CADMUS, TIRESIAS, PENTHEUS
NOTES ON EURIPIDES’ BACCHAE 170-369*

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170: ἐκχάλετ. L. prints τίς ... ἐκχάλετ (LP) and argues that ‘qui ... va appeler Cadmos ?’ is equivalent to ‘que quelqu’un ... aille appeler Cadmos’. But in that case we should expect a potential: cf. A. Ag. 1448-50 τίς ἄν ... μάλτοι, K.G. I, 235.

170: ἀστυ. The meaning ‘citadel’ (R.) is unparalleled. For πύργῳ ‘fence with ramparts’ cf. LSJ I 1.

174: ἔχω. R. thinks that Tiresias, in spite of his blindness (210), comes unaccompanied because he is guided by the god. But Seidensticker (119) rightly observes that this is contradicted by 193 and 198.

175: πρέσβυς ὁν γεραυτέρως. The emphasis put by Tiresias and Cadmus (185, 186, 188, 189, 193, 204, 207) on their old age is the main element which makes their Bacchic behaviour appear ridiculous¹), but this is not an aim in itself: the poet shows that the power of the god deprives man of his natural stability, and that even the most venerable characters must yield to his frenzy, so that they lose their dignity.

R. denies the ridiculous aspect of the scene and suggests that the two old men sanction the new cult by their authority. She refers to 694, Ar. Ran. 345, Pl. Leg. 665 b, but the context of these passages

*) The present article is intended to replace my notes published in Mnem. IV 15 (1962), 342-5. It forms a sequel to the notes on the Prologue, Mnem. IV 33 (1980), 1-16, and the Parodos, Mnem. IV 34 (1981), 300-15. Abbreviations are explained at the end of the article.

¹) Cf. Seidensticker, 115-23, who rightly observes (118): “Der Keim für die Lächerlichkeit der beiden Alten liegt in der offenkundigen Inkongruenz zwischen der aufgesetzten Maske der Jugendlichkeit und Fröhlichkeit und dem immer wieder durchbrechenden Bewusstsein, alt und schwach zu sein”. See also my review of Seidensticker’s book in Mnem. IV 40 (1987), 437-9, where I have expressed my doubts about the use of the term ‘tragicomic’.
is quite different. D. more rightly observes that Euripides “seems to treat this ‘miracle’ with a certain irony”\(^2\)). It might be added that this irony betrays a sceptical attitude on the part of the poet. This scepticism seems to me to underlie the whole presentation of the dramatic conflict.

176: θύρασεως. Rightly taken by D. as a resultative predicate: ‘make a thyrsus by tying a bunch of ivy leaves to a narthex’\(^3\)). The object has to be supplied from the context: see my note on 148 πλανάτας. R.’s ‘allumer la fureur des thyrses’ is impossible.

176: ἔχειν. ‘Wear’: cf. 34, and LSJ A II 3.

178: ως. R. may be right in taking this to explain not only φυλάττει but also Cadmus’ immediate appearance: he did not await the announcement of the θυρωρός (to be expected after 170).

178: γηρέμων. Not only ‘mot éminemment poétique’ (R.), but also referring to a loud or emphatic utterance: see my note on Hes. Op. 260.

178: ἡσθόμην. R. thinks that we should mentally supply ως στίς οὔσης, but the verb is probably used absolutely in the pregnant sense of ‘to be right’: cf. Or. 752, possibly Hec. 1114, and the absolute use of ἀλαθανόμενος (LSJ II).

179: σοφήν σοφοῦ. For the polyptoton cf. 157, 161, 186, and my note on 84. The primary meaning is ‘expert’, scil. in religious matters (cf. 186), but the word has the ‘Bacchic’ overtone of ‘sage’: cf. 266-9, 480, 641. R. compares 395, but her paraphrase of that line, “la vraie sagesse (σοφία) n’est pas la sagesse rationnelle, le savoir (τὸ σοφὸν)”, is misleading: the ambiguity of the term is not based on the contrast between rationalism (or intellectualism: K.) and irrationalism, but between self-conceit and the sagesness of submitting to the power of the new god (cf. 396 θυητὰ φρονεῖν). See further

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2) Similarly, Seidensticker (119) points out an ironic contrast between this scene and the Parodos. Oranje (39) argues that “it is far from certain that Euripides wanted here to show a Dionysiac miracle of youth restored, because he treats the old men with irony”, but miracle and irony are not incompatible.

3) Cf. also C. M. Kalke, AJP 106 (1985), 409 ff., espec. 411. Her conclusion (416-7), however, that “the fir tree has become a thyrsus with Pentheus in maenadic attire crowning its tip as the ivy does the narthex”, and that this thyrsus “may represent an erection ... of the god himself and therefore a manifestation of his power”, is an arbitrary assumption not supported by the text or other evidence. See further below, note on 237.