

Chapter 2

The Dionysiac Chronotope

Abstract Before approaching Hölderlin's poems, Chap. 2 returns to Greece by articulating three successive forms of space and time. Together they represent a secret experience of ritual that the ancient Greeks cultivated. Further, they harness a socio-political potential that is made public with the invention of tragedy. Although indirectly, the chapter implicitly hints at the relevance of this historical transition for Hölderlin whose songs are rooted in his translations of tragic plays. The sufferings of individual isolation and near-death experience that are redeemed by earthly and communal joy are projected onto the public stage. The chapter concludes by turning to one of the most striking, concentrated instances of this double-transformation in the opening verses of the tragedy that Hölderlin translates just before he composes his most meaningful poems: Euripides' *Bacchae*.

Keywords Mystery-cult · Tragedy · Unlimited chronotope · Near-death chronotope · Limited chronotope

Hölderlin's poetry is inseparable from Greek tragedy. To understand his poems we must therefore first understand the tragic play.

As we have noted in the *Introduction*, for Seaford tragedy is a combat zone of *chronotopes*, in particular a struggle between *aetiological* and *monetised chronotopes*. On the one hand, the *aetiological chronotope* represents an opening out of mystic initiation. To illuminate this process, we first consider its origin in ritual.

Being consecrated into mystery-cult re-enacted aetiological myth. The drumming heard during initiation into Dionysus' cult, for instance, re-enacted the lightning and thunder that accompanied Dionysus's birth.¹ The isolation of the initiand in the Eleusinian mysteries, to give another example, re-enacted the isolation of the goddess Demeter in search of her lost daughter Persephone over land and sea.²

Critical to the re-enactment of aetiological myth is its timetable of ordered events. The first phase of initiation included the resistance of the individual initiand to ritual.³ The initiand's increasing isolation culminates in crisis and death. Crisis and death are then transformed into joy. What makes the temporal structure of ritual

¹ Seaford, "Hölderlin and the Politics of the Dionysiac".

² Ibid.

³ I return to this and the following phases of mystic initiation more thoroughly below.

meaningful is that, similar to all religious and socio-political perspectives, it generates a mentality, that is, an everyday world-view. Because the *aetiological chronotope* reflects initiation, it “embodies the transition from one kind of space and time to another, seen from the perspective of the conclusion.”⁴

Given its presence in tragedy, the *aetiological chronotope* represents also an opening out of mystic initiation. In contrast to the rituals celebrated in Dionysus’ mystery-cult, the *City Dionysia*⁵ to which the tragic play belongs is a public holiday.⁶ Consider the traces of mystic initiation found in tragedy. One thinks of the isolation and *near-death experiences* to which Dionysus and his maenad-choruses temporarily succumb in *Bacchae*⁷ (V 547–549, 604–609) and the joyous torch-lit procession with which the *Eumenides* culminates⁸ (V 1021–1046). These traces that compose the *aetiological chronotope* gesture to a double-transfiguration. Alongside the timelessness of the mythic transition from death to rebirth to which they gesture is its historical shift from private to public socio-spheres in Greece during the second half of the sixth century B.C.E.

But what gives the *aetiological chronotope* its depth is its confrontation with another spatio-temporal form that also emerges in the early historic era. As Seaford points out, ancient Greece was the first civilization in history to be pervaded by money.⁹ Already in the sixth century B.C.E. Athenian external trade spikes when Peisistratos introduces coinage and precious metal from Thrace.¹⁰ By the end of the century, Athens is feverishly exploiting its silver resources at Laurium.¹¹ This leads to a new (and unlimited) experience of money. Already by Aeschylus’ lifetime coinage is being hoarded throughout the Mediterranean in places as remote as Egypt and Sicily.¹²

Because money demands a perception of its worth that is projected onto the present and future (as well as onto all places), the spatio-temporal form that emerges alongside money—what Seaford names the *monetised chronotope*—represents an

⁴ Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis* p. 5.

⁵ “Dionúsia tà astiká”. Thucydides 5.20, in *Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian War, Books V and VI*, ed. C. Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1992) p. 40.

⁶ This is clear in the political dimension of tragedy. See Anton Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie. Politische und “metatheatralische” Aspekte im Text* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag 1991) p. 20.

⁷ Euripides, *Bacchae*, in *Euripides fabulae*, ed. J. Diggle, vol. 3, *Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia, Avlidensis, Rhesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994) p. 314, 317.

⁸ Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, in *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoedias*, ed. D. Page (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1972) p. 285.

⁹ This is a critical argument, as money in historic Greece is different from that which we see in previous civilisations (such as those in the Near East). See Richard Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004) pp. 3–4, 10, 30, 95, 113, 136, 132, 178, 321.

¹⁰ Herodotus, 1.64, in *Herodotus. The Persian Wars, Books I–II*, trans. A. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2004) p. 74. See also *Ath. Pol.* p. 15.

¹¹ See Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind* p. 98, 110, 140.

¹² Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis* p. 57.

experience that has no clear spatial or temporal limit. The vanishing of times and places that accompanies this historical transition—one thinks of an impersonal exchange of stamped coins replacing a more personal exchange (where one can not only see the abstract picture on a coin, but also potentially touch, hear, smell and taste that which is being exchanged)—signifies a cataclysmic transformation through which a homogenised and abstract style of experience quickly comes to dominate human life.¹³

That this historical move into an impersonal world (relative to earlier, prehistoric times before the seventh century B.C.E.) brings with it a danger is made clear when we consider the socio-political egoism that it unleashes. As soon as money emerges, “transactors are opposed to each other in that in principle each tries to obtain maximum advantage for himself.”¹⁴ Because money is potentially unlimited—both in its potential for exchange and accumulation, individuals whose everyday life-worlds are ruled by its desire (whether consciously or not) an unlimited mass of money.

The historical unleashing of this unlimited desire leads to a terrifying figure who the Greeks name *túrannos*. One thinks of Peisistratos who is described as using money to obtain and “root his tyranny”¹⁵ in the sixth century B.C.E. That the *túrannos* is frightening and horrific new figure is shown in how this individual, like the essence of money, knows no limit, for instance, even in regard to the killing of his own kin. Having been lured to “acquire enough money to rule the whole of Greece”, the tyrant Polycrates murders one brother and banishes another before he falls from power in the late sixth century B.C.E.¹⁶

As we should expect, the Greeks struggle with the unlimited essence of money. Solon in the sixth century B.C.E. is disconcerted by the absence of a *térma* (limit) in wealth,¹⁷ which leads to enslavement from debt, among the many other (negative) things. Because a poet can be lured from one city to another by higher fees, language finds itself caught up in a nihilism of sorts. Pindar imagines the “voice silvered for a wage” (V 41–44).¹⁸ And while pre-monetised professionals such as poets are altered by precious metal, new professionals such as philosophers emerge and struggle with money’s unlimited and abstract essence.¹⁹ Aristotle, for instance,

¹³ It is significant that barter was much more rare than we tend to imagine. See David Graeber *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Brooklyn, N. Y.: Melville House 2011).

¹⁴ Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis* p. 57.

¹⁵ Herodotus, 1.64, in *Herodotus. The Persian Wars, Books I-II*, Godley p. 74.

¹⁶ Herodotus, 3.39, in *Herodotus. The Persian Wars, Books III-IV*, trans. A. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 52.

¹⁷ Solon, Fragment 13.71–3, in *Greek Elegiac Poetry, From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries B.C.*, ed. D. Gerber (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) pp. 132–133.

¹⁸ Pindar, *Eleventh Pythian Ode*, in *Pindar carmina cum fragmentis*, ed. H. Maehler and B. Snell, Pars I, *Epinicia* (Leipzig: Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft 1987), 100. See also the reference to Demokedes of Kroton in Herodotus, 3.131, in *Herodotus. The Persian Wars, Books III-IV*, Godley p. 162.

¹⁹ See Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind* pp. 175–291.

likens the self-generating spirit of currency to “offspring” who are similar to their parents.²⁰

But for reasons that shall eventually become clear, philosophy in Greece is not where we witness the preeminent confrontation with socio-political danger of money in Greece. Similar to philosophers, tragedians also struggle to understand the unlimited essence of money. Aeschylus, in the oldest extant play, *Persians*, describes the Athenian silver resources recently discovered at Laurium as “a spring of silver, a treasury in the earth” (V 238).²¹ In *Agamemnon* the unlimitedness of money is conceived of in terms of the sea (V 958–962).²²

But in contrast to its contemporary disciplines such as philosophy, Greek theatre does not simply reflect on the spatio-temporal form of money by way of metaphor. As the first part of this chapter shall show, tragedy constructs the *aetiological chronotope* to battle the *monetised chronotope*. The (unlimited) accumulation of precious metal and insatiable egoism that is characteristic of the frightening “*turann*”—a word that occurs over 170 times in tragic plays²³—culminates in a transgression of the sacred. We have noted Polycrates’ real kin-killing. Isolation from kin, fellow humans and the gods is expressed on stage as the abuse of ritual, that is, as the perversion of the ordered timetable to which ritual belongs. Oppositely, when threatened by the tyrant, traces of mystic initiation absorb his unlimited egoism “into its aetiological crisis”.²⁴ In the performance of the tragic play,

it is the aetiological chronotope that prevails. Tragedy derives from polis ritual, and continues to be performed alongside it. *Oresteia*, like the *Demeter Hymn* and *Bacchae*, concludes with the foundation of polis cult.²⁵

But given tragedy’s brief lifespan, the tension between the *aetiological* and *monetised chronotopes* must be taken serious. In Sophocles’ *Oedipus the Tyrant*, the chorus, despairing before the celebration of excessive profit (*kérdos*), *hubris* and impiety, cries out, “if such actions are honoured, why should I dance?”²⁶ (V 895–896) The tyrant in *Antigone*, Kreon, projects his desire for gain onto Teiresias (V 1062, 1056).²⁷ And in *Bacchae* the *túrannos* Pentheus (V 776) projects his desire for mon-

²⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1258b, in *Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003) p. 50.

²¹ Aeschylus, *Persai*, in *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoedias*, p. 10.

²² Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, in *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoedias*, p. 172; See also Richard Seaford, “*Tragic Money*”, JHS 118 (1998) pp. 123–131.

²³ This is in contrast to the word “hero” which scarcely occurs in Athenian tragedy. See Richard Seaford, *Ancient Greece and Global Warming: The Benefits of a Classical Education, or: Learn from the Past to Live in the Present* (Exeter: Credo Press 2011).

²⁴ Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis* p. 132.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 120.

²⁶ Sophocles, *Oidipous Tyrannos*, in *Sophoclis Fabulae*, ed. H. Lloyd-Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990) 155. For the critical, if neglected, theme of money in *Oedipus the Tyrant*, see verses p. 380, 388–389 and 873–874 also in *Sophoclis Fabulae*, Lloyd-Jones pp. 135–136, 154.

²⁷ Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *Sophoclis Fabulae*, Lloyd-Jones p. 226, 225; Seaford, “*Hölderlin and the Politics of the Dionysiac*”. That these lines do mean this is demonstrated by Seaford, “*Tragic Money*”, JHS pp. 131–137.

ey onto the blind prophet (V 255–257)—and even asks to spy on the maenads in the mountain wild in exchange for an enormous amount of gold (V 810–812).²⁸

As we shall see, the concept of tragedy as battling *aetiological* and *monetised chronotopes* is helpful for understanding the tragic play. But given that the object of this inquiry is finally a modern German poet and his relation to tragedy, we introduce two new *chronotopes* to clarify the nuanced socio-political potential through which Hölderlin's poetry ascends, namely the *Dionysiac* and *visualised chronotopes*. Similar to the *aetiological chronotope*, the *Dionysiac chronotope* represents an opening out of the three phases of ritual mentioned above. To demonstrate this unveiling, the rest of the chapter describes the *Dionysiac chronotope* as a composition of three successive (sub)spatio-temporal forms.

2.1 The Unlimited Chronotope

The *unlimited chronotope* describes an experience of space and time during the first phase of an individual's initiation into mystery-cult (which is characterised by the initiand's resistance to ritual). What makes this *chronotope* unlimited is that, during this moment, the limits of space and time that were previously familiar to the individual's identity (ego) begin to collapse, and thus become limitless.

Initiation “into the great mysteries”, as Plutarch notes, first involves,

wanderings and exhausting runnings around and certain anxious uncompleted journeys through darkness, and then before the consummation itself all manner of terrible things, shuddering and trembling and sweating.²⁹

Important to the *unlimited chronotope* is the estrangement of how the initiand senses his or her environment. Unable to look upon the dreadful apparitions, *phasmata* and *deimata*,³⁰ such as the “night-monster”, *Émpousa*³¹ (who appear during the first phase of mystic initiation), frightened initiands close their eyes in horror.³² By alienating the sense organ of sight through which the initiand *organises* experience, the first

²⁸ Euripides, *Bacchae*, in *Euripides fabulae*, Diggle, vol. 3, *Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia, Avidensis, Rhesus* p. 302, 324–325; Seaford, “Hölderlin and the Politics of the *Dionysiac*”.

²⁹ Plutarch, Fragment 178, in *Plutarch, Moralia*, trans. F. Sandbach, vol. 15, *Fragments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1969) pp. 316–319.

³⁰ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4.10, in *Orgien. Contra Celsum*, ed. H. Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1953) 190. Idomeneus, in *Die Fragmente der Griechischer Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby (Berlin and Leiden: Brill Press 1923–1958) p. 338.

³¹ Idomeneus, in *Die Fragmente der Griechischer Historiker*, Jacoby 338. See also verse 293 from Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, in *Aristophanes. Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth*, trans. J. Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2002) p. 64. For the relation between mystery-cult and Aristophanes' comedy, see Ismene Lada-Richards' *Initiating Dionysos: Ritual and Theatre in Aristophanes' The Frogs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999).

³² See the collapsed, self-blinding figure who is kneeling downward in the left of the flagellation scene at the Villa of the Mysteries, in *The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii: Ancient ritual, Modern*

phase of ritual estranges the individual's relation to space and time, which suddenly appears formless (that is, without limit).

On the one hand, the staged *disorganisation* of the *unlimited chronotope* is a re-enactment of aetiological myth. The “wanderings and exhausting runnings around and certain anxious uncompleted journeys through darkness” re-enacted, for instance, the isolation of Demeter in search of Persephone over land and sea in the Eleusinian mysteries. The loss of a familiar style of seeing, as when a mother loses sight of her daughter, is connected to the potential danger of the eyes that can lead to isolation and individual death. Just before Persephone is abducted by Hades and carried off into the darkness of the underworld, the youthful maiden is mesmerised by the beauty of the narcissus flower whose magical appearance for all “to see”³³ (V 10) evokes—through its association with Narcissus—unlimited (self-isolating) egoism and death.³⁴

In Dionysus' mystery-cult the potential danger of the eyes to disconnect a person from his or her environment was expressed in the fatal attraction of the youthful demigod to his reflection in the mirror.³⁵ The “wanderings and exhausting runnings around and certain anxious uncompleted journeys through darkness” (as well as “all manner of terrible things, shuddering and trembling and sweating”) that describe the initial phase of ritual refer also to the re-enactment of Dionysus' struggle with the Titans—something that occurs after he discovers the mirror that they deviously planted in the forest.³⁶ As we shall see in Part III, the mythic representation of the

muse, ed. E. Gazda et. al. (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and the University of Michigan Museum of Art 2000), p. 96 (Colour Plate II).

³³ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in *Homeri Opera*, ed. T. Allen, Tomus V, *hymnos cyclum fragmenta margiten batrachomyomachiam vitas continens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), p. 2.

³⁴ For the myth of Narcissus and its relation to mystic cult, see S. Eitrem, “*Narkissos I*”, in *Paulys Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 16 (Stuttgart 1933–1935), p. 1721, 1726.

³⁵ In his *Commentary on Plato's Phaedo* Olympiodorus writes in regard to the tragic myth of the god stumbling across a mirror in the forest that “Dionysus, when he put his image into the mirror, followed it and in this way was divided up in the universe.” *Olympiodori Philosophi in Platonis Phaedonem Commentaria*, ed. W. Norvin (Leipzig: B.G. 1913), p. 111, 4–19. After noting the curious power of a mirror to “seize a form”, Plotinus points out that “Dionysus [had seen his soul] in a mirror” and was therefore “cut off” from his “intellect [noûs]”. *Plotinus, Ennead*, 4.3.12, in *Plotinini, Opera*, ed. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, vol. 2, *Enneades IV-V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), pp. 27–29. Plotinus also gestures to the danger of the eyes as expressed in the myth of Narcissus that (among other such ridding stories) leads to blindness and individual death. *Plotinus, Ennead*, 1.6.8, in *Porphyry on Plotinus, Ennead I*, ed. A. Armsrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1995) pp. 254–258. See also Plotinus, *Ennead*, 5.8.2, in *Plotinini, Opera*, ed. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, vol. 2, *Enneades IV-V* 269–271. In mentioning the mystic mirror, *lúchnos*, among the sacred *symbola* that the initiates cultivated, Clement of Alexandria gestures to the mythic mirror that lures Dionysus into his tragic fate. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, 2.19, in *Clement of Alexandria*, ed. G. Butterworth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1982), pp. 44–45. See also Nonnus of Panopolis' *Dionysiaca*, 6.194–199, in *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, éd. et. trad. P. Chuvin, vol. 3, *Chants 6–8* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1992), p. 53.

³⁶ See Callimachus, Fragment 643, in *Callimachus*, ed. R. Pfeiffer, vol. 1, *Fragmente* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987) pp. 430–431. Pausanias notes that Onomacritus “composed *orgia*

potential danger of the eyes to lead to tragic individual death that shall be most relevant for our study of Hölderlin concerns Dionysus' mother Semele. Desiring to look upon Zeus' unmediated immortal essence, Semele is incinerated by a lightning flash.³⁷

On the other hand, the secret re-enactment of the estrangement of seeing (and space and time) in myth during the first phase of ritual is opened out onto the public stage. In *Bacchae* the tyrant Pentheus, after seeking to look upon Dionysus' female initiates (V 810–812), is blinded by “two suns”³⁸ (V 922)—a visual frenzy that has its source in the use of mystic mirrors re-enacting the one that Dionysus comes across in the forest.³⁹ Like Dionysus in myth, Pentheus is hunted down and succumbs to dismemberment and a gruesome individual death. *Oedipus the Tyrant* similarly stages the danger of the eyes to lead to isolation and tragic death. After declaring that he alone shall illuminate the dark past, *egò phanò*⁴⁰ (V 132), the tyrant succumbs to blindness and self-dismemberment. *Antigone* also culminates with the

[mystic initiations] for Dionysus and made the Titans the agents of his sufferings”. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 8.37.5, in Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Books VIII.22–X*, trans. W. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2010), p. 86. Diodorus claims that the things revealed in the Orphic hymns and introduced in mystic initiations and rituals agree with the myth of Dionysus' dismemberment at the hands of the Titans and of the restoration of his limbs to their natural state. Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica*, 3.62.8, in Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library of History*, trans. C. Oldfather, *Books II.35–IV.58*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1994), p. 288. When Plutarch refers to “certain destructions and disappearances” that “the cleverer people [...] construct” to stage mystic initiation, he points out that such performances correspond to “the story about the Titans”. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 389a and 364 f., respectively, in Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. F. Babbitt, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003), 222–23, 84–7. See also Nonnus of Panopolis' *Dionysiaca*, 6.200–211, in Nonnos de Panopolis, *Les Dionysiaques*, Chuvin, vol. 3, Chants 6–8 53; Herodotus, 2.42, 2.61, 2.132, 170, in Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Books I–II*, Godley 326, 346–48, 432–34, 84–86; Isocrates, *Busiris*, 11.39, in Isocrates, *Opera omnia*, ed. B. Mandilaras, vol. 2 (München und Leipzig: K. G. Sauer 2003) p. 281. Here we also come across the mystic re-enactment of Dionysus' fatal attraction to his image in a mirror. Apuleius notes that the toys, *crepundia*, with which the Titan's lured Dionysus away to his death at the hands of the Titans was central to mystic initiation. Apuleius, *Apology*, 55, in Apulei *Apologia, Siue pro se de Magia Liber*, ed. H. Butler and A. Owen (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung 1967). See also Seaford, *Dionysus* 74. That the *crepundia* used by the Titans to which Apuleius refers were associated with the sacred *symbola*, including the mystic mirror, *lúchnos*, used in mystic initiation is then shown by Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, 2.18, in Clement of Alexandria, Butterworth pp. 42–43. The mystic mirror is also significantly mentioned in the prescription for ritual on a fragment of papyrus from the third century B.C.E. See Seaford, *Dionysus* p. 58.

³⁷ As we shall see, the myth of Semele's death that accompanies Dionysus' birth is present both in Pindar and throughout *Bacchae*. For the mystic rehearsal and harnessing of Semele's death, which in mystery-cult was called “Semele's birth-pain for her son Dionysus”, see Inscription 44, in *Choirs Dionysos: Les associations dionysiaques, ou, La face cachée du dionysisme*, ed. A.-F. Jaccottet, vol. 2, *Documents* (Zürich: Akanthus 2003), pp. 90–91.

³⁸ Euripides, *Bacchae*, in Euripides *fabulae*, Diggle, vol. 3, *Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia, Avlidensis, Rhesus* p. 325, 330.

³⁹ Seaford, *Dionysus* p. 123.

⁴⁰ Sophocles, *Oidipous Tyrannos*, in Sophocles *Fabulae*, Lloyd-Jones p. 126.

tyrant Kreon, as if modelling a mystic initiand before *phasmata* and *deimata*, recoiling from light as the presence of death devours him (V 1332).⁴¹

As we shall note, the reckless desire to see that leads to isolation and individual death is significantly linked to an individual's projection of inauthentic images. Whereas Pentheus falsely pictures the maenads "in the thickets, like birds, held in the most pleasant nets of sex"⁴² (V 957–958, 685–688), Oedipus falsely declares that he "never saw"⁴³ (V 105) the previous ruler of the land (that he in fact murdered and saw).

To summarise, the *unlimited chronotope* describes the alienation of the familiar limits of space and time that mystic initiands suffered during the first phase of ritual, and which is then adapted to characterise tyrants in tragedy. In both cases, a style of seeing that is peculiar to an isolated and obdurate individual ego leads to the tragic loss of one's relation to his or her environment.

2.2 The Near-Death Chronotope

In his account of mystic initiation, Plutarch compares the "wanderings and exhausting runnings around and certain anxious uncompleted journeys through darkness" to the "soul on the point of death".⁴⁴ "all manner of terrible things, shuddering and trembling and sweating" culminate in an experience of dying from the perspective of the initiand. This means that all the sense organs (ears, mouth, nose, hands and eyes) through which an individual *organises* experience undergo a radical alienation. The second phase of mystic initiation, which refers to the complete absence of spatio-temporal form, we call the *near-death chronotope*.

Similar to the *unlimited chronotope*, the *near-death chronotope* gestures to a re-enactment of individual death as experienced in myth. Isolated initiands who suffered that which they "had never suffered before"⁴⁵ re-enacted Persephone's descent into Hades, Dionysus' dismemberment and Semele's incineration during Dionysus' birth (to mention just a few). Also like the *unlimited chronotope*, the *near-death chronotope* gestures to an opening out of that which was secretly performed in mystery-cult onto the public stage.

We have briefly mentioned the *near-death experiences* to which the isolated Dionysus and his maenad-choruses succumb in *Bacchae*. As we will see, the projection of the initiand's experience of dying onto the *tirannos* in tragedy represents a new

⁴¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *Sophoclis Fabulae*, Lloyd-Jones p. 237.

⁴² Euripides, *Bacchae*, in *Euripides fabulae*, Diggle, vol. 3, *Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia, Avlidensis, Rhesus* p. 332, 320.

⁴³ Sophocles, *Oidipous Tyrannos*, in *Sophoclis Fabulae*, Lloyd-Jones p. 125.

⁴⁴ Plutarch, Fragment p. 178, in *Plutarch, Moralia*, ed. F. Babbitt, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1999) pp. 316–319. Here "uncompleted" means "unlimited", as in that which opposes the ends (*tel-*), that is, limits, of death and mystic ritual.

⁴⁵ Gold leaf from Thurii in southern Italy, in Seaford, *Dionysus* p. 55.

socio-political critique. We have also gestured to Pentheus who, after being “put out of his mind”⁴⁶ (V 850) like an individual succumbing to death during mystic ritual, is murdered by kin.⁴⁷ The mindlessness and death that plague the tyrants Kreon and Oedipus at the end of Sophocles’ tragic plays similarly have an unprecedented socio-political significance.

2.3 The Limited Chronotope

But most haunting in Plutarch’s account of mystic initiation is that which occurs during the third and final phase. After “wanderings and exhausting runnings around and certain uncompleted journeys through darkness”—after “all the terrible things, shuddering and trembling and sweating”, “[t]he soul on the point of death [...] is met by a wonderful light [φῶς] and received into pure places and meadows, with voices and dancing”.⁴⁸ This last phase of ritual, when the newly born mystic sheds his or her isolated (and unlimited) ego in death and joins “company with holy and pure persons”,⁴⁹ gestures to the *limited chronotope*.

Similar to the *unlimited-* and *near-death chronotopes*, the *limited chronotope* looks back to the re-enactment of aetiological myth. The magical light with which initiation culminated is linked in the Eleusinian mysteries, for instance, to the return of Persephone. This coincided, significantly, with the revelation of an ear of corn and thus re-enacted Demeter’s gift to humankind.⁵⁰ In Dionysus’ mystery-cult, the epiphany of a mystical “light”, φῶς, was associated with wine: the sacred “drink from the mixing bowl”,⁵¹ and was doubtlessly caught up in a re-enactment of Dionysus’ resurrection and induction into “mystic initiations”, *teletás*, by Rhea.⁵²

⁴⁶ Euripides, *Bacchae*, in *Euripides fabulae*, Diggle, vol. 3, *Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia, Avlidensis, Rhesus* p. 327.

⁴⁷ Also significant shall be the (perverted) mystic near-death experience in the earthquake scene in *Bacchae*.

⁴⁸ Plutarch, Fragment p. 178, in *Plutarch, Moralia*, ed. F. Babbitt, vol. 4 pp. 318–319.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Seaford, “Hölderlin and the Politics of the Dionysiac”; See *The Homeric hymn to Demeter*, ed. N. Richardson (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2002) pp. 26–30.

⁵¹ Demosthenes, 18.259–260, in *Demosthenes, On the Crown*, ed. H. Yunis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001) pp. 90–91. Here the gift of wine presented to new initiates appears at the centre of a list of sacred, many times secret (if also ridiculed by the lawyer Demosthenes) events. These include reading books, performing various actions by night, placing fawnskins on initiands, purifying them, smearing them with mud and bran, raising them up from the purification while telling them to say “I escaped the bad, I found the better”, priding oneself on delivering the greatest ululation (a style of howling), by day leading through the streets the cultivated *thiasoi* crowned with fennel and while poplar, squeezing fat-cheeked snakes, raising them over one’s head, shouting “Euoi Saboi”, dancing to the cry of “Hyes Attes, Attes Hyes” (a language of ambiguous meaning), being greeted by the old woman as “Leader and Instructor and Basket-bearer (kistophoros), Winnowing basket-bearer (liknophoros)” and receiving as payment various cakes.

⁵² Apollodorus, *Library*, 3.5.1, in *Apollodorus, The Library*, ed. J. Frazer, vol. 1, *Books I–III* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1995) p. 326. Critical is the fact that wine in ritual is new not only

to the newly initiated. Wine is new in itself that is, Dionysiac mystic initiation is inseparable from the (cosmic) invention of wine. See fragment 646a in *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. R. Kannicht and B. Snell, vol. 2, *Fragmenta adespota, testimonia volumini 1 addenda, indices ad volumina 1 et 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht 1981) pp. 217–218. This is suggested further in the satyrs who, being frequently present during the transformation of nature into primeval forms of culture, bear witness to the first ever extraction of wine from grapes. Consider, for instance, Sophocles' satyr-play *Dionysiskos* ("Little Dionysus") where satyrs express their delight when the infant Dionysus invents wine. The epiphany of wine in ritual is thus linked to its epiphany in myth, that is, when Dionysus is himself first inducted into the mysteries of wine by Rhea. This is a secret event that takes place not only after the god has been resurrected and purified, but also after Dionysus has been dismembered and succumbed to death. As shall gradually become clear, death and rebirth are critical in mystic initiation, in particular the fact that living mystics identified the dead as reborn with Dionysus in an earthly afterlife. See Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, 11.21 and 8.7, in *Apuleius, The Golden Ass: Being the Metamorphoses of Lucius Apuleius*, ed. W. Adlington and S. Gaselee (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1977) pp. 354–357, 572–577. There is no lack of evidence that wine drunk in ritual gestured to Dionysus' salvation of humankind. In *Bacchae* Teiresias pairs Demeter and Dionysos as "the two first things among humans": Demeter nourishes mortals "with dry" food and Dionysos gave mortals the "liquid drink" of wine to relieve their sufferings (V 274–283). *Euripides fabulae*, Diggle, vol. 3, *Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia, Avlidensis, Rhesus* p. 303. See also Plutarch, *Moralia*, 68, in *Plutarch, Moralia*, ed. F. Babbitt, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1960) pp. 358–364; and Plutarch, *Moralia*, 716, in *Plutarch, Moralia*, ed. W. Helmbold, E. Minar and F. Sandbach, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1993) p. 716. Consider further the mystic formulae of one of the two gold leaves from Pelinna in Thessaly from the fourth century B.C.E.: "Now you died and you came into being, thrice blessed one, on this day./Tell Persephone that Bakchios himself freed you./Bull, you jumped into milk./Quickly you jumped into milk./Ram, you fell into milk./You have **wine** as your blessed (eudaimon) honour (?)./And below the earth there await you the same rituals as the other blessed ones", cited in Seaford, *Dionysus* 55. Emphasis added. Reference to Persephone, rebirth and wine alongside a feast with dancing and music occurs in verses pp. 503–518 of Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, in *Aristophanes. Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth*, Henderson pp. 92–94. Such texts referring to wine drunk by initiates in the next world are complemented by a Dionysiac visual culture e.g. the Ohio vase where a satyr in the underworld appears with the name *Oinops* ("Wine-face") and the Apulian vase-paintings where wine flows miraculously from grapes without mortal labour in an earthly paradise. See Seaford, *Dionysus* p. 79, 81. Plato, who in the *Republic* refers to the consumption of wine by mystics in Hades, in particular to their "eternal drunkenness", points out further in the *Phaedrus* that, through the "right kind of madness", Dionysiac ritual releases initiates from sufferings both of this world and of the next. *Plato, The Republic, Books I–V*, trans. P. Shorey, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2011) pp. 128–30; and *Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. H. Fowler, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2005) pp. 466–468, respectively. Pherecrates gestures to an unlimited supply of wine in the afterlife. Pherecrates, Fragment p. 113, in *Fragments of Old Comedy*, ed. C. Storey, vol. 2, *Diopethes to Pherecrates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2011) p. 472. And as the Theban maenads remind us in verses pp. 686–713 of *Bacchae*, wine in ritual provided a taste of the (ecstatic) afterlife. *Euripides fabulae*, Diggle, vol. 3, *Helena, Phoenissae, Orestes, Bacchae, Iphigenia, Avlidensis, Rhesus* pp. 320–321. All of this leads to the following conclusion. Given Dionysus' power to dissolve the boundary between water and wine—see Plutarch, *Life of Lysander*, 28.4, in *Plutarch, Lives*, ed. B. Perrin, vol. 1, *Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Solon and Publicola* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1998) p. 312—, as well as the associations of wine with blood, in particular the blood of the god himself—see Achilles Tatius' *The Story of Leucippe and Cleitophon*, 2.2.1–3, in Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, ed. T. Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Oxford University Press 2001) p. 20; and Timotheos, *Fragment 780*, in *Poetae Melici Graeci*, ed. D. Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1962)—, and the myth of Dionysus' dismemberment

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