

A NOTE ON EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* 39-42

In this portion of the prologue, Dionysus, after describing the course of his journey (13-22), says that he first made Thebes rise up and shout (23-25), since (ἐπεὶ) his mother's sisters denied that he was a god (26-31); wherefore (τοιγάρ) he drove them and the other women in a bacchic frenzy (παράκοποι φρενῶν) to the hills (32-38).

δεῖ γὰρ πόλιν τήνδ' ἐκμαθεῖν, κεῖ μὴ θέλει,
 ἀτέλεστον οὔσαν τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων, 40
 Σεμέλης τε μητρὸς ἀπολογήσασθαι μ' ὑπερ
 φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον' ὃν τίχτει Δίῃ. 42

It is common to take the participial phrase at 40 as an object clause dependent on ἐκμαθεῖν¹), despite the obvious objection that the resulting point hardly needs to be made: the city already knows that it does not celebrate the rites of Bacchos. What it does not know, and apparently needs to learn, is that Dionysus is in fact a god²).

The participial phrase can be taken as the object clause of ἐκμαθεῖν if the γάρ at 39 is strictly causal, supplying the immediate ground of the preceding action. The sense would be: I, Dionysus, drove these women into the hills because they must learn that they do not celebrate my rites. But the γάρ does not function in this narrow manner. The reason for Dionysus' action (of driving the women to the hills), as Dionysus himself has clearly stated, is simply that the city has denied his divinity (26-31), and not the fact that they must learn that they did so³). Still less can it be said that the action itself is caused by the additional fact (introduced by a correlating τε in 41) that Dionysus is now bound (δεῖ) to defend his mother (ἀπολογήσασθαι) by appearing to mortals as a god (φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον'); for this does not give the reason why they were driven mad, but simply the reason why Dionysus chose to act.

The γάρ at 39 must therefore be taken more loosely, as 39-42 sums up the reasoning of the entire passage. Dionysus says that he drove the women mad because (ἐπεὶ) they denied his divinity (23-38). He now adds that he did all this because (γάρ) it is necessary (δεῖ) that the city thoroughly learn (ἐκμαθεῖν), even if it does not wish to do so (κεῖ μὴ θέλει); and also (τε) because (γάρ) he is bound (δεῖ) to defend his mother (ἀπολογήσασθαι). In this case, however, ἀτέλεστον οὔσαν cannot easily be the object of ἐκμαθεῖν. For it is still extremely weak, and almost contradictory, if Dionysus is made to say: 'I drove them mad because they denied my divinity—and I chose to do all this because they must thoroughly learn that they do not celebrate my rites'⁴).

Now, φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον' (agreeing with μ') clearly explains ἀπολογήσασθαι. The epiphany is the *apologia*. Dionysus defends his mother not with a speech, but through an epiphany that answers precisely the denial of her sisters⁵). The parallel ἀτέλεστον οὔσαν (agreeing with πόλιν) may also be taken circumstantially, offering an explanation of ἐκμαθεῖν:

the city must thoroughly learn, as it is now (οὔσαν) without his rites⁶). The passage will then run as follows: Dionysus says that he drove the city wild (23-25) because they had denied that he was a god (26-31); this is why he drove them to the hills (32-38). And he says, in summary, that he did all this because it is necessary that the city thoroughly learn (ἐκ-μαθεῖν), even if it does not wish to do so (καὶ μὴ θέλει)—for the city is now (οὔσαν) without his rites—and also (τε) because he is bound to offer a defense of his mother, by appearing as the god she bore to Zeus⁷).

This gives us precisely the sense required. Dionysus wants to be recognized as a god, and to this end he has traveled from Asia to Greece establishing his rites (13-22). In Thebes, however, his own birthplace, his own mother's sisters have denied that he was born of Zeus (26-31). It is just because of this denial that he has driven the Thebans mad (23-25, 32-38). He now says, in 39-42, that he did all this because (γάρ) it is necessary (a) that the city fully learn—not *that* it has denied him (for clearly, what the city needs to learn is not that it has denied him, but that Dionysus is a god⁸), but again, *because* it has denied him—even if it does not wish to do so; and also (b) because he is bound (δεῖ) to offer an *apologia suae matris* that will consist not in words, but in that very epiphany through which he will prove (against the denial of her sisters) that he is indeed the god, Dionysus, born of Zeus (φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον' ὃν τίχτει Διί⁹).

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1) So U. von Wilamowitz, *Griechische Tragödien*, IV (Berlin 1926), 163, "Trotz allem Widerstand soll Theben fühlen, dass ihm Segen meiner Weißen fehlt", following F.A. Paley, *Euripides with an English Translation* (London 1858), ad loc.; also E.R. Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae. Edited with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1960), 68; J. Roux, *Euripide. Les Bacchantes*, II (Paris 1972), 255; W.J. Verdenius, *Notes on the Prologue of Euripides' Bacchae*. *Mnem.* 33 (1980), 10 f.; H. Oranje, *Euripides' Bacchae. The Play and its Audience* (Leiden 1984), 35 n.87; A. Rijksbaron, *Grammatical Observations on Euripides' Bacchae* (Amsterdam 1991), 11 f.

2) This is obviously the point of 23-38 (see the paraphrase in the text above). It is also clear from 13-22; see esp. 21-22: *κάκει χορεύσας... ἴν' εἶην ἐμφανῆς δαίμων βροτοῖς*. Cp. 242-47, 517-18, 775-77, 857-61, 974-76, 1297-1302, 1340-45. For the importance of this topic for the drama as a whole, see H. Yunis, *A New Creed: Fundamental Religious Beliefs in the Athenian Polis and Euripidean Drama* (Hypomnemata 91; Göttingen 1988), 77-81; also H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I: Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* (Leiden 1990), 158-72; and cp. n.8) *infra*.

3) This is stressed by the A-B-A structure of 23-38, which first offers the fact (23-25)—then the reason for it (ἐπεὶ; 26-31)—and then repeats the original fact (τοιγάρ; 32-38). The unity of the passage would be destroyed by adding on a new reason for the action.

4) Oranje (35 n.87) says that "it does not matter to Dionysus that Thebes still has to learn his rites, but it does that Thebes shall understand to the bitter end (ἐκ-) that she has not been initiated into his rites". This strong formulation avoids

some of the triviality of the view under discussion. But in order to achieve this end, Oranje must bury the significance of the whole of v. 40, while placing an enormous burden upon the prefix ἐκ- that is not semantically necessary (for ἐκ- having the more general sense of 'thoroughly', and so serving only to intensify the verb, see R. Renehan, *Studies in Greek Texts* [Göttingen 1976], 24 ff.; also n. 7) *infra*), and which is therefore difficult to justify since nothing in the preceding lines has prepared us for the notion that Dionysus is especially concerned that the city learn to this bitter end. Nor is this notion picked up again subsequently and explained; contrast n. 8) *infra*. We are never told why Dionysus, at this stage of the play (cp. Dodds ad v. 52), should make this threatening prediction, and such foreshadowing is difficult to square with the fact that Pentheus is given several opportunities to repent (Yunis, 79 f.; Versnel, 165 f.), and so must himself bear at least some responsibility for his own disaster (cp. 1120 f. ταῖς ἑμαῖς ἀμαρτίαισι; also Versnel, 170 ff.). Oranje's view would be more attractive if it were syntactically required that the participle clause be taken as the object of ἐκμαθεῖν. But this also is not the case; see n. 7) *infra*.

5) Cp. 42 (φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον' ὄν τίκτει Διί) with 27 (Διόνυσον οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφύναι Διός).

6) Rijksbaron, 11 f., realizes that the participles of 40 and 42 (ἀτέλεστον οὖσαν and φανέντα) are likely to be syntactically parallel, but thinks that the τε of 41 links both of these two participles as object clauses of ἐκμαθεῖν, while ἀπολογήσασθαι is simply an infinitive of purpose dependent upon φανέντα. This produces the very awkward construction such that πόλιν is both subject and object of ἐκμαθεῖν in vv. 39-40, but only its subject in vv. 41-42, where a new accusative object (μ') is suddenly introduced. Besides, the neat and simple arrangement of clauses: (39) δεῖ + acc. + inf., (40) pple. agreeing with the previous accusative, (41, joined by τε to the preceding lines) inf. + acc., (42) pple. agreeing with the previous accusative, shows that we are probably dealing simply with two parallel constructions. As such, the τε in 41 can only join the two infinitives of 41 and 39, each of which is thus dependent upon the initial δεῖ, and each of which is governed by its own subject accusative.

7) This interpretation would seem to have usage on its side. ἐκμαθεῖν is commonly used with a simple accusative, or with an object clause introduced by ὡς (Soph. *Phil* 71), εἰ (Eur. *And.* 715 f., 1050 f.; Soph. *El.* 1223; Aesch. *PV* 816 f.) or τί (Eur. *Ion* 266; *Phoen.* 863 f.; Soph. *OT* 1439, 1443; *OC* 114 f.). But unlike the simple μανθάνειν (cp. *Ba.* 1113 κακοῦ γὰρ ἐγγύς ὦν ἐμάνθανεν), ἐκμαθεῖν never, so far as I am aware, appears in tragedy with a participial object clause. Nor is it used absolutely 'pro διδασχθῆναι aut παιδευθῆναι', as P. Elmsley, *Euripides' Bacchae* (Lipsiae 1822) suggests ad loc. On the other hand, the word is occasionally used very loosely, without any stated object, where the sense must be determined from the general context: see *OT* 116-17; Οὐδ' ἄγγελός τις οὐδὲ συμπράκτωρ ὀδοῦ/κατεῖδ' ὅτου τις ἐκμαθῶν ἐχρήσατ' ἄν; 576: 'Ἐκμάνθαν'· οὐ γὰρ δὴ φονεὺς ἀλώσομαι; 834-35: ἕως δ' ἂν οὖν/ πρὸς τοῦ παρόντος ἐκμάθης, ἔχ' ἐλπίδα.

8) Cp. n. 2) *supra*. The understood object of ἐκμαθεῖν, then, is not τὰ ἐμὰ Βακχεύματα (Elmsley). Dionysus, who is the speaker of vv. 39-42, twice more uses forms of μαθ- in a similar context, where again it is the recognition that Dionysus is a god that is at issue: see 490 σὲ δ' ἀμαθίας γε κάσεβοῦντ' ἐς τὸν θεόν (cp. 480, ἀμαθεῖ, also in the mouth of Dionysus); and especially 1340-45 Δι. ταῦτ' οὐχὶ θνητοῦ πατρὸς ἐκγεγώς λέγω/ Διόνυσος, ἀλλὰ Ζηγός· εἰ δὲ σωφρονεῖν/ ἔγνωθ', ὅτ' οὐκ ἠθέλετε, τὸν Διὸς γόνον/ εὐδαιμονεῖτ' ἄν.../Κα. Διόνυσε, λισσόμεσθά σ', ἠδικήκαμεν./ Δι. ὅψ' ἐμάθεθ' ἡμᾶς, ὅτε δὲ χρῆν, οὐκ ἤθετε. The only other occasion on which Dionysus

uses some form of this word (657 πρώτα τοῦς λόγους μάθε) is obviously of a different order.

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