

THE STRUCTURAL AND EMOTIONAL CLIMAXES
OF EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*
IN THE LIGHT OF ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS**

I. *Introduction*. From the literature on Euripides' *Bacchae* one might get the impression that almost every scene of this fascinating play constitutes a climax. The palace miracles (576-656¹), the first messenger speech (677-774), the fourth episode (912-976), the second messenger speech (1043-1152), the lyric dialogue between Agave and the chorus (1168-1199), the recognition (1264-1297), ... they have all been called a 'climax' by modern scholars². This confusion is partly a confusion of tongues, since critics use the word 'climax' with regard to two different aspects of tragedy, namely the structure of the imitated action and the emotional impact of the play on the audience³. However, it also demonstrates that both these aspects of Euripides' *Bacchae* require further comment. It is our aim to define the structural and emotional climax(es) in the *Bacchae* more clearly by reexamining the structure of its plot, as well as the functioning of the play on the emotional level, in the light of Aristotle's theory of tragedy. The *Poetics* should help us forward in at least two ways. Firstly, since Aristotle regards the structure of

* I would like to thank Prof. Dr. L. Van der Stockt for his valuable remarks on the present study and Adri Van der Vurst for checking the English version of this text.

¹ All references to Euripides' *Bacchae* are to the OCT-edition by J. Diggle.

² See Euripides. *Bacchae*. Edited with Introduction and Commentary by E. R. Dodds, The Plays of Euripides, Oxford 1960², 219 (recognition) and 222 (lyric dialogue); D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama. Myth, Theme and Structure*, Toronto 1967, 71 (recognition); *The Bacchae by Euripides. A Translation with Commentary* by G. S. Kirk, Prentice-Hall Greek Drama Series, London 1970, 17 (palace miracles, first messenger speech, fourth episode, second messenger speech, recognition); J. García López, *En torno alla estructura y el significado de "Bacantes" de Euripides*, "Helmantica" 24, 1973, 377-399 (397) (second messenger speech); T. Stinton, *Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, "CQ" 69, 1975, 221-254 (249) (second messenger speech) and L. Van der Stockt, *Le temps et le tragique dans les Bacchantes d'Euripide*, "LEC" 67, 1999, 157-179 (167) (second messenger speech and recognition).

³ A striking example of the varying use of the word 'climax' is to be found in the commentary of E.R. Dodds. At p. 219, in his comment upon the fifth stasimon, Dodds writes: "As the *action* hurries to its climax there is time only for a brief song of triumph", thus referring to the recognition in the exode. Three pages later he states: "The lyric dialogue marks the *climax of horror*". See also the definitions of climax in H. Shaw, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, New York 1972, s.v. and N. Frye et al. (eds.), *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, New York 1985, s.v.

In this article, we leave aside the rhetorical-technical meaning of 'climax'; for a definition of klímaj as a speech figure, see Demetrius, *On Style* 270.

the events, that is the plot (50a4-5⁴), as the most important constituent element of tragedy (50a15), it contains an extensive conceptual framework that can be used to shed light upon the structure of the action in the *Bacchae*. Secondly, the *Poetics* will provide our discussion of the emotive power of Euripides' play with a starting point that goes beyond purely subjective assessments, because Aristotle establishes theoretical links between the emotional impact of tragedy and the constituent elements of its composition. Since he considers the structure of the events of primary importance in this respect as well (53b1-14), we shall begin our search for the structural and emotional climax(es) of the *Bacchae* with a careful analysis of its plot.

II. *Analysis of the plot.* According to Aristotle every tragedy has a complication (δέσις or πλοκή) and a resolution (λύσις) (55b24). The complication is the part from the beginning of the story up to the point which immediately precedes the imitated change of fortune (55b26-28). It often consists of a combination of προπεπραγμένα and events within the plot (55b24-25)⁵. The λύσις, on the other hand, reaches from the beginning of the μετάβασις to the end of the play (55b28-29). As for the *Bacchae*, it is generally acknowledged that Dionysos' peremptory exclamation 'ᾄ' in v. 810 marks the decisive turning point in the conflict between the god and Pentheus⁶. Before that moment the latter's death has not yet become inevitable⁷. In fact, the god just explicitly pointed out to Pentheus that a peaceful

⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, all references to the *Poetics* are to the OCT-edition by R. Kassel. They are always given in abridged form.

⁵ We agree with A. Gudeman, *Aristoteles: περὶ ποιητικῆς*, Berlin/Leipzig 1934, 315 and D. Lucas, *Aristotle: Poetics*, Oxford 1968, 183 that πολλάκις bears on the whole of τὰ μὲν ἔξωθεν καὶ ἔνια τῶν ἔσωθεν. To read it only with καὶ ἔνια τῶν ἔσωθεν (like a.o. I. Bywater, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, Oxford 1909, 248 and R. Dupont-Roc & J. Lallot, *Aristote: La Poétique*, Paris 1980, 291) implies that a play may consist of nothing but λύσις and that its δέσις may belong to the preformed story entirely. But how is this view to be reconciled with 56a7-10, in which Aristotle clearly discusses complication in terms of the plot?

⁶ See e.g. A. Verrall, *The Bacchae of Euripides and Other Essays*, Cambridge 1910, 96; G. Grube, *Dionysus in the Bacchae*, "TAPhA" 66, 1935, 37-54 (48); R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus. An Interpretation of the Bacchae*, Cambridge 1948, 102; A.P. Burnett, *Pentheus and Dionysus: Host and Guest*, "CPh" 65, 1970, 15-19 (23-24); J. Roux, *Euripide: Les Bacchantes*, Bibliothèque de la faculté des lettres de Lyon 21, 2 vols., Paris 1970-1972, II, 493 and *Euripides: Bacchae. With an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* by R. Seaford, The Plays of Euripides, Warminster 1997², 213.

⁷ Dionysos did of course not come to Thebes with the intention of killing Pentheus; see Grube, *o.c.* 38; R. Goossens, *Euripide et Athènes*, Brussel 1962, 725-726; Conacher, *o.c.* 59; Burnett, *o.c.* 18-19 and H. Erbse, *Studien zum Prolog der euripideischen Tragödie*,

solution was still possible: ὦ τᾶν, ἔτ' ἔστιν εὖ καταστήσαι τάδε (802). He proposed to bring the maenads back to the city unarmed (804)⁸, but Pentheus in his blindness thought the offer to be a trick (805), called for his weapons and ordered his adversary to shut up (809). He has thus sealed his own fate. Now Dionysos becomes determined to destroy Pentheus and immediately starts luring him into the maenads' hands (811). The king's μετάβασις εἰς δυστυχίαν is set in motion, the λύσις of the conflict has begun⁹.

The reversal in fortunes which starts in v. 810 results from the preceding action in accordance with the Aristotelian principle of probability or necessity (51a12-13 κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκάϊον). Dionysos stated in the prologue that, if the citizens of Thebes would try to drive the maenads down from the mountains with arms, he would engage in battle with them at the head of his female worshippers (50-52). So when Pentheus, on hearing about the raid on the mountain villages, becomes so furious that he summons all his troops to march against the bacchantes (780-785) and refuses his opponent's final peace proposal (802-809), "he has stepped across the line laid down by the prologue, and seems now to have made its contingent punishment necessary"¹⁰. And yet the course of events after v. 810 surprises us. For, contrary to all expectations aroused by the prologue, Pentheus does not die in an open battle between his army and Dionysos' bacchantes. Instead, he reacts eagerly to his adversary's surprising question if he wants to see the women in the mountains (811-812), goes off to Mount Kithairon accompanied by a single servant (1045-1047) and ends up falling helplessly into the maenads' hands (1109-1113)¹¹. To put it briefly: Pentheus' μετάβασις is

Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 20, Berlin/New York 1984, 93.

⁸ With Dodds, *o.c.* 175 we consider the god's offer genuine.

⁹ Van der Stockt, *o.c.* 167. Cf. N. Wecklein, *Ausgewählte Tragödien des Euripides. Für den Schulgebrauch erklärt. Drittes Band: Bakchen*, Leipzig 1903², 8. If v. 810 marks the beginning of the μετάβασις, then the end of the δέσις cannot coincide with the end of the fourth episode, *pace* Dodds, *o.c.* 197.

¹⁰ Burnett, *o.c.* 22.

¹¹ Contrary to E. Bruhn, *Die Bakchen*, *Ausgewählte Tragödien des Euripides* 1, Berlin 1891³, 25 we do not believe that Euripides failed to revise the prologue after having changed the original lay-out of the plot, but we share the view that our poet deliberately used a *suggestio falsi* in the prologue, in order to surprise his audience by the particular way in which Pentheus dies later on; see e.g. G. Dalmeyda, *Observations sur les prologues d'Ion et des Bacchantes*, "REG" 28, 1915, 43-50 (50); Dodds, *o.c.* 69 and H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy. A Literary Study*, London/New York 1961³, 372. The effect of surprise would have been even greater, if those scholars are right who maintain that an open battle had occurred in Aeschylus' *Pentheus*; see e.g. Bruhn, *o.c.* 25-26; G. Haupt, *Commentationes archaeologicae in Aeschylum*, "Dissertationes Philologicae Halenses" 13, 1897, 105-160 (114-116); Verrall, *o.c.* 4 and J. R. March, *Euripides' Bakchai: a Reconsideration in the light of Vase-paintings*,

at the same time κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον and παρὰ τὴν δόξαν. It therefore qualifies as an example of the type of μετάβασις that Aristotle calls περιπέτεια (52a22-24)¹².

Pentheus' μετάβασις εἰς δυστυχίαν comes to an end with the killing of the king in the fifth episode (1114-1136). This event falls within Aristotle's definition of πάθος *qua terminus technicus*: πάθος δέ ἐστι πρᾶξις φθαρτικὴ ἢ ὀδυνηρά, οἷον οἱ τε ἐν τῷ φανερῷ θάνατοι καὶ αἱ περιωδυνίαι καὶ τρώσεις καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα (52b11-13). Although it was not enacted on stage, we may safely consider Pentheus' death a θάνατος ἐν τῷ φανερῷ¹³, because the messenger speech in which it is reported is a masterpiece of ἐνάργεια, visualizing the action through the words of the distressed servant¹⁴. As for the relations between the perpetrator and the victim, the painful deed in the *Bacchae* clearly takes place ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις (53b19-22), as the first to throw herself upon the defenceless Pentheus is his own mother Agave (1114-1115; cf. 1179-1183).

Pentheus' death brings about two additional μεταβάσεις ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν. The change in the fortunes of Kadmos is already accomplished when he reappears on the stage. He who once claimed that Dionysos made him joyfully forget his old age (188-189) comes back from the mountains as a sorrowful old man (1216). Agave, on the other hand, is still mad with joy

“BICS” 36, 1989, 33-65 (38). This contention, however, necessarily remains speculative, as a.o. L. Séchan, *Études sur la tragédie grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique*, Paris 1926, 104; Dodds, *o.c.* XXXV and R. Aéliou, *Euripide, héritier d'Eschyle*, 2 vols., Paris 1983, I, 252 point out.

¹² We approve of the suggestion of I.M. Glanville, *Tragic Error*, “CQ” 43, 1949, 47-56 that καθάπερ εἴρηται in Aristotle's definition of περιπέτεια refers to the words παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι' ἄλληλα in 52a4. Her view is shared by a.o. J. Kamerbeek, *A note on Arist. Poet. c. XI, 1452a22-26, 29-33*, “Mnemosyne” IV 18, 1965, 279-281; D. Lucas, *o.c.* 129; Dupont-Roc & Lallot, *o.c.* 231 and O. Schrier, *A simple view of peripeteia. Aristotle, Poet., 1452a22-29*, “Mnemosyne” IV 33 (1980), 96-118. As Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: the Argument*, Cambridge Mass. 1967, 344-346 has pointed out rightly, the context of the words referred to, implies that the reversal needs to be contrary to the expectations of the *audience*, not to those of the characters.

¹³ Cf. B.R. Rees, *Pathos in the Poetics of Aristotle*, “G&R” 19, 1972, 1-11 (10).

¹⁴ On Euripides' use of visualizing techniques in messenger speeches, see I. De Jong, *Narrative in Drama. The Art of the Euripidean Messenger-Speech*, Supplements to Mnemosyne 116, Leiden 1991. The second messenger speech in the *Bacchae* mainly owes its ἐνάργεια to its internal focalisation. Also add to its vividness: the use of *praesentia historica* (1112, 1115, 1117), the detailed description of the setting and the maenads (1051-1057), the imagery (e.g. 1072-1074, 1090, 1136) and the short instances of direct speech (1059-1062, 1079-1081, 1118-1121).

on her arrival at the Theban palace¹⁵, labouring under the delusion that she brings home the handsome price of a happy hunt (1169-1171). During the rest of the δέσις that precedes her μετόβασις, the conflict between Agave's illusory happiness and the grievous truth is aggravated (cf. 1259-1262), as she joins the Asian maenads of the chorus in an ecstatic dance (1168-1199), boasts about her courageous act (1202-1210, 1233-1243), and asks for Pentheus repeatedly (1212-1215, 1252-1258). Finally the μετόβασις itself is brought about in a brilliant recognition (1264-1297). The proper ἀναγνώρισις εἰς φιλίαν (cf. 52a31) takes place in the first part of the scene, when Kadmos carefully makes his daughter wake up to the fact that the head on her thyrsus is not a cub's but her son's (1264-1285)¹⁶. Then Agave starts asking questions about the specific circumstances of Pentheus' death. She thus finds out that she has played an important part in the killing herself (cf. 52a35-36 καὶ εἰ πέπραγέ τις ἢ μὴ πέπραγεν ἔστιν ἀναγνωρίσαι).

Originally, the recognition was followed by long lamentations over Pentheus (1298-1329¹⁷). Next Dionysos appears upon Kadmos and Agave in his divine form and banishes them from Thebes (1330¹⁸-1351). This epiphany is not of the kind that Aristotle criticizes in the fifteenth chapter of the *Poetics* (54a37-b2). It does not serve as a last resort to initiate the λύσις but is used to foretell events outside the play (cf. 54b2-5). The resolution of the *Bacchae* is rounded off by the sad farewell of the two broken characters (1352-1387).

III. *The structural climaxes.* Dictionaries of literary terms usually define the climax of a drama as its crisis or turning point¹⁹. These definitions go

¹⁵ Else, *o.c.* 351-352 has argued convincingly that the phrase τῶν πρὸς εὐτυχίαν ἢ δυστυχίαν ὀρισμένων in Aristotle's definition of recognition (52a31-32) does not imply an idea of destiny, but simply refers to the determinate state with respect to 'happiness' of the characters when entering the action. The happier a character is at first, the more emotive his μετόβασις εἰς δυστυχίαν will be. For a defence of the traditional view, see Dupont-Roc & Lallot, *o.c.* 233.

¹⁶ In his stimulating article *The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides' Bacchae*, "JHS" 90, 1970, 35-48, G. Devereux has shown that the recognition of the *Bacchae* is still clinically plausible in the light of modern psychotherapy.

¹⁷ In one of the lacunae after v. 1300 and v. 1329 a scene is lost in which Agave, according to the third century rhetor Apsines, "lamented over Pentheus' limbs one after the other" (ἕκαστον γὰρ αὐτοῦ τῶν μελῶν ἢ μήτηρ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ κρατοῦσα καθ' ἕκαστον αὐτῶν οἰκτίζεται); see *testimonium* (ii) in the *OCT*-edition of the *Bacchae*.

¹⁸ The first part of Dionysos' speech has been lost in the lacuna between v. 1329 and v. 1330. For a reconstruction of its contents, see Dodds, *o.c.* 234-235.

¹⁹ See e.g. Ch. Duffy, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Denver 1952², s.v.; S. Barnet *et al.* (eds.), *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, London 1964, 113-114; Shaw, *o.c.* s.v.; M. Gray, *A*

back to the pyramidal diagram designed in 1863 by the German critic Gustav Freytag to present the action of a classical five-act tragedy²⁰. The climax (“der Höhenpunkt”) is the apex of Freytag’s pyramid. It marks the transition from the rising action (“die Steigerung”) to the falling action or reversal (“Fall oder Umkehr”). Since it is obvious that this nineteenth-century scheme is fundamentally Aristotelian, we may safely (re)translate it into terms of the *Poetics* and state that a play reaches its climax with the beginning of the μετάβασις, when the δέσις ends and the λύσις starts.

In the *Bacchae* Euripides, as we have seen, puts not just one but two μεταβάσεις εἰς δυστυχίαν on the stage. These do not coincide but constitute different moments in the action. Each is preceded by a complication, each initiates a resolution. Therefore, the beginning of each μετάβασις marks a distinct structural climax in our play. To put it in more concrete terms: the action imitated in the *Bacchae* reaches a climax with Dionysos’ outcry ‘ᾠ’ (810) as well as with Kadmos’ first step in restoring Agave to sanity (1264).

What about the other events in the *Bacchae* that have been called climaxes? The palace miracles (576-656) and the first messenger speech (677-774) form part of the first δέσις or rising action since they precede v. 810. These successive stages in the escalating conflict between Pentheus and Dionysos lead up to the first climax κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον but they do not constitute climaxes in the action themselves. Mutatis mutandis the same goes for Agave’s lyric dialogue with the chorus (1168-1199) in relation to the recognition. The preparation of Pentheus for his journey to his death (912-976) and his fate on Mount Kithairon (1043-1136), on the other hand, both belong to the first λύσις or falling action. In fact, all the events that the Theban king goes through between v. 810 and v. 1136 – the ‘psychic invasion’ by Dionysos²¹, the travesty, the tree-miracle and the παραγγμός – build up the major μετάβασις of our play. They are Euripides’ elaboration of a fact pre-given in the mythical story, namely that Pentheus is torn up by maenads²², into a comprehensive part of a coherent plot (cf.

Dictionary of Literary Terms, York Handbooks, Harlow 1984, s.v.; Frye, *o.c.* s.v.; A. Premiger et al. (eds.), *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton 1993, s.v. and J.A. Cuddon & C.E. Preston, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Oxford 1998⁴, s.v.. Cf. J.T. Shipley, *Dictionary of World Literary Terms. Forms. Techniques. Criticism*, London 1970³, s.v.: “the act or moment of action that determines the reversal; the decisive moment in the dramatic conflict”.

²⁰ See G. Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas*, Darmstadt 1965 (= 1922¹³), 102-122.

²¹ We agree with Dodds, *o.c.* 172 that Dionysos takes control of his victim by a supernatural attack on the weakest point of Pentheus’ personality.

²² We have deliberately kept the formulation vague because it is not certain that, in the original myth and earlier dramatizations of it, Agave and her sisters played a part in the killing of Pentheus. See e.g. Dodds, *o.c.* XXXIII-XXXIV; Aéliou, *o.c.* I 252-254 and March,

55a34-b2: τούς τε λόγους καὶ τοὺς πεποιημένους δεῖ καὶ αὐτὸν ποιῶντα ἐκτίθεσθαι καθόλου, εἴθ' οὕτως ἐπεισοδιοῦν²³ καὶ παρατείνειν).

Does the fact that the plot of Euripides' *Bacchae* contains two climaxes imply that it rather shows an episodic structure than a truly dramatic form²⁴? The obvious starting point to answer this question is Aristotle's definition of the episodic plot: λέγω δ' ἐπεισοδιώδη μῦθον ἐν ᾧ τὰ ἐπεισόδια μετ' ἄλληλα οὐτ' εἰκὸς οὐτ' ἀνάγκη εἶναι (51b34-35). We may infer from this passage that the *Bacchae* would be an episodic tragedy if its two μεταβάσεις were not linked in accordance with probability or necessity. It is, however, evident that the arrival of Agave and Kadmos at the palace and the former's return to reality are closely connected with the killing of Pentheus, in which his mother took the lead. Therefore, the plot of the *Bacchae*, being the imitation of a unified action (μίμησις πράξεως μίας), is not episodic but a unity (cf. 51a30-32)²⁵.

The shift of focus from Pentheus to Agave and Kadmos in the exode does not alter this fact (cf. 51a16-30). On the contrary, the ἀναγνώρισις and the epiphany are necessary to complete the imitated action, to make it τελεία καὶ ὅλη (cf. 50b23-25)²⁶. Dionysos clearly states in the prologue that he has

o.c. 50-52.

²³ We believe A.H. Gilbert, *The word ἐπεισόδιον in Aristotle's Poetics*, "AJPh" 70, 1949, 56-64 (61) is right in circumscribing ἐπεισοδιοῦν as "to develop the stories told in outline into plays, by preparing for stage-presentation the deeds mentioned in the outline"; cf. K. Nickau, *Episodion und Episode. Zu einem Begriff der aristotelischen Poetik*, "MH" 23, 1966, 155-171 (163). We reject translations such as Bywater's "to work in the accessory incidents" (*o.c.* 245), since we do not believe that an ἐπεισόδιον is by definition "a *non-essential* added scene" (Else, *o.c.* 325-326 n. 85; cf. Lucas, *o.c.* 180). In our view, the *presence* of ἐπεισόδια is necessary to give a plot its length (cf. Gilbert, *o.c.* 62-63 and Dupont-Roc & Lallot, *o.c.* 227), while their *specific content* can be worked out by the poet at will (cf. 53b25-26), as long as the ἐπεισόδια are οἰκεῖα (55b13).

²⁴ That such could be the case is suggested by some dictionaries of literary terms. See Frye, *o.c. s.v.*: "In the tightly constructed plot of a tragedy, there is often one major climax, but in an episodic structure there may be a series of climaxes of varying intensities" and Shipley, *o.c. s.v.*: "Such a pattern (= a series of minor climaxes with the 'main climax' at the close) distinguishes the episodic from the dramatic form".

²⁵ Cf. Kitto, *o.c.* 372: "It (= the plot of the *Bacchae*) is an organic unity, a complete contrast to the plots of all the surviving tragedies later than the *Hippolytus*". We do not agree with É. Coche de la Ferté, *Penthée et Dionysos. Nouvel essai d'interprétation des Bacchantes d'Euripide*, Genève/Paris 1980, 221: "En tout cas malgré l'épanouissement du style, la tragédie des *Bacchantes* semble moins achevée que d'autres chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art dramatique. Moins harmonieusement liée en ses diverses parties, sa construction suggère la référence à des sources diverses".

²⁶ See Kitto, *o.c.* 272-273 and Van der Stockt, *o.c.* 167-168.

come to Thebes to prove himself the son of Zeus to *all* its unbelieving citizens (39-42, 47-48). The royal family too has denied his existence (26-31)²⁷. That is why the god is not satisfied with destroying the θεομάχος Pentheus, but also banishes Kadmos and Agave from their home town (1340-1345). By adding the long exode, Euripides has not stretched out the plot of the *Bacchae* beyond its inherent capacity (cf. 51b38: παρὰ τὴν δύναμιν παρατείνοντες τὸν μῦθον), but has provided his play with the ending that the prologue required: μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἄλλο οὐδέν (50b30).

IV. *The emotional climaxes*. As we have already pointed out in the introduction, critics also use the word ‘climax’ with regard to the emotional impact of a play on its audience. However, none of the definitions of ‘climax’ in our dictionaries of literary terms²⁸ can help us to identify the emotional climax(es) of Euripides’ *Bacchae*. Aristotle’s theory of tragedy fortunately turns out to be more useful to our purpose. It specifies that the emotions that are characteristic of tragedy are pity and fear (49b27²⁹). According to the *Rhetoric*, fear is “a painful or troubled feeling caused by a mental picture of an imminent evil, destructive or painful”³⁰, while pity is “a feeling of pain excited by the sight of evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it”³¹. Furthermore, Aristotle indicates where we should start our search. In 50a33-35 he explicitly states that the true tragic pleasure that comes from pity and fear (53b10-14) is most effectively produced by two parts of the plot, namely the peripety and the recognition.

²⁷ Kadmos is a pious man (see e.g. 10-11 and 199), but his attitude towards Dionysos seems to be inspired mainly by the interests of his family (180-183); see a.o. Verrall, *o.c.* 47-48; K. Deichgräber, *Die Kadmos-Teiresiaszene in Euripides’ Bakchen*, “Hermes” 70, 1935, 322-349 (327-328); Grube, *o.c.* 39-40; Winnington-Ingram, *o.c.* 42-43; Dodds, *o.c.* 90 and Erbse, *o.c.* 90. For a more positive view on Kadmos, see Roux, *o.c.* I 30-31, II 243 and 306.

²⁸ The references are to be found in note 19.

²⁹ Pity and fear are first mentioned in the notorious catharsis-clause in Aristotle’s definition of tragedy. Scholars disagree about the question whether κάθαρσις refers to a tragedy’s effect upon its spectators’ minds (see e.g. J. Bernays, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über die Wirkung der Tragödie*, “Abhandlungen der historisch-philosophischen Gesellschaft in Breslau” 1, 1857, 135-202 (reprinted in *Zwei Abhandlungen über die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, Darmstadt 1968, 1-118); L. Golden, *Catharsis*, “TAPhA” 93, 1962, 51-60 and Dupont-Roc & Lallot, *o.c.* 188-193) or to a process within the tragic plot itself (see esp. Else, *o.c.* 224-232 and 423-450), but none denies that a tragedy should fill the audience with pity and fear.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II, 5, 1382a21-22: ἔστω δὲ φόβος λύπη τις ἢ ταραχὴ ἐκ φαντασίας μέλλοντος κακοῦ φθαρτικοῦ ἢ λυπηροῦ.

³¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II, 8, 1385b13-14: ἔστω δὲ ἔλεος λύπη τις ἐπὶ φαινομένῳ κακῷ φθαρτικῷ ἢ λυπηρῷ τοῦ ἀναξίου τυγχάνειν. Cf. 53a5.

Nevertheless, the third μέρος τοῦ μύθου, the πάθος (52b9-10), arouses the tragic emotions too, at least if the painful deed takes place ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις (53b14-22). Let us, therefore, examine how strongly the beginning of the peripety, the πάθος-scene and the ἀναγνώρισις of the *Bacchae* appeal to our pity and fear.

The end of the first δέσις fills us with fear, because we are aware, on the basis of the prologue (50-52), that Pentheus has just signed his own death-warrant by deciding to use force against the bacchantes in the mountains. Now we know: the king must die! The moment the god cries out (810), our fear rises to fever pitch, as we imagine how Pentheus will be killed in an open battle between his soldiers and Dionysos' worshippers. On the other hand, Pentheus seems to deserve this κακὸν φθαρτικόν. We can not expect Dionysos to stand around watching while his adversary carries out his violent plan to massacre the Theban maenads (796-797). That is why we do not pity the king at this point in the action.

The πάθος-scene of the *Bacchae* (1114-1136) is emotionally very powerful. For one thing, the cruelty of the σπαραγμός proper (1125-1136), which culminates in the gory 'ball game', most effectively arouses our pity κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος (cf. 53b17-18). However, the emotional impact of the scene mainly depends on the abortive ἀναγνώρισις that precedes the slaughter (1114-1124). Firstly, it emphasizes the fact that the πάθος takes place ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις, as Pentheus desperately tries to make his raging mother see that he is her son. Secondly, it evokes great fear, because we understand, like the victim himself (1113), that the κακόν is very near now. Lastly, it removes the final obstacle to feel real pity for Pentheus. During the δέσις we could observe that the Theban king remained completely ignorant of his opponent's divine nature. When he became the plaything of a terribly cruel Dionysos (912-976), we started to sympathize with him³². Now, as Pentheus' dying words make it clear that he regrets his errors himself (1120-1121)³³, we can finally pity him, for a man who has acted through ignorance but afterwards feels no compunction at all for what he has done, can not be said to have acted truly involuntarily and therefore can not be pitied³⁴.

During the ἀναγνώρισις (1264-1297) we increasingly fear for Agave as she gradually finds out what happened on Mount Kithairon, because we foresee, like her father (1259-1260), that the full truth about the 'hunt' will

³² Cf. Winnington-Ingram, *o.c.* 10-11 and Dodds, *o.c.* 192.

³³ With Dodds, *o.c.* 216-217, we believe that Pentheus' last words express sincere repentance. For a different view, see Kirk, *o.c.* 116-117.

³⁴ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III, 1, 1109b30-32 and III, 1, 1110b18-24. On the relation between regret and pity, see also N. Sherman, *Hamartia and Virtue*, in: A. Okseberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, Princeton 1992, 177-196 (188).

shatter her. We also feel intense pity for her. The whole scene demonstrates that she slew her son truly involuntarily. Furthermore, she is presented as an innocent victim rather than as a killer at fault. It is as if she expressed our own feelings when she becomes aware of the full facts of the case: Διόνυσος ἡμῶς ὄλεσ', ἄρτι μανθάνω (1296). Even when we are reminded by Kadmos of the fact that Agave used to deny Dionysos' existence too (1297; cf. 26-31), we still find her suffering disproportionate.

The πάθος-scene and the ἀναγνώρισις, then, are on a higher level of emotional intensity than the beginning of the peripety, because they arouse both tragic emotions, pity as well as fear. In our view, none of the other alleged climaxes in the *Bacchae* rivals them in emotional power. The palace miracles may at first inspire us with fear for Pentheus, as the collapses and firelights visible to the Lydian women at the gates do not bode well for him who is inside (576-603). Yet our emotions are immediately calmed down by the amused tone of Dionysos' account of the events and by the lightness of the trochaic tetrameter in which his narrative is put (604-641). Euripides seems to have created the contrast deliberately in order to make his audience understand that the play has not yet reached its climax³⁵. The first messenger speech (677-774) at best evokes our pity κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος, since the astounding events reported by the herdsman do not take place ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις; the maenads' victims are a herd of cattle and some anonymous village people. As for the fourth episode (912-976), we have already argued that it plays an important part in rendering Pentheus' fate pitiable. However, the flood of our pity is not released until we hear that the king showed remorse in his dying words. Lastly, there is the lyric dialogue between Agave and the chorus (1168-1199). We should not be misled by Dodds' equivocal statement that this scene marks 'the climax of horror' in the *Bacchae*³⁶. From an Aristotelian point of view, it can not constitute a climax of fear. For that it presents too early a stage in the imitated conflict. The end of Agave's happiness is not very near yet, since Kadmos is still absent and the Asian maenads of the chorus make no attempt to disillusion their fellow reveler. No, the song horrifies us in another sense: when we see Agave dance ecstatically and understand that she even wants to eat her son's head (1184), we almost turn away in revulsion. However involuntarily she may have acted on Mount Kithairon, her behaviour at the beginning of the exode is too abhorrent for us

³⁵ See Winnington-Ingram, *o.c.* 83-84 and Dodds, *o.c.* 151-152. We believe that this assessment of vv. 604-641 refutes sufficiently Verrall's assertion that the fire and the earthquake are nothing but delusions because a real manifestation of Dionysos' power at this stage would reduce the sequel to an anticlimax; see Verrall, *o.c.* 28-29.

³⁶ Dodds, *o.c.* 222.

to pity her strongly³⁷. She has to calm down (1202) and show more humane feelings (1211-1215, 1252-1258) before pity can become prevalent.

We conclude from the foregoing that the πάθος-scene and the ἀναγνώρισις are the parts of Euripides' *Bacchae* that most strongly appeal to both our pity and fear. In this case it seems justifiable to speak of two emotional climaxes because the scenes in question constitute the emotional high points of two successive μεταβάσεις. Yet, for the very same reason, both climaxes are not necessarily equal in emotional intensity. The impact of each climax will depend on the relation between the cause of its μετάβασις and the ἦθος and διάνοια of the character that suffers it (cf. 53a7-10, 53a13-17). Well then, as Pentheus does not know that his opponent is a god and Agave does not realize that the victim she tears apart is her own son, they both fall from happiness to misfortune δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην (cf. 53a15-16)³⁸. But they act in ignorance for totally different reasons. Pentheus' ignorance is partly due to some negative traits of his ἦθος and διάνοια, like his rashness (216, 233), his prejudice against strangers (482-483, 778-779), and his irascibility (e.g. 255-260, 343-351, 489-511, 778-809)³⁹. They account for his stubborn ἀμαθία (490). They explain why he does not see through Dionysos' allusions to his true identity (e.g. 478, 500, 502, 518, 649-651, 808), but *remains* ignorant of it and why he, although many miracles happen in and around Thebes (443-450, 616-637, 704-711, 735-768) and although several other characters explicitly plead in favour of honouring the new-come god (266-327, 330-342, 712-713, 769-774), obstinately *keeps* refusing to recognize Dionysos as the divine son of Zeus⁴⁰. Agave, it is true, used to deny

³⁷ The opposition between pity and fear on the one hand and revulsion on the other is Aristotelian; see 52b35-36.

³⁸ Within the scope of this article we can not enter at length into the discussion on the exact meaning of ἁμαρτία in the *Poetics*. We take the term to denote an error of judgement, due to ignorance of a specific circumstance of the act. On Pentheus' ἁμαρτία in the *Bacchae*, cf. J. Bremer, *Hamartia. Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy*, Amsterdam 1968, 184: "Because Pentheus is unaware of the Stranger's identity, his whole treatment of his prisoner may be called a *hamartia*". On Agave's ἁμαρτία, see *ibid.* and Stinton, *o.c.* 248-249.

³⁹ See on these negative aspects of Pentheus' personality a.o. Deichgräber, *o.c.* 329-331; Dodds, *o.c.* XLIII and B. Seidensticker, *Pentheus*, "Poetica" 5, 1972, 35-63 (39-40 and 46-47).

⁴⁰ The fact that Pentheus has some weaknesses does not imply that he dies διὰ μοχθηρίαν (cf. 53a15). On the contrary, they render it more probable that he rushes to perdition δι' ἁμαρτίαν. Cf. Stinton, *o.c.* 249, although we do not agree with him that Pentheus' negative traits may be called ἁμαρτίαι themselves. See also Sherman, *o.c.* 190-191, who discusses the case of Deianeira: she kills her husband involuntarily, because she does not know the nature of the potion she uses, but it is her jealousy that explains why she is prepared to take the risk.

Dionysos' existence too (26-31), but once the god has arrived in Thebes, she, contrary to Pentheus, never gets the opportunity to decide by her own free will whether she wants to worship him. Instead, Dionysos immediately strikes her with bacchic frenzy (32-38) and uses her as a tool in his struggle with her son⁴¹. Agave, therefore, seems to have deserved her dire fate less than Pentheus. That is why the recognition more strongly appeals to our pity than the πάθος-scene and constitutes the more powerful of the two emotional climaxes in Euripides' *Bacchae*⁴².

V. *Conclusion*. As we were defining the climaxes of Euripides' *Bacchae* in the light of Aristotle's theory of tragedy, it became clear that the play has a highly individual character. First of all, it contains an unusual number of climaxes, since Euripides successively stages two fully worked out μεταβάσεις ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, each of which entails a structural and an emotional climax of its own. Secondly, the climaxes of the first μετάβασις lie remarkably far apart. Euripides has separated the beginning of the peripety and the πάθος-scene by more than three hundred verses, whereas Aristotle's statement that a recognition assumes its finest form when it is accompanied by a peripety (52a32-33 καλλίστη δὲ ἀναγνώρισις, ὅταν ἅμα περιπέτεια⁴³ γένηται) implies that he prefers the structural and the emotional climax of a play to coincide⁴⁴. Lastly, the *Bacchae*, partly as a result of the characteristics mentioned above, has an uncommonly strong emotional impact⁴⁵. We are seized with intense tragic emotions from the final part of the first δέσις onwards. Initially, we only feel fear for Pentheus. This feeling already reaches a high point with the first structural climax of the play,

⁴¹ Cf. Burnett, *o.c.* 19. G. Norwood, *The Riddle of the Bacchae. The Last Stage of Euripides' Religious Views*, Publications of the University of Manchester. Classical Series 1, Manchester 1908, 54 reverses roles by stating: "he (= Pentheus) is a mere pawn in the game; through him the god is striking at his mother". This is to twist the whole development of the conflict κατὰ τὸ εἶκός ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον.

⁴² Like Van der Stockt, *o.c.* 166-167 n. 53, we disagree on this matter with Kirk, who calls the recognition a "secondary climax" (*o.c.* 17).

⁴³ Unlike R. Kassel in his *OCT*-edition, we prefer the reading περιπέτεια to Gomperz's conjecture περιπετεία in 52a33, because it seems to express the connection between the recognition and the peripety more accurately: the recognition does not simply coincide with the peripety, but brings it about.

⁴⁴ The ἀναγνώρισις in the *Bacchae* does incorporate the two climaxes of the second μετάβασις, although strictly speaking it does not lead up to a peripety, since the end of Agave's happiness does not come as a surprise to us.

⁴⁵ The *Bacchae* won the first prize when it was staged in Athens shortly after Euripides' death; see *Suidas* s.v. Εὐριπίδης Μνησάρχου.

that is the beginning of the peripety. Our fear afterwards becomes less acute, but it keeps haunting us for more than two episodes⁴⁶ until it rises to fever pitch again in the *πάθος*-scene. This moment in the action constitutes the first true emotional climax of the *Bacchae*, since the regret which can be heard in Pentheus' dying words makes us pity him too. Immediately after the account of the *σπαραγμός*, the focus shifts to Agave. When she appears on the stage, a sense of revulsion impedes an instant outburst of the tragic emotions. Yet these quickly regain the upper hand and the *ἀναγνώρισις* arouses our pity even more strongly than the *πάθος*-scene, thus completing the 'climax of climaxes'. The ensuing lamentations for Pentheus and the sad farewell of Agave and Kadmos keep our pity alive until the very end of the exode. To put it shortly: nearly half of our tragedy is on a high level of emotional intensity⁴⁷. Therefore, we can perfectly agree with Aristotle's contention that Euripides, by skilfully constructing *μεταβάσεις ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν δι' ἀμαρτίαν μεγάλην*, was able to write plays that appealed to his audience as most tragic (53a23-30)⁴⁸.

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⁴⁶ Now that it has become clear that Pentheus, contrary to our prior expectations, will not die in an open battle between his army and the maenads, we readjust our mental picture of the *κακὸν φθαρτικόν* that will befall the Theban king on the basis of Dionysos' allusive remarks (e.g. 817; 823; 848-847; 857-859; 966-976) and the strophe of the fourth stasimon (977-991).

⁴⁷ We do not know exactly how many verses are lost in the lacunae in the exode. It is generally acknowledged that the loss after v. 1329 amounts to circa 50 verses; see e.g. Dodds, *o.c.* 234; Roux, *o.c.* II 618 and C.W. Willink, *Some Problems of Text and Interpretation in the Bacchae*, "CQ" 60, 1966, 27-50 and 220-242 (49). The estimations for the lacuna after v. 1300 range from three to thirty-five verses; see resp. Dodds, *o.c.* 232 and Willink, *o.c.* 46.

⁴⁸ See on this passage Else, *o.c.* 399-405.