Preface to the Expanded Edition

The *Bacchae* remains ever new, exciting, and so controversial. "Every reader gets the *Bacchae* he deserves. No two scholars agree on the meaning of the play, let alone on the intention of the author." So writes H. S. Versnel, surveying the state of the scholarship in 1990 (Versnel 1990, 96; also Fitzgerald 1992/93, 13: I refer to the Bibliographical Addenda at the end of this volume). But if the controversy over the meaning of the *Bacchae* has not diminished in the fifteen years since *Dionysiac Poetics* first appeared, there has been a major shift of emphasis in the interpretation of Dionysus. The view of Dionysus primarily or solely as the dissolver of order and of boundaries, which has it roots in Nietzsche and was fostered by the influential work of Walter H. Otto, has been balanced by a broader recognition of Dionysus' place within the polis. The *Bacchae*, as Albert Henrichs has rightly emphasized, presents a very partial and limited view of the god; and the attempts of Henrichs and others over the last two decades to distinguish Dionysus from the "Dionysiac" and to recover a sense of the god's "personality" as it appeared to a wide range of his ancient worshipers offer an important corrective to the Nietzschean approach. In his fine synthesis of research on Dionysus in the third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1996, 479), Henrichs describes Dionysus as "the most versatile and elusive of all the Greek gods," and "elusive" was also the word I chose to introduce the god in my first chapter. It is a pleasure also to note the ever-growing concern with "metatragedy" as a wider phenomenon of Greek culture and to see the interest in investigating Dionysiac patterns, with something like a "Dionysiac poetics," across the whole corpus of Greek tragedy.

Were I writing the book today, although I would not change my view of the play as a whole or of Dionysus' role in it, I would put even greater stress on Euripides' *construction* of Dionysus from the cultic and political background of the god (pp. 68–77; for such an approach to the "palace miracle," see Fisher 1992); and I would

strengthen my discussions of Dionysus' place in the polis (see pp. 10, 16, 247, 328–29). On the other hand, reading the play solely in terms of the social and civic functions of the Dionysiac cult goes too far toward the opposite extreme, for the Dionysus of the play cannot be equated with the Dionysus of cult in any simple, one-to-one relation, nor can one reduce the play to a black-and-white attack or defense of the god, or assume that Euripides' intention was to bolster Athenian civic religion or civic identity. In fact, the civic functions of Dionysus in Athens, Thebes, and other parts of Greece make his destructive role in the play even more striking.

In addition to the intensive reexamination of Dionysus over the past fifteen years (including at least three major international conferences between 1984 and 1990), there have been a number of new books and articles devoted wholly or in part to the *Bacchae*; many new studies of Greek tragedy; James Diggle's new Oxford Classical Text, with accompanying notes in his *Euripidea*; a recent commentary by Richard Seaford, also with a text; significant new work on the iconography of Dionysus; and the publication of several important new Dionysiac inscriptions. All of this puts some issues in the play into new perspective, and I try to take account of these in my Afterword. I have myself returned to the *Bacchae* in two recent studies, Segal 1994 and 1997. The 1994 essay developed from recent work on female lament in ancient Greece (see Segal 1993), which led me to appreciate more fully the play's use of mourning ritual. In my 1997 essay I reexamine some of the problematic relations between the chorus and the polis. I have summarized some of the main points of both essays in the Afterword, but for more detail I refer the reader to the respective publications. Although it was not possible to make changes to the original text, the Press has kindly permitted me a few minor corrections.

I warmly thank my Harvard colleague Albert Henrichs for generously reading a draft of the Afterword and for making many valuable suggestions, and also for much stimulating conversation on Dionysus and tragedy over the past years. As is inevitably the case with Dionysus and with the *Bacchae*, there are many points on which he would not necessarily agree. No one but myself is responsible for the mistakes and shortcomings that remain. I am also grateful to Brigitta van Rheinberg of Princeton University Press for her initiative, encouragement, and patience in the production of this volume, and to

Joy Abellana for efficiently overseeing the new edition. I renew my thanks to the friends and colleagues named in the original Preface and particularly to Jean-Pierre Vernant, whose friendship, kindness, and wisdom over the years have remained an inspiration. I would like to express my loving appreciation to my wife, Nancy Jones, to Josh, Tad, Amy, and Cora, to the other family members to whom I originally dedicated the book, and, last but not least, to Frank and Geraldine Jones, for many years of encouragement and support.

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