility. The women take up the most violent masculine activities, hunting and warfare. They deride men for their weakness and femininity. Dionysus, in the

guise of a long-haired adolescent, personally takes a hand in fomenting the disorder. Pentheus, having reproached the god for his effeminate appearance, is seized by the desire to disguise himself in woman's dress so that he can spy on the bacchantes on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron.

We also find in *The Bacchae* reference to that loss of distinction between man and beast that is always linked to violence. The bacchantes hurl themselves on a herd of cattle, which they mistake for prying men, and tear them apart with their bare hands. And Pentheus, mad with rage, imprisons a bull in his stable in the belief that he has captured Dionysus himself. Agauë commits the inverse error: when the bacchantes discover her son Pentheus spying on them, she mistakes him for a "young lion" and strikes the first blow to kill him.

Another difference that tends to disappear in the course of the tragedy is the seemingly indelible distinction between man and god—in this instance, between Pentheus and Dionysus. There is no aspect of Dionysus that fails to find a reflection in Pentheus. Dionysus is a dual figure. On the one hand, there is the Dionysus of the Maenads, the defender of divine and human laws, the jealous guardian of legality; on the other, there is the subversive *agent-provocateur* of the tragedy, the figure we have considered above. This same duality can be seen in Pentheus. The king of Thebes introduces himself to us as a pious conservative, a guardian of traditional values. Yet the chorus denounces him as a bold lawbreaker whose blasphemy exposes the city to divine retribution. There is no doubt that Pentheus contributes to the chaos he claims to oppose. He dons the garb of a bacchant and becomes possessed by Dionysus; that is, by violence—a violence that eliminates all distinctions between creatures, whether "men" or "gods," through the paradoxical means of fierce antagonism.

The characteristics of each protagonist are all reproduced, to a degree, in the other. For example, the divinity of Dionysus is counterbalanced by a secret humanity implied by his appearance as a long-haired youth. Similarly, the humanity of Pentheus is counterbalanced, if not by divinity, at least by a delusion of divinity, revealed in the superhuman claims that accompany his final submission to the Dionysiac spirit: "Could I not lift up on my shoulders Cithaeron and all its groves, with all the reveling bacchantes?"

In the Dionysiac frenzy all differences between man and god tend to disappear. If there is a voice of Dionysiac orthodoxy in the play it can only be that of the Lydian Maenads, who address us in unequivocal terms. God-inspired madness has made each celebrant another Dionysus. The Lydian chorus declares, "Who leads the dance becomes a Bromios!"

It has been said that the delirium of Pentheus and the Theban bacchantes is due to a culpable hubris, whereas everything relating to Dionysus and his Maenads is truly divine. Even the worst forms of violence are legitimate because god is god and man is man. There is some apparent truth in that. As far as the overall plot of the play is concerned, the difference between man and god is never lost sight of; in fact, it is strongly proclaimed at the beginning and end of the tragedy. Yet in the middle all differences mingle and dissolve, including the distinction between human and divine.

As we have seen, tragic inspiration leads to the same results in *The Bacchae* as in *Oedipus the King*. Mythological and ritual values are abolished by reciprocal violence. The subjective nature of all differences is exposed. We are compelled to confront a vital question pertaining to myth and the cultural order. Sophocles stopped just short of framing this question and concludes by reaffirming the compromised mythological values. Euripides follows the same procedure in *The Bacchae*. The symmetry is so implacably applied that in the end it dissolves the difference between man and god. Divinity becomes nothing more than a prize in the struggle between two rivals: "You know . . . how happy you are when a great crowd greets you at your doors, and all the city glorifies the name of Pentheus. Bacchus also loves such honors, I am sure. . . ."

In any case, at the end of the play the uniqueness of the deity is reaffirmed, and in terrifying fashion. It is made abundantly clear that no real contest ever existed between the omnipotent Dionysus and the culpably weak Pentheus. The triumph of difference once again shields from sight the recently exposed tragic symmetry. Once again tragedy seems to oscillate between audacity and indecision. In the case of Sophocles the conflict between the symmetry of the tragic action and the dissymetry of the mythological content is our only reason for believing that the poet, knowingly or unknowingly, recoiled before an act of even greater audacity. In the case of *The Bacchae* the same textual conflict is present, and we are led by the same process to a similar conclusion: Euripides, too, backed off from commiting an act of even greater audacity. But this time the backing off is not performed in silence. His tragedies contain numerous passages whose emphatic tone and repetition of theme clearly mark them as expressions of the poet's decision to retreat and his attempts to justify himself:

> Human wisdom is not wisdom, and to aspire to more than man's due is to shorten life, is to sacrifice the fruit at hand for what is out of reach. I think it is sheer madness or plain stupidity to act in such a manner. . . . Keep heart and mind aloof from overreaching intellects.
> The beliefs and practices common to the common man are good enough for me.

Scholars are far from agreement on the interpretation of such passages, and much of the modern debate on Euripides centers on this problem. It may be that the whole question has been falsified by a postulate implicitly accepted by all the commentators. This postulate relates to the type of knowledge the poet has declined to confront. We have taken it for granted that such knowledge cannot be unknown to us; the idea that anyone so remote from "modern thought" as Euripides could have perceived a danger wholly unsuspected by us, could have anticipated a truth whose existence has escaped us completely, hardly seems worth consideration.

Modern critics are convinced that Euripides drew back before that same skepticism of which they are themselves the proud proponents—an intellectual viewpoint that denies the existence of a real basis for religion and declares the whole institution purely "imaginary." Euripides, they suggest, hesitated from conventional propriety or simple prejudice to acknowledge that religion was nothing more than mystification, an illusion specifically designed to offer consolation or impose restraints. Timidity kept him from acknowledging that religion was a figment of the imagination.

The modern intellectual is a romantic soul who likes to think of himself as the boldest iconoclast in history. At times he cannot but challenge the high place accorded Euripides by tradition and wonder whether the poet is not essentially too "bourgeois" in spirit to warrant such esteem.

But Euripides speaks less in terms of religious "faith," in the modern sense, than in terms of the transgressing of limits, of the fearsome knowledge that exists beyond these limits. We do not seem to be dealing in his case with a simple choice between belief and disbelief—two equally abstract concepts. Something else is at play, something more to the point than sterile religious scepticism. This something else, still to be discerned, is nonetheless near at hand, in the text of *The Bacchae.*

THE MURDER OF PENTHEUS serves as both culmination and resolution of a crisis provoked by the god himself in "revenge" for the Thebans' failure to pay homage to him, and especially for the resistance of his own family. Having brought about Pentheus' death, the god banishes the rest of the family from the city. Peace and harmony now return to Thebes, which will henceforth honor the god in the manner ordained by him.

The murder thus appears as the outcome of a divine plan and, at the same time, the result of a spontaneous outburst. The divine plan falls within the formalized framework of ritual sacrifice. In this instance the god himself is the sacrificer and prepares the future victim; the sacrificial act ordained by him coincides with the act of revenge that will appease his anger. Under the pretext of arranging his costume and coiffure, Dionysus manages to touch Pentheus ritualistically on his head, waist, and feet. The murder itself is performed in accordance with Dionysiac practice; it includes the distinctive *sparagmos*, or dismemberment, which we have already encountered in other sacrificial contexts. In addition (1) all the bacchantes participate in the killing. This satisfies the requirements of unanimity, which figures in so many rituals. And (2) no weapon is used; the victim is torn apart by the women's bare hands. Such a performance is not peculiar to the Dionysiac cult. We have already cited two examples of collective murders without weapons, one in a Dinka sacrifice and the other part of the Swazi Incwala, where a cow is substituted for the king; there are many similar examples. The assertion—made by Rudolf Otto, among others—that the Dionysiac rites were unique can easily be disproved. There is no aspect of the Dionysiac myth or ritual that does not find a distinct echo in many primitive societies.

The Euripidean version of the myth emphasizes the spontaneous aspect of the ritualistic proceedings and thus affords us a fleeting glimpse—or at least a strong intimation—of a real relationship between the rite and a past event, grounded in fact and partially reconstituted by the dramatist. The dismemberment of a living victim by unarmed assailants, each participating wholly in the act, takes on a clear meaning. Even without Euripides' detailed description we can imagine the original scene. It would not have been a case of premeditated assassination. Everything suggests a crowd whose intentions were initially pacific; a disorganized mob that for unknown reasons (of no real importance to our argument) came to a high pitch of mass hysteria. The crowd finally hurled itself on one individual; even though he had no particular qualifications for this role, he served to polarize all the fears, anxieties, and hostilities of the crowd. His violent death provided the necessary outlet for the mass anguish, and restored peace.[3]

The ritual *sparagmos* reenacts with scrupulous exactitude the mob violence that brought riot and disorder to an end. In the ritual performance, the community tries to mimic the gestures that effected its salvation. It is also trying, paradoxically enough, to recapture through ritual the element of complete spontaneity. Here, as elsewhere, tragedy occupies an ambiguous, intermediary position between the ritual performance and the spontaneous model that the ritual attempts to reproduce. From the point of view of established religious doctrine,

[3] The best treatment of the crowd's role in abolishing differences is Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York, 1966).

Dionysus is wholly responsible for Pentheus' murder. After all, the god is master of events; it is he who prepares from afar the details of the first sacrifice, his own sacrificial enterprise that is the most awesome and effective of all sacrifices, the one that truly mends the shattered community. But from the point of view of a religion-in-the-making, the murder of Pentheus appears as a spontaneous resolution that could be neither planned nor anticipated.

The collective violence is openly displayed, but the essential process —the arbitrary choice of the victim and the sacrificial substitution that restores unity—remains concealed. The actual expulsion of the victim recedes from sight and maintains its efficiency by appearing only in the guise of institutionalized sacrifice. From the viewpoint of the sacrificial crisis, the relationship between the *doubles*, Dionysus and Pentheus, is reciprocal in a double sense. There is no reason why it should be Dionysus rather than Pentheus who sacrifices his companion. Yet from the viewpoint of established religion, even if this reciprocity is at one level acknowledged and the sacrificer and his victim are recognized as *doubles*, on another and more basic level this same reciprocity is abolished. The direction must not be allowed to reverse itself; it has been fixed once and for all, and the expulsion is always understood to have *already* taken place.

We cannot hope to understand the rite merely by attributing it to psychic motivations, either conscious or unconscious. And in spite of all appearances, gratuitous sadism plays no part in the procedure. The rite is directed toward order and tranquillity, not violence. It strives to achieve violence solely in order to eliminate it. Nothing is more naive or, in the final analysis, more futile than the speculations psychological theorists derive from the brutality of a rite such as the *sparagmos*.

The Bacchae offers ample evidence in support of my definition of sacrifice. Euripides' tragedy and the whole cult of Dionysus seem to provide strong support for the hypothesis that traces myth and ritual to a generative act of unanimity.

THE IMPARTIAL READER, approaching the play free of the influence of Nietzsche or Rudolf Otto, is always struck by the sheer perfidy of Dionysus's role. Throughout the play the god wanders from place to place, engendering violence and crime with the artfulness of a satanic seducer. Only the quixotic masochism of our own age, the result of a long immunity to the violence that threatens primitive societies, allows us to see anything attractive in the Dionysus of *The Bacchae*. It seems clear that Euripides shares none of our illusions, which would be comic if they were less disquieting.

The god has no proper being outside the realm of violence. All his attributes are linked to violence; if he is associated with the gift of prophetic inspiration (like the Delphic Apollo who figures in the Oedipus myth), it is because prophetic inspiration is part of the sacrificial crisis. And if he later appears as the god of wine, that is probably a more sedate version of his original designation as the god of homicidal fury. Certainly there is nothing in the ancient Dionysiac tradition that alludes directly to viniculture or the production of wine.[4] In *The Bacchae* the epiphany of the god arises from the catastrophic consequences of the sacrificial crisis, which is symbolized by the destruction of Pentheus's palace:

Chorus: Divine tremor, shake the floor of the earth!
Dionysus: See! The palace of Pentheus trembles. It falls! Dionysus is standing there! Bow down before him!
Chorus: We bow down before him. Ah, see the marble friezes fall! Bromios will shout with triumph within!
Dionysus: Let divine lightning be the torch! Now set afire the ruins of Pentheus's palace.
Chorus: Ah, ah! Look, look! Around the sacred tomb of Semele the ever-smouldering fire leaps in flame! Prostrate yourselves before your god, O Maenads. The palace falls! He is coming, the son of Zeus!

It may seem surprising, even scandalous, that the incarnation of the most terrible forms of violence should be an object of veneration as well as of fear. In this case, however, it is not the worshipers who are naive, but the bewildered observers.

If we examine more closely the specific types of violence associated with the god, we find that an overall pattern appears. This pattern seems to confirm our interpretation of Pentheus's murder as a Dionysiac sacrifice. Under the name of *Bromios*—the Noisemaker, the Earthshaker—Dionysus presides over disasters that have nothing to do with the thunderstorms and earthquakes beloved of nineteenth-century scholars but that in fact always involve a mob impelled by sheer panic to the performance of extraordinary acts. Tiresias defines Dionysus as the god of mob hysteria, of sudden onslaughts of collective fear: "Soldiers in full battle array and poised for combat are transfixed by panic before a lance has touched them. This hysteria is Dionysus's work."

Such statements, added to the ones we have already collected and to

[4] Cf. Henri Jeanmaire, *Dionysos: Histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris, 1970), p. 23.

the body of evidence drawn from other rites, leads to the inescapable conclusion that *Dionysus is the god of decisive mob action.* Once stated, it should be easy to see why such a god is called for and why he is revered. He claims legitimacy not from his ability to disturb the peace but from his ability to restore the peace he has himself disturbed —thereby justifying, a posteriori, having disturbed it in the first place. Divine intervention is transformed into legitimate anger against a blasphemous hubris, which, until the crucial display of unanimity, seemed to implicate the god himself.

Textual criticism confirms the theories that portray the Dionysiac cult as a consequence of major political and social upheavals. In spite of its limitations, a work like Erwin Rohde's *Psyche* manifests a profound intuitive grasp of reality. In the absence of new documentary evidence the traditional historical method can make little progress. Only a comparative analysis of texts and of significant religious phenomena (a method utilized by Rohde, but on too small a scale) can substantially increase our knowledge.[5]

Along with any known historical context, we can infer behind a myth like that of *The Bacchae* a sudden outbreak of violence so extreme as to threaten the very existence of the community. This threat will eventually be withdrawn, as rapidly as it appeared, thanks to a type of mob violence that reconciles all members of the community because it involves the participation of all. The metamorphosis from peaceable citizens into raging beasts is too terrifying and too transitory for the community to accept it as issuing from within itself. As soon as calm has been miraculously restored, the past tumult will be looked upon as a supreme example of divine intervention. Angered at discovering himself ignored or misrepresented, a god has made known his wishes in a thoroughly godlike manner. Having accepted a final victim, a victim of his own choice in which he may also be incarnated, he silently withdraws from the scene. He will be as benevolent from afar as he was terrible in propinquity.

Religion, then, is far from "useless." It humanizes violence; it protects man from his own violence by taking it out of his hands, transforming it into a transcendent and ever-present danger to be kept in check by the appropriate rites appropriately observed and by a modest and prudent demeanor. Religious misinterpretation is a truly construc-

[5] Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, trans. W. B. Hillis from the 8th ed. (London and New York, 1925). In his remarkable *Dionysos*, Jeanmaire offers a critical appraisal of the sociological approach. His thesis, which emphasizes ecstatic aspects of the cult and the signs of possession, can be reconciled with an awareness of social and historical aspects through my hypothesis of the sacrificial crisis and unanimous generative violence.

tive force, for it purges man of the suspicions that would poison his existence if he were to remain conscious of the crisis as it actually took place.

To think religiously is to envision the city's destiny in terms of that violence whose mastery over man increases as man believes he has gained mastery over it. To think religiously (in the primitive sense) is to see violence as something superhuman, to be kept always at a distance and ultimately renounced. When the fearful adoration of this power begins to diminish and all distinctions begin to disappear, the ritual sacrifices lose their force; their potency is no longer recognized by the entire community. Each member tries to correct the situation individually, and none succeeds. The withering away of the transcendental influence means that there is no longer the slightest difference between a desire to save the city and unbridled ambition, between genuine piety and the desire to claim divine status for oneself. Everyone looks on a rival enterprise as evidence of blasphemous designs. (It was at such a moment that all the distinctions between Dionysus and Pentheus were effaced.) Men set to quarreling about the gods, and their skepticism leads to a new sacrificial crisis that will appear— retrospectively, in the light of a new manifestation of unanimous violence—as a new act of divine intervention and divine revenge.

Men would not be able to shake loose the violence between them, to make of it a separate entity both sovereign and redemptory, without the surrogate victim. Also, violence itself offers a sort of respite, the fresh beginning of a cycle of ritual after a cycle of violence. Violence will come to an end only after it has had the last word and that word has been accepted as divine. The meaning of this word must remain hidden, the mechanism of unanimity remain concealed. For religion protects man as long as its ultimate foundations are not revealed. To drive the monster from its secret lair is to risk loosing it on mankind. To remove men's ignorance is only to risk exposing them to an even greater peril. The only barrier against human violence is raised on misconception. In fact, the sacrificial crisis is simply another form of that knowledge which grows greater as the reciprocal violence grows more intense but which never leads to the whole truth. It is the knowledge of violence, along with the violence itself, that the act of expulsion succeeds in shunting outside the realm of consciousness. From the very fact that it belies the overt mythological messages, tragic drama opens a vast abyss before the poet; but he always draws back at the last moment. He is exposed to a form of hubris more dangerous than any contracted by his characters; it has to do with a truth that is felt to be infinitely destructive, even if it is not fully understood—and its de-

structiveness is as obvious to ancient religious thought as it is to modern philosophers. Thus, we are dealing with an interdiction that still applies to ourselves and that modern thought has not yet invalidated. The fact that this secret has been subjected to exceptional pressure in the play must prompt the following lines:

> May our thoughts never aspire to anything higher than the laws! What does it cost man to acknowledge the full sovereignty of the gods? That which has always been held as true owes its strength to Nature.

FOR DIONYSUS AS FOR OEDIPUS, the mythic elaboration, the transfiguring medium of the story, leads to the reorganization of certain elements that properly pertain to collective phenomena anterior to the myth, elements that would be wholly unsuitable, even unintelligible, if they were evenly distributed among the characters; if, that is, the reciprocal nature of the violence were duly acknowledged. In both cases reciprocity yields to difference, and this difference severs the god or mythic hero from the community, while drawing to him all the community's violent impulses. Henceforth the role of violence in the crisis—in addition to its function in purely ritualistic or sacrificial terms—will be recalled solely as that of a passive agent of contagion: the plague in the Oedipus myth, or the fraternal nondifferentiation, or the Dionysiac bacchanal.

All the elements that enter into the composition of the myth are borrowed from the reality of the crisis; nothing has been added, nothing taken away; no conscious alterations have been made. Mythological elaboration is an unconscious process based on the surrogate victim and nourished by the presence of violence. This presence is not "repressed," not cast off on the unconscious; rather, it is detached from man and made divine.

Tragic inspiration dissolves fictive differences in reciprocal violence; it demystifies the double illusion of a violent divinity and an innocent community. The mixed choruses at the festivals of Dionysus and the temporary permission granted women to drink wine are faint echoes of a more awesome type of intoxication. Tragic inspiration demystifies the bacchanal; consequently, it destroys the delusion based on the collective transference upon which a major portion of the rite depends. The rite is not oriented toward violence, but toward peace. The tragic demystification discloses a bacchanal that is pure frenzy, naked violence. And the process of tragic demystification is itself violent, for it cannot but weaken the rites and contribute to their "going wrong." Far from toiling in the cause of peace and universal understanding, as a world blind to the social role of human violence likes to believe, anti-

religious demystification is every bit as ambiguous as religion itself. If it takes up arms against a certain type of violence, it may well bring about another, undoubtedly more destructive type. Unlike the moderns, Euripides confronts this ambiguity head on, and that is why he never advances in one direction without subsequently retracing his steps in another. In his oscillations between "audacity" and "timidity," he appears to be alternately defending and denouncing the bacchanal. At the beginning of the play the bacchanal is presented in a favorable light by Cadmus and Tiresias, who both make speeches in praise of Dionysus. Euripides seems anxious to defend the cult against those who would associate Dionysiac nondifferentiation with promiscuity and violence. The bacchantes are presented as models of tranquillity and decorum, and the hostile aspersions cast on the cult are indignantly rejected by the poet.

The defense of the bacchantes, however, is immediately belied by events. As Marie Delcourt-Curvers remarks in her introduction to the play, we wonder "what meaning the poet intended to give to the antics of Agauë and her companions—innocent at first (to the point of seeming slightly ridiculous), then disquieting, and finally murderous; so that having doubted the very existence of a "problem of *The Bacchae*," we are forced to acknowledge both the problem and our inability to resolve it."[6]

The rite may stem from violence and be steeped in violence, but it still aspires to peace. In fact, it is a means of promoting harmony between the members of the community. Euripides tried to save the rite from the destruction visited on all religious concepts by sacrificial crises and the tragic mode. But this effort was doomed to failure: the poet's tragic inspiration all too easily overcame his good intentions; and once the sacrificial and nonsacrificial have been mixed—like the two drops of Gorgon's blood—there is no separating them.

The "problem of *The Bacchae*" would never have arisen if Euripides had fully acceded to the violent origin of the rite, the playing out of violence, and had acknowledged the generative act of unanimity preserved by the rite, lost in the onslaught of reciprocal violence and recovered through the mechanism of the surrogate victim. He could then have demonstrated that the good and bad aspects of the bacchanal correspond to the two faces of the generative act. The same creatures who are at each others' throats during the course of a sacrificial crisis are fully capable of coexisting, before and after the crisis, in the relative harmony of a ritualistic order.

Indeed, there would have been no problem if Euripides had been

[6] *Euripide*, ed. and trans. Marie Delcourt-Curvers (Paris, 1962).

able to adopt the perspective of primitive religion, openly espousing the sacred while stripping man of his violence and reattributing it to divine influences. Again, there would have been no "problem of *The Bacchae*" if the play had been able to bring his perplexities to rest with one of the intermediate positions between the two extremes of the religious solution, which transfers the whole burden of violence to the divinity, and the unadorned truth, which passes the violence back to man.

In this intermediate system, which is the system of modern man, the opposition between violent disjunction and peaceful harmony—a difference that should unfold in the course of time, as a diachronic process—is transmuted into a synchronic difference. We enter a universe populated by "good" and "evil" influences—the only universe in which we feel truly at home.

Such a universe is adumbrated in *The Bacchae*. All the elements of its establishment are there: the concept of an "impious revolt" against the gods; the partitioning of the god's retinue into "authentic" (Lydian) and "inauthentic (Theban) maenads. However, at the core of the tragic action all distinctions between a "good" and a "bad" Dionysiac possession—between enthusiasm rewarded as a prize to the faithful and enthusiasm meted out as a punishment to the wicked—are effaced. The Manichaean division between good and evil is no sooner proposed than it vanishes from sight.

This division, it should be noted, is reflected in the continuing hunt for a scapegoat on the cultural and ideological level, a hunt that has gone on long after Pentheus met his fate on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron.

To resolve the problem of *The Bacchae*, we would need to establish a system of differentiation that did not dissolve under scrutiny and that permitted us to affirm the play's literary, psychological, and moral coherence. Such a system would be based, once again, on recourse to *arbitrary* violence.

The foundations of *The Bacchae* have not been uncovered, but they have been soundly shaken. It is not Euripides' "psychological" approach that is ultimately responsible for the incoherence of the tragedy, its oscillation between "audacity" and "timidity." Rather, it is the "shaking of degrees," which Euripides cannot and will not explicitly acknowledge but which blunts all distinctions and multiplies all meanings, allowing none of them to remain unshaken.

The tragedy never succeeds in finding its equilibrium; but then, there is no place for equilibrium in the drama. It is from this that the play's fertile incoherence stems—an incoherence very different from the sterile coherence of lesser works of art, "intellectually" and "esthetically" beyond reproach. There is no point in trying to resolve the "problem of *The Bacchae*," any more than there is in trying to resolve the opposition between the symmetry of the tragic action and the dissymetry of the mythological message in *Oedipus the King*. Ultimately these two problems are one. Instead of trying to force tragedy to conform to our trivial and insignificant criterion of coherence, we should concentrate on the logical flaws of tragedy and try to penetrate the inviolate interiors of the myths, to see how they are put together. We must generalize the problem of *The Bacchae* so that it applies to all cultures—religious and nonreligious, primitive and nonprimitive. Our problem then will relate to culture's violent origins, previously hidden but now discernible in the rapid disintegration of the last sacrificial practices of the modern world.

THE PREPONDERANCE OF WOMEN in the Dionysiac cult remains a subject of conjecture. We may well wonder, without retracting any of our previous suppositions, whether the charges brought against the women—their responsibility for Pentheus's murder, the homicidal frenzy that characterizes their behavior throughout the original bacchanal (that is, throughout the sacrificial crisis)—are not every bit as false as the idyllic portrait of the bacchanal, at the beginning of the play, as a rustic interlude amid the flowers and forests of Cithaeron.

The two protagonists are male, but behind them there are only women and old men. Homicidal fury is very real during the crisis, but it pertains to the entire community; the violence directed against the surrogate victim cannot be limited strictly to the women. We may therefore wonder whether the preponderance of women does not constitute a secondary mythological displacement, an effort to exonerate from the accusation of violence, not mankind as a whole, but adult males, who have the greatest need to forget their role in the crisis because, in fact, they must have been largely responsible for it. They alone risk plunging the community into the chaos of reciprocal violence.

We can therefore postulate a mythological substitution of women for men in regard to violence. That is not to say that the women's link to Mount Cithaeron was pure invention. Myths invent nothing; but the true meaning of this mass migration of women, accompanied by their children and perhaps by old men, may well have been as badly distorted by the tragic handling as by pastoral idealizing. We are told that the exodus from the city was prompted by divine inspiration and Dionysiac enthusiasm. Thus, exodus becomes a characteristic trait of the crisis, but it is neither a triumphal procession nor an irresistible

charge. Rather, it is likely to have been a frantic flight of those members of the community whose age or sex prevented them from bearing arms. The weaker leave the field to the stronger, who spread terror throughout the city.

Anthropological evidence seems to support this hypothesis. Napoleon Chagnon describes a festival organized by a number of closely related Yanomamö communities. The program of entertainment included a series of "chest pounding duels," ostensibly of friendly intent and traditional to the occasion. At the moment when the imminent defeat of one team threatened to turn the contest into a bloody battle, "the women and children began to cry, knowing that the situation was getting serious, and they grouped into the farthest corners of their houses near the exits." Shortly after, while the warriors of both factions were preparing for combat and gathering their poisoned arrows, "the women and children . . . began fleeing from the village, screaming and wailing."[7]

The role played by women in the religious and cultural structure of a society—or rather, the minor importance of that role—is graphically illustrated by the social framework prevailing in certain South American villages—in those of Bororo, for example.[8] The village is laid out in the form of an almost perfect circle, divided up according to social categories. In the center is the men's house; entrance is forbidden to women. Cultural and religious activities consist for the main part of a complex system of comings and goings confined entirely to the men, with the central house serving as a sort of general meeting place. The women inhabit the houses on the periphery of the circle and unlike the men, they never move to another house. This immobility of the women was one of the factors that led early researchers to affirm the existence of a "matriarchy." In fact, far from attesting to women's importance, this very stability suggests that women are only passive spectators at a masculine tragicomedy. The elegant dance ritual practiced by the men in time of order and tranquillity amounts to a precautionary measure designed to prevent the violent encounters that occur in times of turbulence. The physical structure of the Bororo village seems to reflect the centrifugal inclinations of its weakest inhabitants, the women, by making the center an exclusively masculine preserve. This inclination is universal; it was observed by Chagnon in its most literal form during the Yanomamö festival, and it can be surmised behind the less convincing aspects of the Dionysus myth.

The motionless groups of women, gathered together in the peripheral houses, bring powerfully to mind the people who cluster on sidewalks or at street corners whenever "something is going on—"usually some dispute or brawl. The desire not to miss any part of the show balanced by the desire to remain at a safe distance from the action causes the spectators to form themselves into a circle around the object of interest. Psychoanalysts will note, of course, that the men's house has been inserted like a phallus in the feminine circle; but this observation scarcely helps to explain the situation. Beyond the sexual symbolism is the violence that gives shape to the events and that literally inscribes itself—first as a cultural order, then as sexuality hidden behind that order, and finally and openly as violence, which underlies all possible meanings and remains indecipherable as long as any other meaning overlays it.

[7] Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamö, the Fierce People* (New York, 1968), p. 116.
[8] Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York, 1975), chap. 22.

Returning to the subject of Dionysus, we repeat that the presence of the women outside the city might well represent a *real* circumstance of the original crisis, transfigured by a mythological operation analogous to, but distinct from, the one we have already analyzed. A transfer of violence can be assumed, parallel to the one that engenders the god but of less consequence. We are dealing here with a mythological elaboration that probably took place early, at an epoch when the divinity had not yet absorbed the most violent and repulsive aspects of the sacrificial crisis. The characteristic features of the crisis are not yet sufficiently blurred and indistinct for men to be willing to acknowledge them as their own.

The tendency to attribute to women what is probably a masculine trait of violence can be related to a major thematic motif of *The Bacchae*: the loss of sexual differentiation. As we have remarked, one of the effects of the sacrificial crisis is a certain feminization of the men, accompanied by a masculinization of the women. For the idea that men behave like women and women like men is substituted the idea that the sinister Dionysiac practices are almost exclusively women's work. The abolishment of sexual differences—for that matter, of all differences—is a reciprocal phenomenon, and the mythological redistribution has been carried out, as always, at the expense of reciprocity. The symmetrical elements regroup under a nonsymmetrical form; a form reassuring to male dignity and authority, for it grants what amounts to a virtual monopoly on Dionysiac delirium to the women.

Here again tragedy restores lost reciprocity, but only partially; it does not dare challenge the dominant feminine role in the origins of the Dionysiac rites. And if the lost sexual difference makes it easier to shunt the responsibility for violence onto the women, it still cannot explain away the necessity for violence. Like the animal and the infant, but to a lesser degree, the woman qualifies for sacrificial status by

reason of her weakness and relatively marginal social status. That is why she can be viewed as a quasi-sacred figure, both desired and disdained, alternately elevated and abused. A reading of Greek mythology and tragedy (especially the plays of Euripides) with particular attention to the possible inversion of the sexes would undoubtedly yield some striking results.