

ARE DIONYSOS AND OEDIPUS NAME VARIATIONS
FOR SATAN AND ANTICHRIST?*

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I trust that the reader...will by now be persuaded of the general thesis that Greek poetry from Hesiod and Homer down to Pindar and Aeschylus is pervaded by influences from West Asiatic literature and religious thought and that this was not the consequence of a single focused burst of radiation but reflects an ongoing process over a broad front.¹

Once when there was a great drought, as is generally agreed, which extended over practically all the inhabited earth except Egypt because of the peculiar character of that country, and there followed a destruction both of crops and men in great numbers, Erechtheus brought from there to Athens a great supply of grain, and in return those who had enjoyed this aid made their benefactor king (Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 1.29.1-2).²

In the chapter ‘Odysseus’ Scar’, in Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, Auerbach cites the differences in narrative techniques in Homer and the Old Testament, saying ‘it would be difficult...to imagine styles more contrasted than those of these two equally ancient and equally epic texts’.³ Auerbach’s comparison does not suggest that Homer and Old Testament scribes are engaged in a conversation featuring a purposeful inversion of a shared reality, although perhaps it should. Instead it is meant to be an example of two contrasting texts chosen specifically to illustrate two

* It should be noted that the evidence for the particular interpretation expressed in this article is selective and trans-historical. What I mean by trans-historical is that much of the Greek material predates the Christian, with some of the Christian material carrying on into the medieval period. However, Roman use of the Greek material indicates that it later became contemporary with some of the Christian formulation.

1. M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 585.

2. Translation from C.H. Oldfather (LCL, 423), p. 95.

3. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 11.

distinct and contradictory representations of reality from two cultures that developed independently of each other, with the main reason for the comparison being their similar age and status in Western thought.

The assumptions underlying this chapter in *Mimesis* reflected the general view, which held that Greeks and Hebrews developed with little or no knowledge or contact between cultures. The conviction held sway for decades that only after Alexander the Great did Hebrew scribes, who ‘saw as their task the repudiation of alien Hellenistic influences’,⁴ alter their ancient religious texts for considerations of the moment.

However, Auerbach and other scholars who believed that Greeks and Jews did not come into pronounced contact until the Hellenistic period overlooked an important event two hundred years earlier when contact can be presumed. Certain Greek colonies such as Halicarnassus and the Jews became part of the Achaemenid Empire in 539 BCE, at which time the Babylonian captivity, which had begun in 597 BCE, ended. These Greek colonies and the Jews then remained part of the same empire until the conquests of Alexander the Great. Moreover, even though the Babylonian captivity had ended, and upwards of 40,000 Jews made the trek back to Jerusalem, the majority stayed in Babylon. Significantly, although no theatre histories that I am aware of make note of this, the first Greek tragedies were produced just five years after the Babylonian captivity ended—if we accept that Greek tragedy actually began with the first competition in Athens of the City Dionysia in 534 BCE, which Thespis, the first ‘artist of Dionysos’,⁵ allegedly won.

On the authority of ancient authors, although largely discounted by modern scholars, there is an even earlier period of contact between Greek and Hebrew, indeed pre-Homeric. These sources cite Egyptian Petes and Erechtheus as early kings of Athens,⁶ Phoenician (or Canannite)⁷ Cadmus as the founder of Boeotian Thebes⁸ and Egyptian Danaus as the

4. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 108.

5. Another name for actors. See Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.197c and Livy 45.32.9.

6. Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 1.28.4–29.4.

7. The coastal Canaanites of Num. 13.29, Deut. 1.7 and Josh. 5.1 ‘exactly correspond’ to Phoenicians (P. Kyle McCarter Jr, ‘Canaan’, in Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan [eds.], *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], p. 98).

8. Cadmus was the son of Agenor, King of Tyre. Tyre was a coastal city of Phoenicia. Thebans, as Oedipus called them in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, were *tekna*

founder of Argos,⁹ which suggests that the West Asiatic roots of early personages in Greek history and mythology were foundational, and that Greeks and Hebrews might, with some elasticity, even be able to trace their lineages back to the same ancestors. Hebrew writings are more definitive, mentioning Javan,¹⁰ the son of Japheth, who was reputedly the ancestor of the Greeks and the founder of Ionia (cf. Gen. 10.2; Dan. 8.21; Zech. 9.13; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.6.1). The most startling is probably 1 Macc. 12.21, wherein King Areus of the Spartans allegedly writes to the Jewish high priest Onias, saying: ‘It is found in writing, that the Lacedemonians and Jews are brethren, and that they are of the stock of Abraham’ (KJV).

The Phoenicians were the Old Testament Canaanites. Danaus, as brother-in-law of Phoenix, the eponymous ancestor of the Phoenicians, and Cadmus, a prince of Tyre, are part of an ancient tradition that ascribed eastern origins to several of the Greek city-states. If we accept these sources, then many of Homer’s so-called Danaans were interrelated with or descended from the Canaanites, the offspring of Noah’s son Ham, and the traditional adversaries of Israel. Modern scholars have generally resisted this idea, but, whether the genealogical pedigrees of Thebes, Argos, Sparta, Ionia and Athens mentioned above are true or not, modern archeology *has* established probable direct and certainly mediated points of contact between Greeks and Hebrews as far back as the Homeric period.¹¹ Given these developments, both the contrasting view of reality and the differing notions of fate and time that Auerbach discerned between Homer and the Old Testament writings may be better understood as an indication of a complex interaction, *aemulatio*, which is writing with an eye toward the other, rather than an example of two independently arrived at perspectives.

There is also evidence that the Greek New Testament might have continued this convention. Recent scholarship has begun to recognize that

Kadmou—children of Cadmus (Michael Davis, ‘Introduction’, in Seth Benardete and Michael Davis [trans.], *Aristotle: On Poetics* [South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002], pp. xi-xxx [xxi]).

9. Danaus was brother-in-law of Phoenix, the eponymous ancestor of Phoenicia. Danaus left Egypt (Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 1.28) and became king of Argos. Forty-nine of his fifty daughters, the Danaides, killed the sons of Aegyptus and married men from Greece.

10. It has been suggested that Javan is Ion of Greek mythology—grandson of Erechtheus on his mother’s side and founder of Ionia.

11. Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes: In the Epic Age of Homer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

the New Testament appears to have some type of relationship with ancient epic, although what that relationship actually is remains open to debate. For example, Marianne Palmer Bonz argues that ‘Luke–Acts appears to have drawn inspiration from heroic epic in the manner in which it creates its story as the fulfillment of divine prophecy and the accomplishment of a divine plan’.¹² Dennis R. MacDonald goes further, insisting that Mark can best be understood as a transvaluative hypertext of the hypotexts of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.¹³ MacDonald believes that Mark not only imitated Homeric epic but also ‘expected his readers to recognize it’, which, according to MacDonald, ‘locates the primary cultural context of the Gospel in Greek religious tradition, not in Judaism’.¹⁴ Perhaps the Jewish writers of the Gospels¹⁵ were following in the footsteps of a long-established practice? Or maybe this is a form of *recapitulatio*, a symbolic strategy that will be discussed later in the article.

This article begins with the following notion: the distinct antithesis that Auerbach noticed could actually be evidence of a complex interplay between classical epic and tragedy and Judeo-Christian religious writings. By following this line of thought, explanations then exist for why the Fall of Troy was associated early on with the number 666,¹⁶ why Dionysos can be seen as a false YHWH and, thus, why a *type* of Antichrist, Herod the Great, would incorporate Dionysian symbols into the rebuilding of the temple, why Christ uses the term ‘hypocrite’—meaning actor or ‘artist of Dionysos’—repeatedly in the Gospels as a form of reprobation,¹⁷ why

12. Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke–Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 191.

13. The literary critic Gérard Genette says that a hypertext is a text that relies on a written antecedent, or hypotext. A hypertext is transvaluative when it has different values that it substitutes for those in the antecedent (Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000], p. 2).

14. MacDonald, *Homeric Epics*, p. 189.

15. Luke is the only Gospel writer who, scholars surmise, may not have been Jewish.

16. In the opening lines of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* the watchman on the tower of Argos spies the beacon announcing the fall of Troy and connects this to a dice roll of triple sixes.

17. Hypocrite is from the Greek *hypokritēs* for ‘actor’. Some of Christ’s most strident condemnations were for hypocrites, calling them ‘snakes’ and ‘brood of vipers’. It was the hypocrites whom he asked, ‘How will you escape being condemned to hell?’ (Mt. 23.33).

Dionysos can be seen as the ultimate antagonist to Christ in the New Testament, why wine in the Old Testament is recurrently a factor in human wickedness, and why there are clear similarities between the Greek tragic hero and the Antichrist of the Christian tradition. This connection between the Greek tragic hero and the Antichrist helps to make clear why the most paradigmatic *protagonist* of Greek tragedy, Oedipus, is descended from the traditional *antagonists* of the Old Testament, why Dionysos can be understood to be the father of Oedipus, and why Oedipus's life becomes elaborately intertwined with two other *types* of Antichrist—Judas and Nero. Cumulatively these pathways will lead to a larger question: are Dionysos and Oedipus name variations for Satan and Antichrist? This is not an anachronistic question if Greek tragedy does bear some connection to Jewish religious writings, because, as W. Bousset has shown in his seminal book *The Antichrist Legend*, the Antichrist legend developed at least partly from Jewish antecedents.¹⁸

Satan and Dionysos

Hades and Dionysus, for whom they go mad and rage, are one and the same (Heraclitus fr. 15).¹⁹

Why now! I seem to see two suns; a double Thebes;
Our city's wall with seven gates appears double.
You are a bull I see leading me forward now;
A pair of horns seems to have grown upon your head.
Were you a beast before? You have become a bull.
(Euripides, *Bacch.* 917-922).²⁰

Then let the people roar their Bacchic hymn
While we approach Death's kingdom dark and dim.
(Seneca, *Oed.* 407-408).²¹

A core Dionysian trait—*possession*—is clearly manifest in Euripides'

18. W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore* (trans. A.H. Keane; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

19. Cited in Walter Friedrich Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (trans. Robert B. Palmer; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 116.

20. Translation from Philip Vellacott, *Euripides: The Bacchae and Other Plays* (New York: Penguin, 1972), pp. 224-25.

21. Translation from Rachel Hadas, 'Oedipus', in David R. Slavitt (ed.), *Seneca: The Tragedies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), II, 1-261 (19).

Bacchae and is suggested in the earliest written source to mention maenads,²² *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.²³ This is only one of a number of significant traits that Dionysos and Satan share. Yet the current crop of scholarly studies on the history, origin or development of the idea of the Devil, such as Elaine Pagels's *The Origin of Satan*,²⁴ Peter Stanford's *The Devil: A Biography*,²⁵ Henry Ansgar Kelly's *Satan: A Biography*,²⁶ Neil Forsyth's *The Old Enemy*²⁷ and Jeffrey Burton Russell's multi-volume *The Devil, Satan, Lucifer and Mephistopheles*,²⁸ fail to put forward Dionysos as a possible pre-Satan or Satan-like figure—one that contributed to the image of Satan that becomes important in medieval Christianity. Only in Gerald Messadié's *A History of the Devil* is Dionysos even mentioned, when Messadié tells us that in the first centuries after Christ, the Church Fathers 'tolerated the identification of various Greco-Roman deities with Jesus—Apollo, Hercules, even Dionysus'.²⁹ However, elsewhere in his book Messadié makes it clear that he believes Hellenistic thought, untouched by Jewish thought, to be incompatible with the idea of a 'Devil'.³⁰ Thus in Messadié's understanding of the nature and character

22. Literally, 'raving ones', a name given to female devotees of Dionysos who often were 'possessed' by the god. Bacchus was the Roman god equated to Dionysos.

23. See lines 385-386 in Helene P. Foley (ed.), *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); see also E.R. Dodds, 'Appendix I, Maenadism', in his *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 270-82. References to Dionysian possession appear to predate Hebraic references to demon possession.

24. Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan: How Christians Demonized Jews, Pagans, and Heretics* (Toronto: Random House, 1995).

25. Peter Stanford, *The Devil: A Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1996).

26. Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

27. Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and Combat Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

28. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

29. Gerald Messadié, *A History of the Devil* (trans. Marc Romano; New York: Kodansha International, 1996), p. 262.

30. Messadié begins his chapter on Greece with a nod to how absurd it seems

of the Greek gods, they can have no connection with what he believes is fundamentally a later Christian formulation.

It is surprising that scholars investigating Satan have largely ignored Dionysos and his many Satan-like qualities. Simply put, no other deity from any other culture is as closely associated with both YHWH and Christ—and yet diametrically opposed to them—as Dionysos. Consider the following observations and epitaphs about Dionysos, which are only a sampling of the many that will be discussed in this article: he is the ‘only Greek god endowed with the power of *mayá* (magic)’;³¹ he is the only prologizing god in Euripides who ‘will mingle unrecognized, *in human form*, with the actors in the human drama’;³² he is called ‘Dionysos Anthroporrhaistes (Man Destroyer)’;³³ he is the smiling Stranger in the *Bacchae*, whose calm Dodds finds ‘first touching, then vaguely disquieting, in the end indescribably sinister’;³⁴ he is the ‘effeminate god of the phallus, the phallic god of women’;³⁵ he is the *horned* Dionysos,³⁶ who is linked with the underworld, and, among his animal forms, is closely associated

to look for the Devil here. He ends by stating that ‘Hellenic and then Hellenistic democracy kept the Devil from penetrating the borders of Greece, since in the end the fallen angel is no more than the logical stratagem of a totalitarian power’ (*History of the Devil*, p. 145).

31. Vernant as quoted in Albert Henrichs, “‘He has a god in him’”: Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysus’, in Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone (eds.), *Masks of Dionysus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 13-43 (33).

32. E.R. Dodds, ‘Commentary’, in his *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 61-242 (62).

33. Dirk Obbink, ‘Dionysus Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation’, in Carpenter and Faraone (eds.), *Masks of Dionysus*, pp. 65-86 (74).

34. E.R. Dodds, ‘Introduction’, in his *Euripides*, pp. xi-lxi (xliv).

35. Michael Jameson, ‘The Asexuality of Dionysus’, in Carpenter and Faraone (eds.), *Masks of Dionysus*, pp. 44-64 (45). See also Eric Csapo, ‘Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction’, *Phoenix* 51 (1997), pp. 253-95.

36. ‘[T]he bull-horned god was born of Zeus’ (David Grene and Richmond Alexander Lattimore [eds.], *The Complete Greek Tragedies. V. Euripides: The Bacchae* [trans. William Arrowsmith; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968], p. 101). In *Dion.* 6.165, Nonnos calls the child Dionysos *keroen brephos*, ‘the horned baby’ or ‘infant’. See Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life* (trans. Ralph Manheim; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 245.

with the snake/serpent.³⁷ He is also connected in a number of ways to Oedipus, who himself, as I will show, can be seen as a type of Antichrist. Certainly these are important considerations that are given no attention in the afore-mentioned treatises that discuss Satan. Maybe this proves P.E. Easterling's point that Dionysos 'tends to resist scholarly capture'³⁸ and suggests that assumptions made about autonomous Hebrew and Greek development continue to relegate scholars to well-worn paths, while other paths open to investigation are not taken.

For example, the biblical story that Satan deceived Eve—from which develops the theological position of 'woman's' supposed susceptibility to the serpent—could be analogically related to the history of the cult of Dionysos and the myths of his arrival in Attica:

Dionysus is a woman's god in the fullest sense of the word, the source of all woman's sensual and transcendent hopes, the center of her whole existence. It was to women that he was first revealed in his glory, and it was women who propagated his cult and brought about its triumph.³⁹

Given this essential characteristic of the cult of Dionysos,⁴⁰ in the *Bacchae* the maenads are referred to as 'my sisterhood of worshippers',⁴¹ while Plutarch says, 'Euoe Bacchus who incites / Womankind' (*E Delph.* 9.389).⁴² It is again fascinating to note that it is women who first see the risen Christ and that women are extremely prominent and important in the propagation of Christianity—especially in the early years. And it is illuminating that Dodds, noting the organization of the cult of Dionysos whose leader becomes 'Bromius', remarks that it 'would be like that of a witches' coven, where the single male leader was known to his congregation as "the devil"'.⁴³

37. For the importance of snakes in the cult of Dionysos, see below in the section 'YHWH and EUAI'.

38. P.E. Easterling, 'A Show for Dionysus', in his *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 36-53 (44).

39. J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 101, as quoted in Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 130. Bachofen's comments are in his introduction to 'From *Mother Right*'.

40. On this subject, see the informative essay by Ross S. Kraemer, 'Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus', *HTR* 72 (1979), pp. 55-80.

41. Dodds, 'Commentary', p. 70. See also Kraemer, 'Ecstasy and Possession'.

42. Translation from Frank Cole Babbitt (LCL, 306), p. 225.

43. Dodds, 'Commentary', p. 83.

Before going further with the idea that Dionysos is the opposer in the Old Testament (or Lucifer understood from a different perspective), several questions might be raised. Perhaps the most obvious is why not Hades, the Greek god of the underworld, rather than Dionysos? More will be said about the association of Dionysos with Pluto/Hades,⁴⁴ but for now it should be noted that Dionysos has an elaborate connection to the underworld, a connection pointed to in the epitaph ‘giver of riches’⁴⁵ and especially in Heraclitus’s statement, ‘Hades and Dionysus, for whom they go mad and rage, are one and the same’.⁴⁶ Moreover, at least two festivals of Dionysos, the Agrionia and the Anthesteria, were festivals ‘of the dead’.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as Susan Guettel Cole observes, most of the Greek ‘epigrams with Dionysiac themes are sepulchral epigrams’, and since ‘care for the dead involved libations of wine, Dionysos is also associated with the cult of the tomb’.⁴⁸ Thus Otto, noting the many epitaphs along with a wide variety of other reasons to connect Dionysos to the underworld, ultimately says: ‘Where does this put us? Surely there can be no further doubt that this puts us into death’s sphere.’⁴⁹ In this regard, the ‘marriage to death’ theme, a component of many of the Attic plays,⁵⁰ might be understood from a wider perspective. That is, since the plays were produced for a festival honoring Dionysos, could the marriage to death theme be understood as a type of ritual offering to the god?

Another reason that Dionysos is the only choice of a Satan figure that can make sense—at least from the Greek pantheon—is because it is Dionysos who may actually be the most powerful Greek god. One reflection of this power is Dionysos’s encroachment onto the realms of many other Greek gods. For example, Dionysos’s name contains the name Zeus, and this ‘conundrum’ as Walter Burkert calls it, ‘is how it was construed in antiquity: Dios Dionysos, Zeus’ son Dionysos’.⁵¹

44. See especially the chapter titled ‘The Somber Madness’, in Otto, *Dionysus*, pp. 103-19.

45. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 115.

46. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 116.

47. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 103.

48. Susan Guettel Cole, ‘Life and Death: A New Epigram for Dionysos’, *Epigraphica Anatolica* 4 (1984), pp. 37-49 (40-41).

49. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 113.

50. Rush Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

51. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 162.

Indeed, Kerényi notes that more than any other god Dionysos appeared to be ‘a second Zeus’.⁵² Related to this is the Orphic version of the birth of Dionysos and the Oedipal element inherent in the story of the rape and abduction of Kore (the virgin). The specific manner in which Hades and Zeus are mentioned in the account suggests that both could actually be Dionysos.⁵³

Dionysos also intrudes into Poseidon’s realm. Plutarch comments that Dionysos and Poseidon are ‘by common acceptance sovereign over the domains of the moist and the generative’.⁵⁴ Dionysos absorbed the cult of Pan,⁵⁵ a Greek god invariably mentioned in discussions of the origins of Satan. Pan’s personal appearance is notable for its striking resemblance to Satyrs, the part-human, part-goat male followers of Dionysos.⁵⁶ Apollo, too, is intricately associated with Dionysos. Again, it is the former priest at Delphi, Plutarch, who says: ‘If, then, anyone asks, “What has this to do with Apollo?” we shall say that it concerns not only him, but also Dionysus, whose share in Delphi is no less than that of Apollo’.⁵⁷ Finally, several commentators also tell us he was the first *triumphator*⁵⁸ and that he shares in the nature of Ares.⁵⁹ Thus we see the vase by the archaic master, Xenokles, on one side of which are Zeus, Poseidon and Hades with their emblems of power, and on the other side is the Chthonios Dionysos, welcoming Persephone who is ‘obviously’ being sent to him by Hermes and Demeter. This might indicate the sum of what these various details allude to: there *is* reason to understand Dionysos as the god behind the gods.⁶⁰

52. Carl Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p. 251.

53. Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*, pp. 250-51.

54. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 5.3.675. Translation from P.A. Clement and H.B. Hoffleit (LCL, 424), p. 391.

55. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 266; and Arthur Evans, *The God of Ecstasy: Sex-Roles and the Madness of Dionysos* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), p. 110.

56. See the discussion in Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*, p. 174.

57. Plutarch, *E Delph.* 9.388. Translation from Babbitt (LCL, 306), p. 221. The empty tomb of Dionysos was inside the *adyton* in the temple of Apollo.

58. Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 4.5.2; Arrian, *Anab.* 6.28.2; Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.10.8; Tertullian, *Cor.* 7.12.

59. Euripides, *Bacch.* 302; Plutarch, *Demetr.* 2; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.19.1. See also Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 197. However, see Dodds (ed.), *Euripides*, p. 109 for a differing view.

60. Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*, p. 251.

YHWH and EUAI

The raving Dionysus is worshipped by Bacchants with orgies, in which they celebrate their sacred frenzy by a feast of raw flesh. Wreathed with snakes, they perform the distribution of portions of their victims, shouting the name of Eva, that Eva through whom error entered into the world; and a consecrated snake is the emblem of the Bacchic orgies (Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 2.32-40).⁶¹

In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, the authors note that two places in Maccabees ‘point to a closer connection between Dionysos and Yahweh’, and go on to observe that Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 4.6) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.5) ‘identified the two’,⁶² an idea that was apparently widespread among pagans.⁶³ The maenads called out ‘Euai’ in their frenzy (Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 4.3.2; cf. Aristophanes, *Lys.* 1193-1198), a word that, especially if read from right to left, seems close to YHWH. The connection between YHWH and Dionysos, like that between Christ and Antichrist, can be understood as parodic.

Certainly the Jews would have rejected the notion that Dionysos and YHWH were one and the same, otherwise why would Ptolemy threaten to stigmatize the Jews and fire-brand them ‘with the ivy-leaf symbol of Dionysus’ (3 *Macc.* 2.29)?⁶⁴ What is contained in Ptolemy’s threat is the idea that one of the worst offenses he could imagine would be to brand a Jew with a symbol of Dionysos. Indeed, it might be akin to threatening to brand Christians with symbols such as a pentagram.

Similarly, in 2 *Macc.* 14.33, Nicanor demands that Judas Maccabeus be handed over to him or he will destroy the temple in Jerusalem and ‘build here a splendid temple to Dionysus’. Given the extreme enmity that Nicanor held against the Jews, his threat suggests that he knew that nothing could be more abominable to the Jews than a temple to Dionysos on ground reserved for the worship of YHWH. Nicanor may have had

61. Translation from G.W. Butterworth (LCL, 92), p. 31.

62. Fitz Graf, ‘Dionysus’, in Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2nd rev. edn, 1999), pp. 252-58 (256).

63. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 487.

64. ‘Apocrypha’, in Michael Coogan *et al.* (eds.) *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, augmented 3rd edn, 2007), pp. 1AP-381AP (309AP).

good reason for thinking this, because Dionysian symbols appear in the Hebrew Bible where there is opposition to YHWH. For example, this can be seen in the rich symbolism surrounding the Fall of humankind.

In the story in Genesis, there is a fruit of which Adam and Eve eat, a tree, a serpent and a fig leaf loincloth placed over the genitals. One of our most important comments on Dionysian rites is found in Plutarch, who tells us that the original Bacchic celebration involved ‘a wine jar, a vine, a goat, a basket of figs, and then the phallus’.⁶⁵ One name for Dionysos was ‘Figwood’,⁶⁶ or the Fig-god (Sykites or Sykeates),⁶⁷ and the fruit, sacred to both Dionysos and Priapus, has long been recognized as a symbol of sexual intercourse.⁶⁸ In fact, an icon at Rhodes, apparently carved out of figwood, was called ‘Dionysus Thyonidas’ from ‘Thyone,’ which was a general Dionysiac cult name for phallus.⁶⁹

Dionysos was also called Dendrites, worshipped, according to Plutarch, ‘almost everywhere in Greece’ as the tree god, and in Boeotia was known as ‘he who lives and works in the tree’.⁷⁰ In the *Dionysiaca* Nonnos provides a fascinating look at Dionysos, a true shape-shifting god, changing into the likeness of a tree during a battle with Deriades:

for his head changed and his hair became what seemed the counterfeit foliage of a tree, his belly lengthened into the trunk, he made his arms the boughs and his dress the bark and rooted his feet, and knocking up with his long branches he whispered into the face of the fighting king (Nonnos, *Dion.* 36.307-312).⁷¹

The Dionysian connection to snakes or serpents is also manifest. In the *Dionysiaca*, Nonnos calls Dionysos ‘snake-hair’ (22.30), and in the story as presented by Euripides (*Bacch.* 102-104), the first thing Zeus does after Dionysos’s birth is to set a crown of serpents on his head. In remembrance of this act, the maenads thus fix serpents into their own hair. Moreover, the ubiquity of serpents in the cult of Dionysos may explain why ivy is one of the most common symbols of Dionysos.⁷² For

65. Plutarch, *Cupid. divit.* 527, and Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 164.

66. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 260.

67. Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*, p. 274.

68. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 158.

69. Csapo, ‘Riding the Phallus for Dionysus’, p. 259.

70. Plutarch, *Quaes. conv.* 5.3.1, as quoted in Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 157.

71. Translation from W.H.D. Rouse (LCL, 356), p. 23. Nonnos also wrote the *Metabolē*, a paraphrase of the Gospel of John.

72. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 155.

example, Plutarch asks, ‘did not the ancients for this reason dedicate and consecrate the snake among the reptiles of the earth and the ivy among plants to the god of wine as to one who is lord of a cold and chilling power?’ (Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 3.5.653a).⁷³ Even tragic masks were called *gorgeia* in the Doric dialect, being named after the Gorgon with her head of serpents.⁷⁴

However, it is Dionysos as the wine god that offers the richest possibilities in relation to the Genesis story. The tree in the garden of Eden was of the fruiting variety, and Dionysos is especially associated with trees that fruit. Plutarch quotes Pindar who says, ‘May Dionysus, rich in joys, make the trees to prosper with the holy splendor of ripe fruit’.⁷⁵ As mentioned above, the fruit that Dionysos is most closely associated with is the grape. Indeed, Diodorus Siculus says it was Dionysos who ‘taught how to make wine and to gather “the fruits of the trees”, as they are called’ (*Bib. hist.* 3.63.2).⁷⁶ Moreover, as Kerényi notes, in the *Odyssey* (5.69) the Greeks called the grape vine *hemeris*, the ‘tame’, a name reflective of the fact that the wild grape can actually develop into a thick tree.⁷⁷

Although the fruit in the Genesis story is unidentified, the grape, and the effects of wine, which itself is a ‘fruit’ or product of the tree, is certainly a plausible choice. For example, in the New Testament, Christ speaks of wine as the ‘fruit of the vine’, saying that he ‘will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come’ (Lk. 22.17, 18).

Both the cult of Dionysos and the fruit of the cultivated grapevine, or the wild tree, have a well-known association with eroticism and sexuality. Walter Burkert, discussing the change in the portrayal of Dionysos in the mid-fifth century BCE from a bearded adult male to a nude and youthful god, writes ‘with this transformation, Dionysos is now enveloped more than before in what is a truly erotic atmosphere’. Burkert adds that ‘wine and sex go together: private Dionysos celebrations may be orgies in the disreputable sense of the word’.⁷⁸ The word ‘orgy’ itself comes from the Greek *orgia*, ‘the word most typically used as a name for the rites of both Demeter and Dionysos’.⁷⁹ Diodorus Siculus states that the reason the

73. Translation from Clement and Hoffleit (LCL, 424), p. 243.

74. Csapo, ‘Riding the Phallus for Dionysus’, p. 257.

75. Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 35, as quoted in Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 157.

76. Translation from C.H. Oldfather (LCL, 303), p. 291.

77. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 57.

78. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 167.

79. Evans, *God of Ecstasy*, p. 69.

ancients say that Priapus is the son of Dionysos and Aphrodite is because ‘men, when under the influence of wine, find the members of their bodies tense and inclined to the pleasures of love’ (*Bib. hist.* 4.6.7-9).⁸⁰ And, according to one myth, the Athenian men rejected Dionysos when his cult was first introduced to Attica, and for this their phalli were afflicted with *satyriasis*.⁸¹

Robert Alter’s erudite translation of Gen. 3.6-7 illustrates that the story of the eating of the fruit in the Garden is infused with eroticism and sexuality.

And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was lust to the eyes and the tree was lovely to look at, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her man, and he ate. And the eyes of the two were opened, and they knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.⁸²

In the notes to this passage, Alter explains his translation of the phrase *lust to the eyes*.

ta’awah means that which is intensely desired, appetite, and sometimes specifically lust. Eyes have just been mentioned in the serpent’s promise that they will be wondrously opened; now they are linked to intense desire. In the event, they will be opened chiefly to see nakedness. *Ta’awah* is semantically bracketed with the next term attached to the tree, ‘lovely’, *nehmad*, which literally means ‘that which is desired.’⁸³

And the fruit of the vine *is* identified with sexuality in other verses in the Bible. For example, in the Song of Songs, ‘that most sensual of all biblical poems’, imagery of the vine is ‘frequently employed’.⁸⁴ Given the ancient identification of this fruit with sexuality and desire, this is not surprising.

However, what the compilers of the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* do find ‘somewhat unexpected’ is the ‘variety of ways the poet uses the

80. Translation from Oldfather (LCL, 303), p. 357.

81. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 164, from scholium on Lucian, *Deor. conc.* 5, which supplements scholium on Aristophanes, *Ach.* 243. The story is printed in Eric Csapo and William J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 111.

82. Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), p. 12.

83. Alter, *Genesis*, p. 12.

84. ‘Vine, Vineyard’, in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 915-16 (916).

image'.⁸⁵ It is this fruit that is behind the biblical account in Song 7.8, and, considering our discussion of Dionysos and the 'fruit' in Genesis, the compilers' comments about this passage are relevant:

In a poem that describes the physical beauty of the woman's body, the man anticipates the touch and taste of her breasts by his exuberant blessing 'May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine'.⁸⁶

The vine is also mentioned in conjunction with Sodom and Gomorrah—places that are synonymous with wickedness. There an 'organic connection' is made between 'the sins of God's people and those of the notorious city of Sodom' using the metaphor of the vine.⁸⁷

Their vine comes from the vine of Sodom / and from the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are filled with poison, / and their clusters with bitterness (Deut. 32.32 NIV).⁸⁸

Another example that has 'Oedipal' echoes is the story in Gen. 19.30-38. Here Lot's daughters, conceivably of the mind that they are the only people left on earth, get their father drunk with the express purpose to 'sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father' (Gen. 19.32). Presumably, the daughters get their father inebriated with wine from Sodom, whose grapes are 'filled with poison'.

Finally, of importance here is that, embedded in the Bible, there is a 'general biblical pattern in which history is seen as a cycle of approximate and significant recurrences'.⁸⁹ So if the 'fruit' in Genesis could be understood as wine, grapes or fermented grapes, and being aware of the various strategies employed in the Bible that suggests *history repeats itself*, then the story of Noah and the vine itself becomes a prime example of the concept of approximate and significant recurrences.

After the flood, Noah, 'a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard' (Gen. 9.20 NIV). His overuse of the fruit of his labors resulted in his drunken state, giving Ham, his youngest son, the opportunity to sin against him. This led to Noah's curse on Canaan, Ham's son, which was borne out in the subjugation of the Canaanites to the descendants of Ham's brother Shem, the Israelites.⁹⁰

85. 'Vine, Vineyard', p. 916.

86. 'Vine, Vineyard', p. 916.

87. 'Vine, Vineyard', p. 915.

88. 'Vine, Vineyard', pp. 915-16.

89. Alter, *Genesis*, p. 18.

90. 'Vine, Vineyard', p. 916.

In this instance, then, the motifs repeat themselves, and the new pristine world after the flood and the ‘new garden’ of Noah is subject to the same ‘poison’ as occurred in the original Fall.

Ultimately other motifs are running throughout these biblical stories and are intertwined with the more obvious motif of wine, grapes and eroticism. In the stories of the Fall, the Flood and Lot, there is a sub-theme of populating or re-populating the earth. And in the stories of Eve and the Serpent, Noah and Ham, Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot and his daughters there is a theme of a sexual boundary or taboo being broken. But in all cases, except in the one instance in Genesis when the ‘fruit’ is unidentified, the fruit of the vine is at the heart of the transgression of boundaries. And yet it is also at the heart of the Christian path to Christ and heaven.

Christ and Dionysos

Nietzsche was a radical atheist, but at the same time he opposed a Greek god to Christ. In posing the alternatives ‘Dionysos or Christ’, he selected—whether correctly or incorrectly—the god who struck him as compatible with his radical atheism. How did he come to do so? Though strange, his idea cannot have been totally unfounded.⁹¹

If Dionysos and Satan were one and the same, then the symbols of this god could be symbolically overturned through *recapitulatio*, or conversion, as Christians were wont to do. *Recapitulatio* is a principle ‘clearly enunciated’ by Tyconius, the fourth-century North African theologian, and ‘given wide currency by Augustine in the *De doctrina Christiana* and later by Bede, who includes [it] in the prologue to his *Expositio Apocalypsis*’.⁹² *Recapitulatio*, and/or Christianization or conversion (not in the religious sense) can be stated metaphorically as the ‘baptizing’ of pagan practices, shrines and holidays.⁹³ The Passion enacted on the

91. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. xxiii.

92. Penn Szittyá, ‘Domesday Bokes: The Apocalypse in Medieval English Literary Culture’, in Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 374-97 (391).

93. For example, the Holy Sepulchre is on the site where the main pagan temple in Jerusalem once stood. I thank Professor Stephen J. Shoemaker and Professor Daniel Falk for this explanation. Christians have not been alone in this practice, as seen by the successive shrines built on the Temple Mount and the Holy Sepulchre site as the

cross, and the resulting pity and catharsis, could itself be understood as the conversion of the genre of tragedy—after the crucifixion it is no longer the domain of Dionysos and the Greek tragic hero. Indeed, Christ replaces Oedipus and other pretenders as the quintessential tragic hero *and*, at the same time, he fulfills the promise of the future oriented Roman/Christian epic hero. (See below, under the heading *Tragoidia: the Song of the Goat*).

Recapitulatio might also be the best way to understand Christ's actions at the Last Supper. If this is indeed symbolically what is happening at the Last Supper, this fully supports the idea that the grape is the fruit alluded to in Genesis. Certainly if the pagan god of wine—through a type of *interpretatio Christiana*—is identified as having a connection with the serpent in the garden, as Clement of Alexandria in the second century suggested, then the most important sacrament in the Christian religion, drinking the 'fruit of the vine' in remembrance of Christ (Mt. 26.29; Mk 14.25; Lk. 22.18), is also *conversion* of the rites of his arch enemy and pagan god, Dionysos/Satan. In this case, in the best sense of *recapitulatio*, the fruit that brought humankind's 'Fall' would now be redeemed.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Lk. 22.20).

Moreover the highly charged drama and atmosphere of the 'Last Supper' would be magnified in new and significant ways as, for example, in the account in Luke wherein Satan possesses Judas:

Then Satan entered into Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve (Lk. 22.3).

Thus Dionysos/Satan—the pagan wine god and opposer to Christ who is endowed with the power of possession—sits at the table with Christ in the 'mask' of Judas and, as they are preparing to eat, Christ says, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer' (Lk. 22.15).

In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus, or 'man of suffering', desires to see the women engaged in Bacchic practices and is destroyed by Dionysos for succumbing to his desires. At one point, Dionysos even states that Pentheus 'fed on his desires' (Euripides, *Bacch.* 617).⁹⁴ In this regard, an inverted comparison has long been made between the figure of Dionysos

location changed hands.

94. William Arrowsmith (trans.), 'Bacchae', in David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (eds.), *Greek Tragedies*. III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 189-258 (221).

before Pentheus, and that of Christ before Pilate.⁹⁵ Here, however, it can be argued that Christ controls his own desires and does not drink:

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (Lk. 22.17-18).

In this interpretation, at the table with Christ is the wine god who witnesses his primary means to lead humankind astray being converted or baptized into the primary means of saving humanity. Further, if we take into account the earlier words of Christ: ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener’ (Jn 15.1), the moment is electric with antagonism and danger. If we go so far as to contend that the myths and symbols of Dionysos that we find in the Classical and Judaeo-Christian tradition do provide us with a different insight into Satan—and make for a charged atmosphere at the Last Supper—then other events leading up to the crucifixion can be seen as aggressive, retaliatory behavior on the part of Dionysos/Satan and his followers. An example of this is when Christ comes to Golgotha and is hung on the cross:

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means ‘the place of the skull’). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it (Mk 15.22-23).

And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’). When some of those standing near heard this, they said, ‘Listen, he’s calling Elijah’. Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink (Mk 15.34-36).

It is therefore salient, given our discussion of Dionysos and Satan, that Christ is offered wine intermixed with gall or myrrh when he comes to ‘the place of a skull’, and just before he dies he is offered ‘wine vinegar’. These are substances that were formerly wine or might be considered *masked wine*.

However, conversion happens both ways, which could explain Christ’s actions in the temple, which included tipping over the tables of the

95. For a history of this comparison, see R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2nd edn, 2003), p. 4, who cites Otto Weinreich, ‘Türöffnung im Befreiungswunder’, in *Genethliakon für Wilhelm Schmid* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, 1929), pp. 280-341 (338-40).

moneychangers. The Jewish historian Josephus describes the rebuilding of the temple by Herod, who ‘took away the old foundation, and laid others’ (my emphasis). Some of it then collapsed but ‘we resolved to raise [it] again in the days of Nero’ (*Ant.* 15.11.391).⁹⁶ Had the temple been partly converted into a shrine to Dionysos by Herod and his descendants, or, to give it a slightly different context, was Nicanor’s earlier threat finally realized under Herod? If so, it is probably no accident because, as Shaye Cohen notes, ‘all of Herod the Great’s building projects, including the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, were in the Hellenistic style of the Near East’.⁹⁷

Josephus gives a fascinating description of the gates of the temple in *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Jewish War*:

They were adorned with embroidered veils, with their flowers of purple, and pillars interwoven: and over these, but under the crown-work, was spread out a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators, to see what vast materials there were, and with what great skill the workmanship was done (*Ant.* 15.11.394-395).

But that gate which was at this end of the first part of the house was, as we have already observed, all over covered with gold, as was its whole wall about it, from which clusters of grapes hung as tall as a man’s height (*War* 5.5.210).

It is during the rule of Herod and Nero that Dionysian elements, especially from a Greek perspective, are newly incorporated or rebuilt into the temple. For example, the clusters of grapes as a symbol of Dionysos would be manifest to the pagan Greeks and Romans, the very audience that Josephus claims to be writing for in *Antiquities*. And, in the above excerpt from *Antiquities*, the pillars, over which spreads a golden vine, would not require awareness of the reference to grapes in *War* for the astute Greek or Roman to interpret them as a Dionysian symbol. Dionysos Perikionis, a Theban epitaph, means ‘Dionysos who twines himself around the column’.⁹⁸ In fact, this is one of the reasons Tacitus

96. Translation from William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: New Updated Edition Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 423-24. All translations here from Josephus are from Whiston.

97. Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (ed. Wayne A. Meeks; Library of Early Christianity, 7; Louisville: Westminster Press, 1989), p. 38.

98. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 196.

gives for the erroneous belief that the Jews were worshipping Dionysos:

From the fact, however, that their priests used to chant to the music of flutes and cymbals, and to wear garlands of ivy, and that a golden vine was found in the temple, some have thought that they worshipped Father Liber [Bacchus] (Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5).⁹⁹

The comments about the temple by both Josephus and Tacitus make it clear that Herod's temple had Dionysian symbols attached to it. Additionally, the display of wealth at the temple, especially because of the other Dionysian elements, could be seen as yet another symbol of Dionysos. Indeed, it does provide an echo to the practice of displaying the wealth or 'Pluto'¹⁰⁰ of Athens at the Theatre of Dionysos during the City Dionysia:

As the sailing season began at the time of the Dionysia, the (subject) allies were required to send their tribute to Athens at the time of the festival, and this was brought down from the Treasury and displayed to the audience.¹⁰¹

Wealth, as its name in Greek suggests, was seen as a gift from the underworld, either from the crops that spring miraculously out of the ground or from the minerals and precious stones that are found in the ground. Besides the occasion for a display of power that the theatre affords, the logical place to display the 'Pluto' of Athens would be at the theatre named for the god with the epitaph 'giver of riches'.

Ultimately, the ramifications for seeing Dionysos as a name variation of Satan, or Satan described and understood from different viewpoints, are immense and beyond the scope of this article. What is clear, however, is that this interpretation provides new and profound meaning for Christ's actions in the temple and at the Last Supper.

Oedipus: Son of Dionysos

Who bore you, Oedipus? A nymph?
 Did Pan beget you in the hills? Were you begotten by Apollo?
 Perhaps so, for he likes the mountain glens. Could Hermes be your father?
 Or Dionysus? Could it be that he received you as a gift

99. Translation from Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, *Complete Works of Tacitus: The Annals. The History. The Life of Cnaeus Julius Agricola. Germany and its Tribes* (New York: Random House, 1942), pp. 267-68.

100. The Greek word for 'wealth' is *ploutos*.

101. Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, p. 108.

high in the mountains from a nymph with whom he lay?
(Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 1100-1108).¹⁰²

A fundamental characteristic of the Antichrist tradition is that the Antichrist is the son of Satan. One of the most bizarre and impenetrable of Bacchic practices and rites concerns the Anthesteria or *Older Dionysia* (Thucydides 2.15), a three-day festival ‘common to Athenians and all Ionians’, whose ‘certain similarity with the sequence of Good Friday and Easter’, as Burkert observes, ‘cannot be overlooked’.¹⁰³ At this time, the virgin wife of the *archōn basileus* was given in marriage to Dionysos, a circumstance that could be discussed, but not, as Pseudo-Demosthenes explains, the ‘ineffable sacred ceremonies connected with this event in accordance with the ancient tradition’.¹⁰⁴

Aristotle speaks of this act as an actual marital union.¹⁰⁵ This is how it is translated in the volume on Aristotle in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought series: ‘the union and marriage of the wife of the King Archon with Dionysus’.¹⁰⁶ This is a highly unusual Dionysiac rite as ‘there is no precedent in the history of cult for the rite of sexual intercourse with the queen’.¹⁰⁷ Consummation of this union apparently took place in the Boukolion,¹⁰⁸ but the ‘ineffable sacred ceremonies’—the divine *pregma* mentioned by the physician Aretaios—were kept mysterious and secret.¹⁰⁹ Although the festival’s Athenian and Ionian roots are noted,¹¹⁰ there is a common theme: the physical union between a woman and Dionysos, which also seems to be echoed in the consummation story of Oedipus.

Cumulatively, there are reasons to infer that Dionysos lay with Jocasta and is therefore the father of Oedipus. This is first because votaries of the gods themselves become ‘Bacchus’, reflected in the Theban chorus’s

102. Translation from Luci Berkowitz and Theodore F. Brunner, *Sophocles: Oedipus Tyrannus* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), p. 25.

103. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, pp. 237-42.

104. As quoted in Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 309.

105. Aristotle, *Ath. pol.* 3.5.

106. Stephen Everson (ed.), *Aristotle: The Politics and the Constitution of Athens* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 212.

107. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 85.

108. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 109.

109. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 309.

110. This may suggest Egyptian roots. Erectheus was an early king of Athens, while Ion (Javan?), his grandson, founded Ionia.

words ‘god whose name is our name Bacchus’ (Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 277).¹¹¹ Related to this is the example of Echion (Snake-man), one of the ‘sown men’ who is repeatedly mentioned in the *Bacchae*. According to Winnington-Ingram, we are meant to see ‘a symbol of the Dionysiac element in this man, which makes him, like the snake, a potential vehicle of the god’.¹¹² Secondly Euripides notes that Laius was drunk (see below). Thirdly, Aeschylus indicates that both Laius and Jocasta were mentally blinded or possessed by madness (‘madness was the coupler / of this distracted pair’, *Sept.* 756-757). And fourthly, Thebes had unique status as Dionysos’s birthplace. This combination of circumstances reveals that it is not only Laius who comes to Jocasta the night Oedipus is conceived, it is also Dionysos. Though this is never declared outright, through this series of associations it becomes an illuminating and plausible argument, one that adds a new layer of meaning to Oedipus’s search for his true parents.

In Euripides’ *The Phoenician Women*, the prophecy of Apollo to Laius, as recounted here by Jocasta, warns Laius of the dire consequences of begetting a child:

‘Lord of Thebes and its famed horses, / sow not that furrow against divine decree. For if you have a child, him you beget / shall kill you, and your house shall wade through blood.’ / But Laius, in his lust, and drunk beside, / begot a child on me (Euripides, *Phoen.* 10-15).¹¹³

There is double meaning in the phrase ‘Lord of Thebes’, since this could be understood to mean both Laius and Dionysos—even including the prophecy. In this respect, the similarity of Dionysos as *Lyaios* ‘the unbinder’ to the name of Oedipus’s father, Laius, is considerable.¹¹⁴ Euripides indicates that it is because of *both* lust and drunkenness that Laius begets Oedipus—‘in his lust, and drunk beside’—which again suggests that Dionysos himself participated in the union in a very real sense. The implications continue to grow if, through Laius’s drunken state, Dionysos is seen as Oedipus’s ‘father’. In the *Laws* (775b-e), Plato says that a man’s acts of insolence, like the vice of drinking to the point of inebriation, ‘will inevitably rub off on to the souls and bodies of his

111. Translation from Stephen Berge and Diskin Clay, *Sophocles: Oedipus the King* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 32.

112. Dodds, ‘Commentary’, p. 144.

113. Translation from Elizabeth Wyckoff, *Euripides: The Phoenician Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 73.

114. Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*, p. 274.

children, and produce absolutely degenerate creatures who have been stamped with the likeness of their father'.¹¹⁵

We can add to this Plato's remarks in the *Timaeus* that madness (later known as the 'sacred disease' is a 'disease of the soul' (86b),¹¹⁶ because madness is also a synonym for Bacchic possession. This provides yet another reason for those concerned with the ultimate disposition of the soul to closely inspect Dionysos and his cult. Indeed, we are told that 'mysterious dedications' named Dionysos 'Lord of Souls'.¹¹⁷ It is, therefore, telling that the union between Laius and Jocasta is blamed on madness in Aeschylus's *Seven against Thebes*: 'madness was the coupler / of this distracted pair' (756-757).¹¹⁸ Thus, because of Dionysos's history of coupling with the wives of kings in other places, because votaries of Dionysos themselves become 'Bacchus', and because Dionysos's blood is a part of the Theban family tree, it is not unreasonable to argue that Oedipus is, in several ways, a son of Dionysos. Hence, Sophocles' question as to whether Oedipus's father could be Dionysos ultimately becomes the answer: Jocasta *did* lie with Dionysos and then offered her son to 'Death' on Mt. Cithaeron, that is, to his father, Dionysos.

Oedipus and Antichrist: An AntiMoses?

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7.22).

Although Robert Alter's analysis of Jacob's actions upon learning of Joseph's 'death' stands on its own, Greco-Roman literary terms, along with a comment about Moses by Manetho, might add to an understanding of the following passage.

'Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned his son many days. All of his sons and daughters tried to console him but he refused to be consoled, saying, "No, I will go down to my son in the underworld mourning", thus did his father bewail him' (Gen. 37.34-35). In two brief verses half a dozen different activities of mourning are recorded, including the refusal to be consoled and direct speech in which the father expresses

115. Translation from Trevor J. Saunders, *Plato: Complete Works* (eds. John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

116. Translation from Donald J. Zeyl, *Plato: Timaeus* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 81.

117. Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 49.

118. See Debra Hershkowitz, *The Madness of Epic: Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 3, 8.

the wish to mourn until he joins his son in death. (Later, ironically, he will 'go down' to his son not to Sheol, the underworld, but to Egypt.)¹¹⁹

When applying Greek terms of epic/tragedy to this ironic 'going down' to Egypt, we actually have a *katabasis* for a group rather than for a single, heroic individual.

In Josephus's *Contra Apion*, Josephus hotly contests Manetho's discussion of Moses in a passage that throws considerable light on our discussion: 'It was also reported that the priest, who ordained their polity and their laws, was by birth of Heliopolis, and his name Osarsiph from Osiris, who was the god of Heliopolis; but that when he was gone over to these people, his name was changed, and he was called Moses' (*Apion* 1.250). Some have taken this as yet another identification of the Hebrew God with Osiris.¹²⁰ However, the Greeks would have recognized Osiris as Dionysos, as noted below. On ancient authority, then, Moses is linked to Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld and of resurrection, who was understood to be none other than Dionysos.

Modern scholars see the identification of Osiris with Dionysus as simply another case of *interpretatio Graeca*, of the Greeks equating foreign gods with their own for which sometimes there appears to be the slimmest of reasons. What seems important about this comparison, however, is that while the Greeks believed tragedy developed from dithyrambs that celebrated the birth of Dionysos, a twentieth-century find at Abydos, Egypt has unearthed the earliest recorded 'play', which is a stone tablet celebrating the resurrection of Osiris, known today as the *Abydos Passion Play*.

Herodotus, in his *Histories*, may have been the first to record the notion that Dionysos was Osiris (2.42, 47, 123, 144-146, 156), the god most closely identified with resurrection among ancient Mediterranean cultures. Herodotus is not, however, necessarily engaging in *interpretatio Graeca*, because when he tells the story, it is the Egyptians who inform Herodotus that Osiris is Dionysos. In this regard, Orphic versions of myths regarding Dionysos's birth appear to have Egyptian influence.¹²¹

Moreover, it is unclear whether Herodotus had knowledge of ancient Egyptian plays about the resurrection of Osiris. If not, then Herodotus's

119. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 14.

120. See G.P. Goold (ed.), *Manetho* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 130-31 n. 1.

121. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 198.

willingness to accept and promulgate the notion that Dionysos was Osiris could have stemmed from the fact that Dionysos was apparently ‘associated with eschatological expectations as early as the classical period’,¹²² and that Dionysos himself was associated with resurrection in various permutations of Greek myths. Or it might be that Herodotus saw in the theatre’s symbolically staged ‘resurrection’—a genre that features dead characters from the past living again—an obvious connection to Osiris, the Egyptian god of resurrection. Or perhaps we should take Herodotus at face value and accept that he simply reported what the Egyptians told him.

In any case, while Herodotus may have been first to make known this comparison between the two gods, by the Hellenistic period this connection was firmly established.¹²³ Finally, in view of all this we have another interpretation of the Israelites’ ‘journey’ out of Egypt to the Promised Land, one that prefigures the pattern of such epic heroes as Aeneas and Dante’s pilgrim. That is, it is a completion of a journey started with Jacob’s ‘going down into Egypt’, forcing the later break from the parodic god of the underworld, Osiris/Dionysos, and ultimately a return to their true god and to paradise in Jerusalem. Egyptian historiography, by the Hellenistic period, puts a slightly different spin on the story, noting an *expulsion* from Egypt not only of Hebrews but also of Greeks.

The expulsion of pestilential foreigners, as we have noted, was a traditional theme of Egyptian historiography. Now, however, Egyptian priests began to identify these aliens as Greeks: Danaus and Cadmus, primeval colonizers of Greece and ancestors of Alexander, they said, had been forced out of Egypt, together with the Jews, as polluted aliens.¹²⁴

If Egyptian historians based these stories on at least some truth, and because the time frame of the alleged ‘expulsion’ of ‘pestilential foreigners’ could conceivably be collocated with the events described in Exodus, there are even more reasons why the Oedipus legend contains

122. Cole, ‘Life and Death’, p. 44.

123. Csapo, ‘Riding the Phallus for Dionysus’, p. 273, identifies, among others, the following sources and authors who equate Osiris with Dionysos: Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 1.11, 13, 15, 17, 25, 27; 4.1; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 13 (*Mor.* 356b); Herodian, *Prosod. cathol.* 4; Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.29.5; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 22.9.4; Porphyry, as quoted in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 3.11.50; Nonnos, *Dion.* 4.269-270; Cosmas of Jerusalem, *Comment. in Gregor. Nazianz. Carmin.* 44.260.

124. E.J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 23.

many motifs in common with the story of Moses. Certainly the shared motifs are pervasive enough to state that Oedipus, probably the most famous child of Boeotian Thebes, can be described as an *anti*-Moses. For example, Moses is set adrift in the river by his *proletarian* mother in order to save him; Oedipus is abandoned by his *royal* mother on Mt. Cithaeron in order to kill him. Moses is chosen by God and destined to save his people; Oedipus is ‘joined to fate’ and ‘married to evil’ (Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 525)¹²⁵ in Thebes, eventually choosing to ‘die’ at Colonus—an act which will forever hold Athens ‘safe from the men of Thebes’ (*Oed. col.* 1533).¹²⁶ Moses and his people *escape* from Egypt; Oedipus is *exiled* by his people from Thebes. Moses journeys for forty years in the desert to find the ‘promised land’ where his people can live fruitfully and multiply; Oedipus journeys for about twenty years with his daughter to find the prophesied place where he will lie in wait to drink the blood of Thebes:

They’ll break apart with spears this harmony— / All for a trivial word. / And then my sleeping and long-hidden corpse, / Cold in the earth, will drink hot blood of theirs, / If Zeus endures, if his son’s word is true (Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 619-627).¹²⁷

Moses’ burial place is hidden and kept a secret; Oedipus’s is also hidden and kept secret:

Keep it secret always, and when you come / To the end of life, then you must hand it on / To your most cherished son, and he in turn / Must teach it to his heir, and so forever. / That way you shall forever hold this city / Safe from the men of Thebes, the dragon’s sons (Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 1520-1537).¹²⁸

Oedipus is a descendant of Canaanites, while Moses’ line results in the Israelites, the ultimate adversaries of the Canaanites. Finally, in the background of both stories is the image of a Sphinx.¹²⁹

Louis Feldman recounts that Josephus, who was undoubtedly familiar with Sophocles,¹³⁰ also drew a comparison between Oedipus and Moses:

125. Translation from Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald, *The Oedipus Cycle: An English Version* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 109.

126. Fitts and Fitzgerald (trans.), *Oedipus Cycle*, p. 158.

127. Fitts and Fitzgerald (trans.), *Oedipus Cycle*, p. 115.

128. Fitts and Fitzgerald (trans.), *Oedipus Cycle*, p. 158.

129. It hardly matters that the Boeotian Theban Sphinx and the Sphinx at Giza are of different gender (see the discussion in Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Sphinx: History of a Monument* [trans. David Lorton; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002], pp. 10-12).

130. See Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley:

In particular, we may note that to the biblical account of Moses' death (Deut. 34.1-6) Josephus has added lamenting people, a walk to the mountain, companions on Moses' final walk, and 'disappearance' (*Ant.* 4.323-326), details found in no other postbiblical source, though those sources recount Moses' last hours in far greater detail than does the Bible. And yet, it is precisely these details that are found in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*.¹³¹

An important question that arises from Josephus's linkage is the idea of typology. We have noted the anti-Moses variations in the Oedipus and Moses stories. Does this provide some basis for seeing Oedipus as a *type* of Antichrist, considering that Christians understood Moses to be a *type* of Christ?

Oedipus and Antichrist: The Life of Judas

Kadmos scattered the great snake's teeth and they fell into the furrows of rich fields. Then through the surface of her soil Earth erupted the likeness of armed men (Euripides, *Phoen.* 767-772).¹³²

Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon (Rev. 13.11).

The association of Oedipus and Moses in Josephus is from an authority of the first rank and is precedent setting. Certainly Oedipus can be seen as an anti-Moses; whether that allows us to see Oedipus as a *figura* of Antichrist is another matter. However, a connection between Oedipus and an unmistakable *type* of Antichrist, Judas, does exist. This link might have its roots in Origen, Clement of Alexandria's pupil, who 'compares the Psalmist's prediction of the crime of Judas with the prophecy of the oracle of Laius'.¹³³ As Paul Baum points out, Origen goes further in a later passage wherein Judas and incest are mentioned, and states: 'If it were necessary to give an example of the Devil's influence in the deeds of men I could refer to the man in I. Corinthians who had his father's wife'.¹³⁴

University of California Press, 1998), pp. 173-75.

131. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 174.

132. Translation from Peter Burian and Brian Swann, *Euripides: The Phoenician Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 46.

133. P.F. Baum, 'The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot', *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 31 (1916), pp. 481-632 (615).

134. Baum, 'Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot', p. 616. According to Baum,

These are very slight hints of an early association between Judas and Oedipus to which Baum rightly points because of a later medieval tradition that undeniably merges the story of Oedipus with the life of Judas.¹³⁵ As Baum writes:

The legendary Life of Judas the Betrayer, based, it is usually said, on the Greek myth of Oedipus, is found in almost every language and country of mediaeval Europe. It was written down in Latin as early as the twelfth century. By the end of the thirteenth century it was turned into the vernacular in lands as far apart as Wales, Catalonia, and Bohemia.¹³⁶

Indeed, Lowell Edmunds counts forty-two twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin texts that connect Oedipus to Judas.¹³⁷

Baum also mentions the tribe of Dan—from which the Antichrist tradition usually says the Antichrist will come—in the discussion of how Judas is understood to be an Antichrist. Thus Baum explains that

Various legends have connected Judas with the tribe of Dan, obviously on account of the evil reputation of Dan and the Danaites—‘Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path’ (Gen. 49.16-17)—and we need not ascribe the reference in the legend to any particular source.¹³⁸

Kim Paffenroth summarizes this lore as it appears in Jacobus de Voragine’s *The Golden Legend*¹³⁹ (c. 1270 CE), writing, ‘Judas’s parents are pious Jews, Reuben (or Simon) of the tribe of Dan (or Issachar) and Cyborea’.¹⁴⁰ Because of the admixture of Oedipal images with Judas, it

Origen identifies the man in 1 Corinthians with Judas.

135. See E.K. Rand, ‘Medieval Lives of Judas Iscariot’, in *Anniversary Papers by Colleagues and Pupils of George Lyman Kittredge* (Boston: Ginn, 1913), pp. 305-16; Lowell Edmunds, *Oedipus: The Ancient Legend and its Later Analogues* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Baum, ‘Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot’; Thomas Hahn, ‘The Medieval Oedipus’, *Comparative Literature* 32.3 (1980), pp. 225-37; Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple* (London: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001).

136. Baum, ‘Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot’, p. 481.

137. Edmunds, *Oedipus*, p. 61.

138. Baum, ‘Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot’, p. 628.

139. Some estimation of the influence of this work can be seen in the sheer number of manuscripts—over one thousand—that have survived. Of works printed before the year 1500, more copies survive than do printed editions of the Bible (Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters [eds.], *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2nd edn, 2001], p. 81).

140. Paffenroth, *Judas*, p. 71.

is noteworthy that the *Danaoi* is a Homeric term for Greeks, probably derived from the children of Danaus, who, as Diodorus notes in the same passage about the colonization of Judaea, had come out of Egypt and colonized Greece:

They say also that those who set forth with Danaus, likewise from Egypt, settled what is practically the oldest city of Greece, Argos, and that the nation of the Colchi in Pontus and that of the Jews, which lies between Arabia and Syria, were founded as colonies by certain emigrants from their country (Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 1.28.1-3).

Thus Oedipus and Judas, whose lives became intermingled in later accounts, are both from ‘a’ tribe of Dan.

At this point there are strong reasons to consider Oedipus a *type* of Antichrist. However, it is the Oedipus/Nero connection discussed below that actually allows us a basis to exchange one-to-one Oedipus for Antichrist, and finally makes it necessary to consider whether tragedy should factor into the Antichrist tradition.

Oedipus and Antichrist: Nero, a New Oedipus?

Here you shall be—awhile—a visitor; / but you shall be with me—and without end—Rome’s citizen, the Rome in which Christ is Roman (Dante, *Purg.* 32.100-102).¹⁴¹

Just before the end Nero took a public oath that if he managed to keep his throne he would celebrate the victory with a festival...and when the last day came would dance the role of Turnus in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (Suetonius, *Nero* 6.54).¹⁴²

The identification of Nero with Antichrist is perhaps most fully developed by Commodian in the *Carmen de duobus populis* and in three of his *Instructiones*, including the *De Antechristi tempore*—an important treatment of the *Nero redivivus* legend.¹⁴³ Indeed, Nero has traditionally

141. Translation from Allen Mandelbaum, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Purgatorio* (New York: Bantam, 1984), p. 301.

142. Translation from Robert Graves, *Suetonius: The Twelve Caesars* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 245. The reference is to the tragic hero and enemy of Rome, Turnus, rather than the epic hero Aeneas.

143. Richard Kenneth Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), p. 146.

been more closely associated with the Antichrist, or more commonly as a *precursor* of Antichrist, than any other figure. An example of this identification resulted in the comparison of the ‘number’ of Nero’s name with the ‘number of the beast’. Because Hebrew and Greek letters have numerical equivalents, the ‘most probable’ of the numerous explanations for the number of the Antichrist (666) is, in Hebrew letters, *Neron Caesar*.¹⁴⁴ This leads to the observation that if the pre-eminent tragic hero (Oedipus) is seen as a type of Antichrist, it may also be that the pre-eminent Antichrist (Nero) himself plays the role of the tragic hero.

Dio Cassius says that Nero’s ‘favorite roles’ were those of ‘Oedipus, Thyestes, Heracles, Alcmeon and Orestes’ (63.9.4), and, although Dio does not use the term ‘anti-Caesar’, he contends that by becoming an ‘artist of Dionysos’ and taking up the role of tragic actor, Nero has ‘defeated’ the Caesars and has become the polar opposite of the *true* Roman emperor:

And all of this he did, though by winning the contests of the lyre-players and tragedians and heralds he would make certain his defeat in the contest of the Caesars...Yet why should one lament these acts of his alone, seeing that he also elevated himself on the high-soled buskins only to fall from the throne, and in putting on the mask threw off the dignity of his sovereignty to beg in the guise of a runaway slave, to be led about as a blind man, to be heavy with child, to be in labour, to be a madman, or to wander an outcast (Dio Cassius 63.9.3-4).¹⁴⁵

In *The Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius identifies by name four tragedies in which Nero performed: *Canace in Childbirth*, *Orestes the Matricide*, *Oedipus Blinded* and *Distraught Hercules* (Suetonius, *Nero* 6.21).¹⁴⁶ Later in the biography Suetonius recounts parts of some anti-Neronian verses posted on the city walls of Rome:

Alcmaeon, Orestes, and Nero are brothers, / Why? Because all of them murdered their mothers. / Count the numerical values / Of the letters in Nero’s name, / And in ‘murdered his own mother’: / You will find their sum is the same (Suetonius, *Nero* 6.39).

This is an important passage because close inspection of Nero’s life illustrates that it was often mirrored in the roles he played on stage. For

144. See the note to Rev. 14.18 in ‘New Testament’, in Metzger and Murphy (eds.), *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, pp. 1NT-449NT (438NT).

145. Translation from Earnest Cary (LCL, 176), pp. 151-53.

146. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 224.

example, as ‘brother’ to Orestes, Nero was said to have avoided Athens ‘because of the story about the Furies’ (Dio Cassius 63.14.3-4).¹⁴⁷ Thus it is very interesting when Suetonius specifically names four plays and then later mentions verses that closely identify Nero with a character in one of those four plays. Because well-known events in Nero’s life could make him a ‘brother’ to each of the title characters previously named, the fact that Suetonius highlights Nero’s kinship to certain tragic heroes requires us either to see Nero as a generic tragic hero or to contemplate how Nero’s life is connected to these title characters. As Richard Beacham notes, ‘the Roman public was always quick to note inconvenient passages that could be construed to suggest parallels between stage tyrants (and their fates) and those who might be sitting in the audience’.¹⁴⁸

Moreover, there were times during the course of his stage career when Nero wore masks of himself while playing the roles of Orestes and Oedipus.¹⁴⁹ In these instances the connection is even closer, allowing one scholar to make the claim that this ‘could not possibly leave anyone in doubt’ that ‘Orestes was Nero; Nero *was* Oedipus’,¹⁵⁰ a circumstance that adds another layer of meaning to Seneca’s *Oedipus*. It is also perhaps an instance of foreshadowing that prior to the reference to *Oedipus Blinded*, Suetonius tells of an incident when a ‘temporary blindness’ overcame Nero.¹⁵¹ Because of the metatheatrical conventions of the time, it is probably the intent of both Dio Cassius and Suetonius that the reader sees Nero as a tragic hero or contemplates how Nero’s life is mirrored on stage. Thus a *chiasmus* presents itself here: Nero can be seen as a type of ‘new’ Oedipus in his life, and, owing to this character’s significance as the tragic hero *par excellence*, this allows us to follow both tracks simultaneously—tragic hero in life/life mirrored on stage.

The echoes to Oedipal patterns and themes developed in the plays and legends about Oedipus in accounts of Nero’s life are uncanny. For example, the incestuous relationships of Oedipus and Judas have their mimetic

147. Translation from Cary (LCL, 176), p. 161.

148. Richard C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 133.

149. Putting on the mask and allowing one’s personality to be submerged in that of another is, as Csapo argues, ‘a form of possession and at least a partial expulsion of the familiar self’ (Csapo, ‘Riding the Phallus for Dionysus’, p. 255).

150. Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 96.

151. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 222. Dio Cassius 22.6; 63.9.4-10 also speaks of Nero being led about as if blind.

response in Nero's alleged incestuous relationship with his own mother, Agrippina. Dio Cassius says that Nero had a mistress who resembled Agrippina, and when he 'toyed with the girl', he would remark that 'he was wont to have intercourse with his mother' (61.11.4).¹⁵² Suetonius has his own say on the matter, noting that Nero's 'lecherous passion' for his mother was 'notorious', even if Nero had not actually acted out his desire (6.28).¹⁵³ Suetonius leaves room for doubt on this point, but does mention that there were those who thought Nero had committed incest every time they rode together in the same litter, a fact proved by the 'stains' on Nero's clothes when he emerged (6.28).¹⁵⁴

Nero visited Delphi, and, like Oedipus, misunderstood the Oracle's prophecy with disastrous consequences. The Oracle told Nero to 'beware the seventy-third year', referring to seventy-three year old Galba, the man destined to be his successor. However, Nero interpreted the Oracle's utterance to mean that he would live to a ripe old age (Suetonius, *Nero* 6.40).¹⁵⁵ In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, a voice is heard calling Oedipus from the grove where he enters to die saying, 'Oedipus it is time: you stay too long' (Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 1623).¹⁵⁶ Suetonius tells us that Nero had dreams in which the doors of the Mausoleum opened by themselves and a voice from inside called: 'Enter, Nero!' This is in the same passage from Suetonius (*Nero* 6.46) where it is mentioned that the last piece Nero sang in public was 'Oedipus in Exile'.¹⁵⁷

The actual spot where Oedipus is buried is a mystery, and the accounts are vague as to whether he actually died.¹⁵⁸ This is much like Nero who, after his death, was immediately cremated leaving uncertainty as to whether he had died. Dio Chrysostom (c. 40–112 CE) underscores this confusion when he says, 'most men verily do believe at this day that Nero is still living'.¹⁵⁹ Plutarch (*Sera* 32) envisioned Nero's soul being

152. Translation from Cary (LCL, 176), p. 61.

153. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 228.

154. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 228.

155. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 238.

156. Translation from E.F. Watling, *Sophocles: The Theban Plays: King Oedipus. Oedipus at Colonus. Antigone* (New York: Penguin, 1974), p. 120.

157. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 241.

158. Gordon M. Kirkwood, 'Oedipus Coloneus 1583–1584', *Phoenix* 41 (1987), pp. 184–88.

159. Richard Holland, *Nero: The Man behind the Myth* (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000), p. 239.

prepared for reincarnation and returning as a frog,¹⁶⁰ while Suetonius (*Nero* 6.57) reports that for some time after Nero's death his supporters 'continued to circulate his edicts, pretending he was still alive and would soon return to confound his enemies'.¹⁶¹ Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.8) says 'various rumours were current about his death; and so there were many who pretended and believed that he was still alive'.¹⁶² It is further alleged in the Sybilline Books (4.119-122, 137-139) that Nero escaped death, and in the Talmud (*b. Git.* 5.56a) Nero is presented as coming to Palestine and marrying a Jewish woman.¹⁶³ Walter notes that the belief in Nero's survival or imminent return was 'surprisingly persistent', and remarks that Jerome (c. 342–420 CE) knew of an opinion current in his time that Nero was alive.¹⁶⁴ In *The City of God* 20.19, Augustine (354–430 CE) also says:

Hence there are people who suggest that he was not killed and that he is still alive and in concealment in the vigour of the age he had reached at the time of his supposed death, until 'he will be revealed at the right time for him' and restored to his throne (*Civ.* 20.19).¹⁶⁵

One of the most interesting accounts occurs in the *Sacred History*, by the church historian Sulpitius Severus (c. 363–420 CE):

In the meanwhile Nero, now hateful even to himself from a consciousness of his crimes, disappears from among men, leaving it uncertain whether or not he had laid violent hands upon himself: certainly his body was never found. It was accordingly believed that, even if he did put an end to himself with a sword, his wound was cured, and his life preserved, according to that which was written regarding him—'And his mortal wound was healed'—to be sent forth again near the end of the world, in order that he may practice the mystery of iniquity (*Hist. sac.* 2.29).¹⁶⁶

160. See Holland, *Nero*, p. 239.

161. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 246.

162. Church and Brodribb (trans.), *Complete Works of Tacitus*, p. 480.

163. There he converted to Judaism, and the third-century doctor, Rabbi Meir, claimed descent from him. Gerard Walter, *Nero* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1957), p. 259. See also S.J. Bastomsky, 'The Emperor Nero in Talmudic Legend', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59.4 (1969), pp. 321-25.

164. Walter, *Nero*, p. 262.

165. Translation from Henry Bettenson, *St. Augustine: Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 933. See Walter, *Nero*, p. 262, and Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum* 823-838.

166. Translation from Edgar C.S. Gibson, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (ed. Philip Schaff; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark,

The persistent belief about Nero's 'non-death' and/or his imminent reincarnation continued into the Middle Ages, which perhaps provides one explanation why Nero is not seen in Dante's *Commedia*.

Finally, there is mention of 'Fate' adding to the disasters and scandals of Nero's reign with a 'plague' registered at the temple of Libitina that in one autumn took 30,000 lives (Suetonius, *Nero* 6.49).¹⁶⁷ Tacitus describes this plague:

A year of shame and of so many evil deeds heaven also marked by storms and pestilence. Campania was devastated by a hurricane, which destroyed everywhere country-houses, plantations and crops, and carried its fury to the neighborhood of Rome, where a terrible plague was sweeping away all classes of human beings without any such derangement of the atmosphere as to be visible apparent (Tacitus, *Ann.* 16.13).

As I have shown, many of the events of Nero's life have a parallel with the literary *topos* of the tragic hero, especially Oedipus. Richard Holland, without drawing any connections between Oedipus and Nero in his biography of Nero, says the following:

Both the *Iliad* of Homer and the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles start with a situation in which a deity is inflicting punishment on ordinary people because of the unacceptable actions of a ruler. Thus it was not simply a question of Nero having to prove that he did not deliberately start the fire himself or order his servants to do so. He also had to prove that the gods who normally protected Rome were not angry with him.¹⁶⁸

Nero played the part of the tragic actor, often that of Oedipus, both on stage and in life. The admixture of his life story with its own echoes of past tragic heroes, which was then performed on the stage by Nero himself—a circumstance that did not escape Dio Cassius—ultimately presents Nero's life itself as a tragic actor playing a role:

This fellow might most properly be termed Thyestes, Oedipus, Alcmeon, or Orestes; for these are the characters that he represents on the stage and it is these titles that he has assumed in place of the others (Dio Cassius 63.11.6).¹⁶⁹

Certainly Nero held dear his acting ability and was also an adept practitioner of the performance of power. This leaves us to speculate

1998), XI, p. 111.

167. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 236.

168. Holland, *Nero*, p. 165.

169. Translation from Cary (LCL, 176), p. 175.

what was really meant by Nero's famous utterance, '*Qualis artifex pereo*' ('What an artist dies with me' [Suetonius, *Nero* 6.49]).¹⁷⁰ Did it refer to his own abilities on the stage or his performance as emperor? Could it have even alluded to a change in his character after putting on the masks of Dionysos?¹⁷¹ A change at some point in Nero's career was suggested by many authors. Eusebius alludes to this change in his unmatched style: 'When Nero's power was now firmly established he gave himself up to unholy practices and took up arms against the God of the universe' (*Hist. eccl.* 2.25).¹⁷² And it has been pointed out that in Nero's early years he was only a *potential* 'artifex' (*artificer*):

as far as the ancient writers are concerned, Nero appears in the opening years of his reign as the *potential* artist, whether in singing or charioteering, privately studying and training himself with possible future performances in view, but not as the *actual* artist, appearing in person on the boards or in the circus.¹⁷³

On the other hand, was it possible that '*Qualis artifex pereo*' was an allusion to certain events and themes from Nero's own life that seemed to be mirrored repeatedly on the tragic stage in the portrayal of various tragic heroes such as Oedipus? Viewed this way, the utterance raises the question: was it simply a case of Nero self-consciously performing his own life, or, like Oedipus—and as the Roman historian Dio Cassius suggests—did Nero ultimately see himself playing a role assigned to him by fate?

Such was the drama that Fate now prepared for him, so that he should no longer play the roles of other matricides and beggars, but only his own at last, and he now repented of his past deeds of outrage, as if he could undo any of them. Such was the tragic part that Nero now played, and this verse constantly ran through his mind: 'Both spouse and father bid me cruelly die' (Dio Cassius 63.28.5).¹⁷⁴

170. See Walter, *Nero*, p. 249 n. 68, where Walter mentions the various translations of this phrase.

171. In Nero's first public appearance in a theatre he performed his own composition *Attis or the Bacchantes* (Walter, *Nero*, p. 105).

172. Translation from G.A. Williamson, *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 62.

173. J.M.C. Toynbee, 'Nero *Artifex*: The *Apocolocyntosis* Reconsidered', *Classical Quarterly* (1942), pp. 83-93 (87).

174. Translation from Cary (LCL, 176), p. 189. The lines Nero speaks are from an unknown tragedy. The speaker is Oedipus. See p. 189 n. 1.

If so then it is irony taken to the highest degree when Suetonius tells us that Nero, now in his last public appearance and playing the part of *Oedipus in Exile*, ended with the same line that Dio claims ran through Nero's mind the day he died: 'Wife, mother, father, do my death compel!' (Suetonius, *Nero* 6.46).¹⁷⁵

Finally, it is fascinating that while Christians understood Nero as an Antichrist, classically educated commentators make Nero an Oedipus. If Nero is an Oedipus and Nero is an Antichrist, logic dictates that we might also say Oedipus is an Antichrist. In this way the genre of tragedy has led us from Oedipus to Antichrist.

Tragoidia: Song of the Goat

They give him the names of Dionysus, Zagreus, Nyctelius, and Isodactes; they construct destructions and disappearances, followed by returns to life and regenerations—riddles and fabulous tales quite in keeping with the aforesaid transformations. To this god they also sing the dithyrambic strains laden with emotion and with a transformation that includes a certain wandering and dispersion (Plutarch, *E Delph.* 9.389).¹⁷⁶

Nobody sets foot in here, only those who've quite abandoned hopes of living useful lives. Bacchises? Not Bacchises, they're Bacchantes of the wildest kind (Plautus, *Bacch.* 3.1.369-372)¹⁷⁷

In his studies of the ancient Greek adventure-romance novels, M.M. Bakhtin detected a pattern. In these stories not only is the hero kept away from his lover by the element of chance, Bakhtin realized that 'all initiative and power belongs to chance'.¹⁷⁸

175. Graves (trans.), *Suetonius*, p. 241.

176. Translation from Babbitt (LCL, 306), p. 223.

177. John Barsby (trans.), *Plautus: Bacchides* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1986), p. 49. This very interesting play was written approximately 220 years before Christ. In it there is: (1) a metaphorical fall of Troy with Chrysalus as Odysseus; (2) the deceiver, Chrysalus, who uses night, bacchantes, wine and gold to tempt father and son to wickedness; (3) a suggestion that Chrysalus will be crucified, but really it is father and son who are corrupted; (4) a pun on the name Chrysalus, which links him to a cross; (5) a suggestion that Chrysalus has mental *multipotens*, a word Plautus uses elsewhere only in reference to gods. See Barsby, *Plautus: Bacchides*, p. 153.

178. M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 100.

While it is true that his life may be completely passive—‘Fate’ runs the game—he nevertheless *endures* the game fate plays. And he not only endures—he *keeps on being the same person* and emerges from this game, from all these turns of fate and chance, with his *identity* absolutely unchanged.¹⁷⁹

One way to understand the role of fortune or chance in this game is to understand that the inclusion of this element actually serves to enhance the story with twists and turns. In fact, ‘Chance’ seems to be almost as much of a character as the two lovers in its effort to keep the lovers from reuniting too soon.

What is surprising is that a similar pattern can be seen on an even grander scale, if we consider the possibility that classical epic and tragedy and the Old and New Testaments, in a sense, form a single whole. This tripartite structure—epic/tragedy/biblical narrative forming a genre of its own—makes sense in a number of ways, especially if Hebrew and Greek did have early and formative contact in the pre-Homeric past.¹⁸⁰

In this schema, Homeric epics begin with fallen humanity resisting change and movement. Later heroes, like Aeneas in Vergil’s *Aeneid* and the ‘Pilgrim’ in Dante’s *Commedia*, then show the story of the growth and movement of the individual through time. Certainly it has been remarked that human *transformation* is a component of the epic tradition not only because of the intertextual nature of epic but also because of the implied supersession of individuals and epochs. Masaki Mori notes this transformation:

The Homeric heroes do not have much sense of communal responsibility, whereas self-sacrificial devotion to the community is what characterizes Aeneas most. In the case of the two religious epics, Dante and Adam do not have the sense of communal duty that Aeneas does. Unknowingly, however, they bear a far heavier burden, because each of them symbolically stands for all humankind.¹⁸¹

179. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 105.

180. Virgil might have his own unique pathways into Hebrew thought as the oldest continuing Jewish community in Europe was established in Rome in 161 BCE. Another possible point of contact stems from a conflagration in 83 BCE in which the Romans lost the Sybilline books. In an effort to reconstruct these lost books they turned to other oracular/prophetic texts, including the Old Testament. My thanks to Professor James Clauss for noting this.

181. Masaki Mori, *Epic Grandeur: Toward a Comparative Poetics of the Epic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 72.

The biblical narrative, on the other hand, positions the entire elect community in relation to God. With the addition of the New Testament, it has been said that the Bible is the epic story of the movement of God to humanity. Thus if the human is the hero of epic, surely Meir Sternberg is correct in saying that ‘God is the Bible’s hero’.¹⁸²

This is where Greek tragedy fits in. Tragedy, as outlined by Aristotle, is a genre limited to one time and place. Theoretically, then, Greek tragedy itself resists movement. The root of Satan, *śtn*, is ‘to oppose or obstruct’.¹⁸³ To view human history as a part of a grand design, and to view genres of epic, tragedy and Scripture as taking part in this grand design at its most fundamental level, is to see any opposition or obstruction to the convergence of the individual with God at the end of time as being an attempt to oppose or obstruct time itself. This idea is behind Jesus calling Peter a *Satana*, because, as Neil Forsyth explains, ‘Peter plays a Satan, or *diabolos*, to Christ’s progress on the way toward his condemnation, death, and resurrection’.¹⁸⁴

One of the central traits of the Sophoclean hero is that he parries with time. As Bernard Knox notes:

Time and its imperative of change are in fact what the Sophoclean hero defies; here is his real adversary, all-powerful Time, the master of us all, which, as Oedipus tells Theseus, dissolves all human things, man’s body, his intellect, the work of his hands, the creations of his brain.¹⁸⁵

Auerbach, comparing an Old Testament passage to Homer observes, ‘by this example of the contrary, we see the significance of the descriptive adjectives and digressions of the Homeric poems’.¹⁸⁶ Taking this idea a step further, understanding Oedipus’s fight with Time in relation to Christian thought makes Oedipus a *Satana* in much the same way as Peter. In this respect, it is interesting that Dionysos, the anti-structural god,¹⁸⁷ the god whom the maenads called ‘Euai’ (Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 4.3.2) and who Plutarch thought was none other than the Hebrew

182. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 323.

183. Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, p. 230.

184. Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, p. 288. See also Mk 8.27–9.1 and Mt. 16.23.

185. Bernard Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 27.

186. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 11.

187. ‘Dionysus’, in van der Toorn, Becking and van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, p. 253.

‘YHWH’, would also be the God of the drama, the genre wherein reality is mimicked, and whose most paradigmatic character, Oedipus,¹⁸⁸ is on the most fundamental level resisting movement through time and space. The chronotope of the tragic genre, that is, the injunction by Aristotle that a tragedy should be limited in place and time, provides a genre where Dionysos, the ‘god of joy, god of terror’,¹⁸⁹ and his heir, the tragic hero, can be theoretically contained.

In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, ‘pity’ is defined as being ‘concerned with misfortunes that are undeserved’.¹⁹⁰ It could be argued that the concept of pity as outlined by Aristotle is given its purest form and meaning at the crucifixion, with catharsis or purification in Aristotelian terms becoming the redemption of humankind in Christian terms. In this regard, it is significant that the small town of Nazareth, where Christ grew up, was only four miles from the 4000-seat Roman theatre in the magnificent city of Sepphoris, ‘the jewel of the Galilee’. Because of the ubiquity of Greek and Roman tragedy in the days of Christ, he and his followers would have known the symbolism of his death in relation to misfortunes that are undeserved. In fact, because of the central role of theatre in the Greco-Roman world, the devotees of the Dionysian genre of tragedy might have been those most impacted by the story of Christ and his crucifixion.

Kenneth Telford presents a fascinating analysis of the Aristotelian conception of pity—especially as pertaining to the preordination of Christ’s suffering due to humankind’s original sin:

For an incident to be undeserved it must depend for its meaning on preceding incidents, for a misfortune cannot appear as undeserved unless the previous actions of the character make it so. Pity, therefore, is the tragic meaning which the present incidents have in relation to the past.¹⁹¹

In the purest form as conceived by Aristotle, this notion trained the viewer to pity individuals who experienced misfortunes that were undeserved. However, from Christianity’s point of view, there was only one, Christ, who was completely without sin and thus whose misfortunes were wholly undeserved. As the tragic drama unfolds in the Gospels, Pilate underscores this essential trait for the ideal tragic hero: ‘Then said

188. Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the respect for Aristotle by Renaissance thinkers insured this.

189. Berge and Clay (trans.), *Sophocles: Oedipus*, p. 32. (*Oed.* 210).

190. Kenneth A. Telford, *Aristotle’s Poetics: Translation and Analysis* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), p. 23.

191. Telford, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, p. 104.

Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man' (Lk. 23.14). However, it might be argued that, as a form of conversion, the tragic genre had been awaiting the ultimate tragic hero, Christ, and that Greek tragedy is the genre that actually emphasizes Christ's death. In fact, if writing with an eye toward the other has been a traditional practice of Jewish and Greek culture eyeing each other back and forth, encoded within Greek tragedy was a powerful foreshadowing that could be understood as serendipitous preparation for the audience to fully grasp the significance of the crucifixion.

Ultimately, what the archeological record indicates and what modern scholarship is making clear is that we cannot consider Old Testament, New Testament, Greek and Roman tragedy and ancient epic as if they each developed in a cultural vacuum. Thus the constituent parts of this tripartite structure are as follows. As outlined in this article, the story of human movement toward God is contained within the epic genre; the story of the movement of God toward the human is contained in the Old and New Testament; and Satan and Antichrist reside in classical tragedy, the necessary element that tries to keep God and humankind from reuniting. It could be that the inclusion of this diametrically opposed element ultimately makes any eventual reunion more significant. Aristotle states that 'the greatest things by which tragedy *guides the soul* [my emphasis] are parts of the story, reversals and recognitions'.¹⁹² The phrase 'guides the soul', having been translated from the Greek word *psychagōgei*, 'referred originally to the leading of souls into or out of Hades and therefore to a kind of sorcery and black magic'.¹⁹³ It may be that the larger function of the tragic genre was to guide the soul from death to life.

Conclusion

The sons of Ogyges¹⁹⁴ call me Bacchus, / Egyptians think me Osiris,
Mysians name me Phanaces, / Indians regard me as Dionysus,

192. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1450a34-35. Translation from Seth Benardete and Michael Davis (trans.), *Aristotle, On Poetics* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), p. 22.

193. Benardete, *Aristotle, On Poetics*, p. 22 note.

194. See H.G.E. White (ed.), *Ausonius* (2 vols.; LCL, 96 and 115; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), II, pp. 186-87. Ogyges refers to the sons of Ogyges, the mythical founder of Egyptian Thebes. In Euripides, *Phoen.* 1.1113, Hippomedon takes his place at the Ogygian gate of Boeotian Thebes.

Roman rites make me Liber, / The Arab race thinks me Adoneus,
Lucaniacus the Universal God.¹⁹⁵

Oedipus has a number of significant traits that would rightly allow him to be identified as a type of Antichrist. He is descended from Canaanites, and, as one of the *Danoi*, he is from ‘a’ tribe of Dan. Because of his resistance to Time, he can be fittingly understood as a *Satana*. Moreover, Oedipus is a synoptic figure in Judeo-Christian thought, since he can be seen as an Anti-Moses. He also became a model for Judas’s early life. Further, the most significant Antichrist of all, Nero, could be understood as a new Oedipus.

Another common association with Oedipus that may also provide a link to Satan and the Antichrist is Oedipus’s tragic flaw. The word *hamartia* appears in the Greek New Testament translated as ‘sin’. Hubris or excessive pride was understood in the Renaissance to be Oedipus’s tragic flaw, and pride was also understood to be the cause of Lucifer’s fall. Because it is considered the chief antichristian state, this in itself could indicate in the syncretic scheme we are following that Oedipus was a disciple of Satan, whether Oedipus knew it or not. Thus Thomas Aquinas said the Devil is ‘*king over all the sons of pride*, that is, over those who are subject to pride, all of whom follow his leadership’.¹⁹⁶ John Cassian (c. 360–465 CE), explains that the evil of pride is so great that neither angel nor virtue opposes it, but that God himself is its adversary (*Inst.* 12.7).¹⁹⁷ As Rodney J. Payton has pointed out, for Christians of the medieval period, pride gave ‘rise to envy which caused Satan to offer violence to God in the primordial act of sin, just as it was pride, the desire to be the “equal of the Gods” (Genesis 3:5), that led to the fall of man’.¹⁹⁸ Dante scholar John Ciardi echoes this view, saying that pride is ‘the primal sin and the father of all other sins, for the proud man seeks to

195. Ausonius, epigram 48. This epigram is discussed in Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 52.

196. Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary concerning Providence* (trans. Anthony Damico; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), p. 468.

197. Gibson (trans.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, XI, p. 281.

198. Rodney J. Payton, *A Modern Reader’s Guide to Dante’s Inferno* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 108.

set himself up as God'.¹⁹⁹

Oedipus can also be seen as a son of Dionysos, and, according to Christian tradition, the Antichrist is supposed to be a son of Satan. For those who would approach the classical and biblical works with a synoptic bent and with recognition that contact may have occurred during the most formative period for Greeks and Hebrews, this is significant because there are good reasons to understand Dionysos as Satan by another name, as we have seen. Truly Dionysos was the most powerful Greek god,²⁰⁰ and, through the proliferation of dramatic forms of mimesis through the centuries, undoubtedly he continues to be the most influential. He was also the most ubiquitous of the Greek gods. As Kerényi points out, 'no other god of the Greeks is as widely present in the monuments and nature of Greece and Italy, in the "sensuous" tradition of antiquity, as Dionysos. We may almost say that the Dionysian element is omnipresent.'²⁰¹ Indeed in the *Bacchae* the Dionysian cult is characterized as 'a sort of world religion'.²⁰² Moreover, Bacchic *possession* or the merging of male and female votaries with the god, which has been said to be 'without parallel in the rest of Greek religion',²⁰³ does offer parallels to Satanic possession.

199. Translation from John Ciardi, *Dante: The Purgatorio* (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 119.

200. In Nonnos, *Dion.* 40.37-60, Dionysos demonstrates his power in another way. Here Deriades remonstrates about the impossibility of defeating Dionysos because he changes from panther to lion to serpent to bear to flame to boar to bull to tree to water.

201. Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. xxiv.

202. Dodds, 'Commentary', p. xx.

203. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 162. However, Easterling notes Pan and Cybele as gods also associated with ecstatic possession (Easterling, 'A Show for Dionysus', p. 45 n. 32). I do not think that the uniqueness of possession in the cult of Dionysos is undermined by the examples Easterling provides, partly because Dionysos absorbed the cult of Pan (Evans, *God of Ecstasy*, p. 110) and the Dionysiac retinue was not complete without Pan (see Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 266). As for Cybele, she was originally a Phrygian goddess and became incorporated into the Greek pantheon by her identification with other goddesses, especially Rhea, 'particularly in connection with Rhea's relationship to Dionysus'. 'She was also called the mother of Sabazius, the mystic Dionysus, because she had brought him up as she had done in the case of Zeus' (Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], p. 144). Both cases tend to underscore the Dionysian role in possession rather than diluting it. It is therefore to be noted that possession seems to be part of a confluence of three gods centering around Dionysos.

Further, Dionysos impinges on the realm of many other gods,²⁰⁴ and even competes with Christianity in the sense that his is a ‘missionary religion’.²⁰⁵

There are other reasons to see a link between Dionysos and Satan. In the Middle Ages the Devil was commonly identified or associated with the goat,²⁰⁶ and the Greek word *tragoidia* means ‘goat song’, while Dionysos himself has an epitaph ‘of the black goat-skin’.²⁰⁷ Because of this and because evidence now suggests that Hebrew and Greek may have been in contact from the earliest times, a connection can be drawn between the satyrs of Dionysos and the Seirim—*hairy ones* or *goats*²⁰⁸ and the dancing demons (Isa. 13.21)²⁰⁹ of the Old Testament, whose cults are pronounced in Leviticus to be apostasy (Lev. 17.4, 7). Dionysos’s ‘place’ of birth in Thebes can be seen as an entrance into hell²¹⁰ and as an anti-Athens.²¹¹ Dionysos also has a strong connection to prophecy, or eschatology, as exemplified by the legend that his tomb was at Delphi and because those possessed by Dionysos apparently spoke prophecies: ‘As the god enters full the body, / He makes the mad speak the future’ (Euripides, *Bacch.* 300-301).²¹² Nor is it of small note that Clement of Alexandria, an early and respected thinker in church history, identified the *Bacchic* serpent in the Garden. Moreover, in an extended and unprecedented passage parodying Euripides’ *Bacchae*, Clement offers the Christian an inverse path to follow to reach the Father rather

204. See also the case of Hestia, who lost her position at Olympia to Dionysos.

205. As quoted in Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p. 140.

206. The most common identification—along with the serpent and the dog (Russell, *Lucifer*, p. 67).

207. The Greek word is *melanaigis*. See Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 169.

208. Michael J. Gruenthaner, ‘The Demonology of the Old Testament’, *CBQ* 6 (1944), pp. 6-27 (22). Gruenthaner does not draw a parallel between the satyrs of Dionysos and the Seirim.

209. Bernd Janowski, ‘Satyrs’, in van der Toorn, Becking and van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, pp. 732-33 (733).

210. Edwin K. McFall, ‘Tragic Hero to Antichrist: *Macbeth*, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of the English Renaissance’ (unpublished PhD diss., University of Washington, 2005), pp. 165-203.

211. Froma Zeitlin, ‘Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama’, in John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 130-67.

212. Translation from Francis Blessington, *Euripides: The Bacchae* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1993), p. 12.

than Dionysos.²¹³ It is also noteworthy that perhaps the earliest Christian tragedy, *Christus Patiens*—not including the passion as recounted in the Gospels—is formed with a conglomeration of lines lifted from the *Bacchae*. Another potential collocation with the story of Eve and the serpent involves the ingestion of the pomegranate (a Dionysian fruit)²¹⁴ in the underworld by the ‘virgin’ Kore (allegorically a planting of seeds and a consummation of marriage with Hades). This begins the Dionysian cycle of ‘life, death, life’,²¹⁵ and provides an alternative to resurrection in the Christian sense.

The most important reason, however, might be that, from a Judeo-Christian viewpoint, the similarities in Dionysiac rites, chants, history, symbolism and life to YHWH and Christ can be interpreted as *parodic* in nature. It is extraordinary that an ancient specialist like Plutarch could misconstrue Dionysos as YHWH, and that the brilliant mind of the nineteenth-century philosopher and atheist Nietzsche saw in Dionysos a diametric opposition to Christ, while a modern apologist imagines that ‘the Christian concept of Christ was a development and transformation of the figure of the suffering Son of God as it had been developed in the Dionysian tradition’.²¹⁶

This is helpful because Satan and Antichrist are understood to parody Christ in a kind of opposing mirror image, from which we get the idea of the Augustinian ‘two cities’, and ultimately, a thoroughly developed theory of Antichrist:

As a pseudo-Christ, Antichrist’s power rests on the deception of his false prophets, symbolized by the two-horned beast that rises from the earth (Apoc. 13:11), and on his own pretense to be Christ (Matt. 24:5). Such interpretations emphasize Antichrist’s parodic imitation of Christ’s life. As medieval commentators recognized apparent similarities between the events

213. Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 12.92. Translation from Butterworth (LCL, 92), pp. 255-57.

214. See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin Books, 1960), I, pp. 103, 110, 111. Clement claims that the women who celebrate the Thesmophoria ‘are careful not to eat any pomegranate seeds which fall to the ground, being of the opinion that pomegranates spring from the drops of Dionysus’ blood’ (*Protr.* 2.16); translation from Butterworth (LCL, 92), pp. 39, 41.

215. An inscription on bone tablets found in Olbia in a fifth-century BCE grave reads, ‘life, death, life, truth...Dio[nysoi], Orphikoi’ (see Susan Guettel Cole, ‘Voices from beyond the Grave: Dionysus and the Dead’, in Carpenter and Faraone (eds.), *Masks of Dionysus*, pp. 276-95 (277)).

216. Evans, *God of Ecstasy*, p. 172.

of Christ's and Antichrist's lives, they added details to the Antichrist legend not originally found in the apocalyptic sources. Explanations of Antichrist's birth, for example, reflect a conscious effort to portray Antichrist as a parodic antitype of Christ. Antichrist's mother, according to legend, is possessed by the devil, so that her child will be born thoroughly evil, in contrast to Christ, whose mother was possessed by the Holy Spirit. This particular feature of the tradition is based on the comparison of Antichrist with Christ, not upon a specific scriptural text.²¹⁷

Who better to parody than the *chthonic* god of mimesis, Dionysos and his on-stage heir, Oedipus?²¹⁸ Seeing a tripartite structure of epic/tragedy/Scripture makes sense of why this should be so and suggests that tragedy is the genre of Satan and Antichrist with Dionysos and Oedipus as name variations of the same.

217. Emerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*, pp. 74-75.

218. Otto believes it is the Zagreus permutations of the myths of Dionysos that give us the clearest indication of the chthonic nature of Dionysos (Otto, *Dionysus*, p. 191).