Orfeus and the Maenads

Two Modes of Ecstatic Discourse in Stagnelius's Bacchanterna

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In 1822, a year before his death, Erik Johan Stagnelius (1793–1823) completed a fascinating one-act tragedy, *Bacchanterna eller Fanatismen*.[1] But despite the beauty of its language, the complexity of its thematic concerns, the intensity of its dramatic effects, and the bizarre grandeur of its ambitions, the play hardly enjoys the acknowledgement it deserves in discussions of the romantic contribution to drama and theater. That Stagnelius wrote in Swedish may explain in part the lack of international appreciation for his achievement. If this explanation is not entirely convincing, it is because one can always point to Strindberg, Ingmar Bergman, or Pär Lagerqvist as producers of Swedish dramatic texts which speak in other languages. A more satisfying explanation lies in *Bacchanterna* itself, in its relation, not to the Swedish language as such, but to Language—or more precisely, poetic speech—as a sign of cosmic intelligence.

However, the national identity of the text looms over much of the published commentary on Stagnelius, which manages to enhance his significance by subduing his strangeness. Such commentary stresses the poet's connection to large international cultural currents but avoids focusing attention on his otherness in relation to what he perceived as a tradition or the dominant set of values defining the reality in which he lived. The emphasis is on identifying the unifying principles in the poet's works; these principles then unite him to a European rather

[1] The edition of *Bacchanterna* cited in this essay is that which appears in volume 4 of Böök's edition of Stagnelius's, *Samlade Skrifter* (235–80). Line numbers are cited instead of pages. All translations are mine. The most recent edition of the play, with commentary by Holger Frykenstedt, is in volume 6 of *Sveriges litteratur* edited by Carl Ivar Ståhle and E. N. Tigersted. That edition contains no line numbers.

than to an obscure, isolated, or provincial tradition.[2] It is evident, however, that *Bacchanterna* complicates positioning Stagnelius within various supralinguistic, transhistorical, or transnational contexts. Although no one dismisses the play as a lesser achievement, discussion of the text appears muted in relation to other works by Stagnelius.[3]

Fredrik Böök, the major commentator on the play and a very prominent and cosmopolitan figure in Swedish literary criticism, could perhaps accommodate the perversities of *Bacchanterna* without worrying about the provinciality of the national literature. In his three books on Stagnelius, Böök devoted entire chapters to this drama. He did not repudiate any previous interpretation, nor did he treat the text as a problem in establishing a unity for the poet's work as a whole. On the contrary, over a period of four decades, he refined and elaborated an initial perception of *Bacchanterna* as a major work because Stagnelius has developed a poetic language (symbolik) for embodying a diverse range of seemingly contradictory versions of reality: paganism and Christianity, Greek radiance and Nordic shadows, romantic symbolism and classical form, and archaic mythology and ascetic idealism (*Stagnelius* 454-84).[4] But in order to grasp the power of this language to

[2] For example, Benson (1–143), an American, examines Stagnelius's historical dramas in relation to Old Norse mythology in order to show how a romantic preoccupation with the origin of poetry blends harmoniously with the poet's modern reflections and feelings. A French Scandinavist, Bachelin, presents Stagnelius as a precursor of the Baudelairean romantic mood of critical detachment from modern reality. Widegren identifies gnostic components in Stagnelius's poetry which parallel motifs in the *auto sacramentales* of Calderón de la Barca. An implication of Widegren's article is that gnosticism connects poetry to a mystical ideology which transcends a specific language, culture, or historical period such as romanticism. However, neither Benson, Bachelin, nor Widegren even deals with *Bacchanterna*.

[3] Thus, Cedarblad (*Stagnelius*) merely mentions *Bacchanterna* in a large effort to link Stagnelius to a distinctly romantic aesthetic rather than religion derived from a multitude of sources which include Novalis, Böhme, Atterbom, classical mythology, esoteric Christian doctrine, and so forth (303). In an earlier book (*Studier*), Cedarblad expanded his study of influences upon the poet to include locally unique historical variables but made even fewer references to *Bacchanterna*, whose Orfeus is now understood to embody the Socratic spirit (223). Holmberg devotes only four pages (230–34) to the play, which, he proposes, dramatizes the belief that it is not sacrifice (the price paid for Dionysian release) that produces world affirmation, but death itself, the condition of being the object of sacrifice (234), and in this sense, the text is a Nietzschean critique of religious values (233). Just as brief is Andreae (82–86), who sees the text as an example of a romantic ambition to make troll music out of language, to use poetry as the means for representing the reality of dreams.

[4] I do not disagree with Böök's interpretations of *Bacchanterna*; rather, I feel that his focus on defining the historical context for the text diverts attention from the text itself; all three

complicate cultural difference, it is necessary to examine the text from a psychological, psychoanalytical perspective, which means considering the text not only in relation to the life of its author and the specific cultural milieu in which he lived but in relation to recurrent sets of motifs and images which do not seem bound to a particular time and culture (*Stagnelius än en gang* 87–116). Böök's perspective perceives poetry as the materialization of an intelligence that seeks to transcend the constraints imposed upon it by historical consciousness. Yet in the end the power of language to blur distinctions between humans and the gods is a philosophical problem which compels us to see the text as a "kritik av Martyerna," and, by implication, as the encoding of a mysterious (Platonic) logic (sällsam fantasiens logik) by which speech simultaneously manifests God and destroys the Orfic poet (*Stagnelius liv och dikt* 219–36).

In 1962, Staffan Bergsten reprinted Hammarsköld's 1824 edition of the play and published a brief afterword which focuses more narrowly than Böök on the text's sophisticated relation to classical mythology and classical models ("antika forbilderna"), presumably in order to situate Stagnelius within a more enlightened or Apollonian attitude toward religious fanaticism than reference to motifs and obsessions defining the world-view of romantic mysticism would encourage. In distancing Stagnelius from the romantic impulses ascribed to him by other commentators, Bergsten links *Bacchanterna* to the poet's other theater projects in a classical vein, such as the opera *Cydippe* and the ballet *Narcissus*, as well as to his cosmopolitan awareness of classical literature. But this strategy is not much different from others in that it stresses the text's relation to other texts rather than to language itself, rather than to a unique or strange perception of language embodied by the text.

The chief concern of previous commentary, with its emphasis on influences on Stagnelius, has been to situate this mysterious play in relation to mainstream European cultural history, whereas the objective in this

of his interpretations seem provocatively incomplete, and indeed his shifting, scholarly preoccupation with Stagnelius over four decades does suggest that he was persistently haunted by the sense of having left something important about Stagnelius unsaid. But perhaps this incompleteness is due to an extravagant concern for what Stagnelius left unsaid rather than for what the commentator has left unsaid about what the text does say. In his 1919 "Kommentar" to his edition of *Bacchanterna*, Böök's exclusive purpose is to identify a vast network of influences upon Stagnelius: Euripides, Ovid, Virgil, Plutarch, Plato, among many others. In subsequent works, Böök moved toward interpreting the text in relation to these and other influences, but the effect is always to historicize the text in such a way as to diminish the significance of Stagnelius's language for a non-Swedish audience.

essay is to situate the text in relation to ideological structures embedded in rhetorical choices and signifying practices, which control the production of historical modes of discourse. The unique value of the text, then, depends less upon its affiliation with mainstream cultural modes of discourse (classicism, romanticism) than upon its use of tensions between these modes to expose a tragic relation between language and feeling, which neither discourse in itself can disclose. *Bacchanterna* dramatizes conditions under which speech moves its speakers toward ecstasy. But focusing on tensions between classical and romantic modes of discourse may conceal a deeper, more significant tension within the text. Focusing on the language of the text reveals a profound sexual difference controlling relations between speech and ecstasy. Stagnelius introduces a complex web of rhetorical devices which indicates that ecstasy emerges differently in response to two distinct modes of discourse, male and female, each of which, however, subsumes both classical and romantic modes of discourse.

Stagnelius dramatizes the romantic theme of the stigmatized individual in conflict with the homogeneous community. The text imbues this political and very conventional problem with an erotic aura, so that the principle of individuality, in the persons of Orfeus and his adept, Gorgias, appears as a masculine phenomenon, while communal identity, represented by the nameless chorus of bacchantes, implies a feminine quality of being. The male/female polarity evolves out of a cosmic polarity of sky and earth:

> *Orfeus:*
> *Mig tyctes att på spetsen af Olympus*
> *Jag ensam stod och lät mitt fria öga*
> *Kring verlden irra.* (172–74)
>
> (It seemed to me that on the summit of Olympus
> I stood alone and my eyes wandered freely
> Around the world.)
>
> *Chorföreskan:*
> *En grotta der mig vinkar i sin tysta famn.*
> *Narciss-omblomstrad öppnar sig dess dunkla port.* (312–13)
>
> (Chorus Leader:
> One cave beckoned me into its silent embrace.
> Narcissus blossoms opened wide round its dark door.)

The Olympian/chthonic conflict also entails a conflict between two modes of ecstatic discourse. The text, however, dramatizes a perception of ecstasy that is unconstrained by the pressures of family feeling. In spite of its determination to treat ecstasy as above all an erotic experience, the drama avoids any distinct reference to family life or even marriage. Instead, the play shows how ecstasy, for either sex, arises from attitudes toward language which subvert, or at least inhibit, that unity between the sexes for which marriage and the family are dominant signs.

The poetic voice of Orfeus is seductive without his wanting it to be so. The bacchantes hunt him down and destroy him because his song threatens the communal-building power of Dionysos, "verldens Gud" [1009] (the world god), even though he does not sing for the purpose of communicating with anyone but himself. Dionysus never appears, but the Chorus Leader quotes him at length (491–527). His voice,

> [. . .] *var som källans sorl,*
> *Som i cypresselundar vindens midnatts-sus.* (486–87)
>
> ([. . .] was like a murmuring spring,
> Like the midnight sigh of the wind in the cypress groves.)

His voice is, thus, not only an impersonation or an echo of a male voice, is not only male power transformed and manifested through a female voice, but is the transmission of a message heard only in a dream: "Systrar, hören dock min dröm" [474] (Sisters, hear my dream). For the bacchantes, ecstasy means unity with God, with a superhuman identity, and such unity signifies itself when language unfolds through an orgiastic, anonymous, and choral voice. For Orfeus, ecstasy means a supreme detachment from the world, an unbound relationship to any mythic spot of earth, and such detachment results when language manifests itself through a meditative, lyric, solo voice. The Orfic poet, perceiving language as a source of ecstasy rather than an apparatus of seduction, is indifferent to whether his voice communicates or has an audience. The ambiguity of his language is so great that it prevents any stable understanding from taking place; indeed, his language reveals a profound skepticism regarding the permanence or even the reality of human feelings. That skepticism prevented Euridyce (who here is only a name on Orfeus's lips) from accompanying him out of the underworld and motivates the bacchantes to return him forever to the cave. Yet the enigmatic beauty of his voice is seductive insofar as it awakens

in the anonymous, bacchantic listener a desire for unity with a human (i.e., real) rather than divine (dreamt) identity.[5]

But the desire of the mass to absorb and consume the individual results in violence, a frenzied tearing apart of the detached poet, and so it is not surprising that Orfeus links the sound of song with the image of sacrificial blood (offerblod och sång [1111]), as if the sound and the image had a common node of origin in the human emotional system. In this text, the relation between seduction and ecstasy is very strange and complex. The language which brings ecstasy to the Orfic speaker is merely and unintentionally seductive to the bacchantic listener, who fears, all the same, that a real male voice, however enchanting, will only bring disillusionment to the (female) listener, for the singer remains loftily detached from any sense of community, communication, or unity with a (female) listener who dares to explore the possibility that a greater source of ecstasy lies in a real male than in a god she has imagined. But the ecstatic speech of the bacchantes has no seductive purpose or effect (at least for the male figures in the text), even though the seductive voice of the god, Dionysus, is embedded within their language. Making no appearance on the stage and speaking entirely through the voice of the Chorus Leader, Dionysus is the creation of a female ecstatic discourse. He signifies the perception that ecstasy is a response to an illusion, a myth, a dream, an imaginary identity which language constructs when the speaker regards ecstasy as a sign of communal understanding and communication.

The central scene in this huge one-act drama is the vast, ecstatic dialogue between the Chorus Leader and the chorus of Bacchantes (284–637). Though he makes no explicit acknowledgement in his

[5] The text suggests that the effect of a real male voice is to urge the bacchantic listener to lose the anonymity she shares with everyone else in the bacchantic community. The text emphasizes this point through the character of Polydora, a bacchant and the only named female in the text; she and Hermas anticipate marriage, but in the end, his voice is not strong enough to overcome her devotion to the Dionysos and the bacchantes, who are determined to destroy a voice that is, the voice of Orfeus. The real male voice has the power to construct a sense of difference between female listeners, and this difference threatens the communal unity of the bacchantes. The communal unity and anonymity of the bacchantes is a response to the imaginary, dreamt male voice of the god, who speaks through the voice of the woman dreamer. All the male speakers in the text have individual names, but they do not form a community. They form pairs or trios of speakers created and dissolved by conflicting desires. In the final scene, four male figures appear: the ghost of Orfeus, Timon, Lycis, and Hermas. But the ghost urges them to separate and pursue different courses of action alone.

preface to the play, Stagnelius ("Om Bacchanterna" [221–22]) here seems to have been inspired by the wild chorus scene near the opening of Euripides's *The Bacchae* (407 BC) with its turbulent, irregular speech rhythms, its hymnic reiterations of praise for Dionysus and the mythic images attached to him, and its descriptions of his divine powers. But by introducing the ecstatic chorus so early in the drama, Euripides discloses a vaguely satiric purpose. Actions which culminate in ecstasy are of less interest to him than actions which are a consequence of ecstasy. Since for Euripides, ecstasy of any sort is synonymous with hallucination, with a complete submission to illusions, the actions which result from the ecstatic state of misperception are by turns grotesque, barbaric, morbid, and, ultimately, tragic.[6] Euripides links ecstasy with a punishment inflicted upon humans by the god for a trivial insult to his honor. His motive is petty, vindictive, and never higher than human motives; indeed, he is easily mistaken for a mortal, in spite of the early grandiose glamorization of him by the chorus.

But Stagnelius, by situating the ecstatic scene in the center of the play, avoids linking ecstasy with an initiating or culminating locus of action. His strategy makes it difficult to establish a clear cause-and-

[6] Böök (*Kommentar* 439–45) provides several examples of where Euripides' play has influenced Stagnelius. Stagnelius is close to Euripides insofar as he equates female ecstasy with a response to an illusion, a severe disorder of perception. Pentheus in Euripides's play mistakes Dionysos for an ordinary mortal and the bacchantes mistake Pentheus for a lion, whom they tear apart when he spies upon their orgiastic rites. But these misperceptions, which afflict both sexes and both ecstatic and non-ecstatic persons, derive from a larger problem of perceiving differences between gods and humans. As Cadmus reproachfully remarks to Dionysos: Gods should be exempt from human passions (1. 1348), but they are not, and because they are not, because Dionysos acts so humanly by acting so spitefully, so vindictively, humans can feel the presence of a god only by entering into a state of delirium or grotesque masquerade as when Cadmus, Teiresias, and later Pentheus disguise themselves as bacchantes. But for Dionysos, the stimulation of ecstasy in the bacchantes is not an end in itself but a means to a dreadful end: revenge for the slander that he was of mortal rather than divine birth. "When you had time, you did not know me," he tells the men of Thebes (1. 1345). Ecstasy therefore appears as part of an unjust punishment inflicted upon human beings for their limitations of perception. But this point becomes clear when we perceive ecstasy as an initial, rather than central or culminating, experience, and for that reason, Euripides places his ecstatic chorus near the beginning of the play. What follows this ecstatic eruption is the gradual revelation of a huge, tragic error of perception which has as its consequence the destruction of an entire society. This consequence involves perceptual and emotional complexities which do not interest Stagnelius as much as those relating to the sexualization of language. Euripides's play contains grotesque comic elements, startling emotional contrasts, which are completing missing from Stagnelius's play.

effect relationship between the ecstatic state and the actions which occur either before or after it. Ecstasy obviously appears as a central force in human experience, giving meaning to the past and the future; but that means it is, in effect, a condition of being in the midst of time itself. It is not merely a transformative point in time but a point between the beginning and ending of powerful desires. Ecstatic speech emerges a kind of substrate out of which other, less central forms of experience are descended.

The scene opens with a twenty-line speech by the chorus; the lines vary in length from nine to twelve syllables. Figure 1 diagrams the diversity of verse forms and meters throughout the scene to show how radically Stagnelius departs from the classical dramatic conventions, particularly the alexandrine, followed by neo-classical or quasi-classical writers like Racine, Alfieri, and Grillparzer, even though his subject matter is perfectly classical. From a formal perspective, Stagnelius's play represents a more powerful deviation from classical dramatic form than Byron's extravagant *Manfred* (1817) or Hugo's widely influential *Hernani* (1830).

The chorus gives a luminous panoramic description of the Thracian landscape, linking the pervasive but hidden presence of Dionysos to "Guldvingade fjärilar paras" [305] (gold-sparkling couplings of butterflies). The Chorus Leader continues the hymnic cataloguing of nature, through which the gods manifest themselves but observes that it is song which purifies her soul and transports it "till salighetens öar hän" [316] (to holy isles far away). The chorus asks, "Hvad will du höra?" [317] (What will you hear?) and proceeds to list all the gods and mythic figures for whom it has songs. The Chorus Leader responds that she would prefer to think of Bacchus (Dionysos), the "tiger-tamer" (tigertämjarn): "för sömnens makt/Mitt öga domnar, vakna vid hans lofsång opp" [336–39] (to seal the eyes with sleep, waken wide the song of praise for him). This instruction is curious because it seems to imply a lullaby such as she mentions in her previous speech. But what follows is an enormous eruption of language in a turbulent, epic mode. The chorus abandons the previous verse pattern: the first nineteen lines, which set the scene of Dionysos's Aegean realm as a luxuriant garden or festooned monument, are all seven syllables long. The following 110 lines are broken up into twenty-two stanzas, each four lines long. The first three lines of every stanza have eleven syllables, while the fourth line is always five syllables. Here, as elsewhere, no rhyming occurs. The chorus shifts into the past tense as it narrates the

rescue by Dionysos of the love-tortured Ariadne from her abandonment by Theseus. But in telling the story, the chorus quotes the speech of Ariadne and Dionysos, so that the past becomes present through the impersonation of mythic voices. Dionysos, for example, transports Ariadne out of the chthonic prison into a celestial paradise with these words:

> *"I en guldvagn, dragen af Leoparder,*
> *Vid min sida skall du till hemlen åka.*
> *Flicka, hvad? Du tvekar. Välan! ett under*
> *Tyde min allmakt."* (432–35)
>
> (In a gold chariot, drawn by leopards,
> Shall you ascend at my side to heaven.
> What's this, girl? You tremble. Repose thou embraced
> by all my power.)

The chorus concludes the tale with a stanza of praise for Dionysos, for "Karlekens plågor stillar/Bacchus allena" [446–47] (Love's torments Bacchus alone subdues). The Chorus Leader awakens from her dream, and the meter returns to alexandrines. Her five-line speech is a set of four questions about the power of a dream to transport one to another reality. The chorus assures her that she remains an idol of purity, a white "Venushärmande gestalt" [463] (Venus-like form); they await her command to begin the celebration of Dionysos, which means exhausting "Den långa natt i bacchisk stjernomtindrad dans" [472] (the long night in Bacchic star-speckled dance).

The Chorus Leader then delivers a long (129 lines) speech in which, slipping again into past tense, she describes her dream. In other words, the language covers the same time which the chorus devoted to the Ariadne-Dionysos story. Stagnelius wants to dramatize how the same points in time and space can encompass more than one level of consciousness or reality. These levels include more than those embodied by the chorus and Chorus Leader: they include that present-tense level of mythic consciousness embodied by Ariadne, Dionysos, and the Chorus Leader herself when the narrators impersonate their voices. She discloses that in her dream she stood atop ice-clad Mt. Rhodope when Dionysos, a figure of gold and scarlet radiance, appears before her. He speaks at length (over forty lines) through her voice. He addresses her, describes for her the manifold movements in nature and life related to his pervasive spirit, and invites her, "jordens sorgsna barn" [527] (earth's mournful child), to share with him the "orgisk" (orgiastic)

experience of olympisk salighet (Olympian bliss). The next thirty lines describe her luxuriant, worshipful response to the idyllic world created by the god's aura. She calls out: " 'Låt mig bland rosenhyddor evigt här få bo' " [556] (Let me live here among rose boweries forever). Dionysos reminds her that one must fight for the rewards of heaven: "'Mot Orfeus lyfta hämndens fruktansvärda tyrs!'" [564] (The wand of destruction must be lifted toward Orfeus). He then disappears, and she suddenly finds herself, in "namnlös fasa" (nameless terror) deep within the earth, Pluto's realm. Her language becomes increasingly excited as she beckons the invisible god and then her sisters (the chorus) for relief from torments which vaguely resemble symptoms of a powerful erotic agitation. Indeed, when she moves out of the dream itself to address the chorus directly, her speech adopts a complicated rhyme scheme (see Figure 1, pp. 51–52), which, though intricately structured, is the wildest language in the play. She asks if the chorus hears wedding music, then compares herself, as one who seeks God in unknown realms, with a timid bride:

> *Hvad mäktar mot Guden*
> *Den skälfvande Bruden?* (589–90)
>
> (What power against God
> Has the trembling Bride?)

It is "en jättelik bragd" [398] (a gigantic deed), this power of the god to carry away a woman's passion. She then falls to the earth in orgasmic convulsions at the conclusion of these lines:

> *Ack! phallus mig bränner,*
> *Ack! tyrsen mig rör.*
> *Mig sjelf jag ej känner.*
> *Jag dör! Jag dör!* (599–602)
>
> (Ah! the phallus burns me,
> Ah! wands that shake me.
> I know myself no more.
> I die! I die!)

The chorus, though not nearly so violently aroused, pursues a minor variation of the rhyme scheme, giving an elaborate description of the radiance exuded by the exhausted, resting body of the Chorus Leader. When she awakens, the Chorus Leader shifts to a ten/eleven syllable meter to declare that she awakens to take revenge against Orfeus. She

exhorts her sisters to rise up and destroy his song. The scene concludes with the chorus repeating the last two lines of her eight-line speech:

> *Ja, upp till hämd! må Hebri silfverflod*
> *Förgyllas skönt af Orfei gjutna blod.* (636–37)
> (Now to revenge! Hell's silver river shall be
> Gilded rich with Orfeus's spurting blood).

Though it contains large passages spoken by a single speaker, the ecstatic rhetoric of the bacchantes is actually a complex form of dialogue. Stagnelius perceives the centrality of ecstasy in human experience as the result of a particular exchange of language between more than one speaker or voice, and for this reason, his work, in spite of the romantic instability of its structure and rhythm, remains aligned with the classical ideological perception of ecstasy as a dramatic phenomenon which is not beyond language, not ineffable, but controlled above all by language. The feminine discourse of ecstasy involves an intersection of speakers. Intersection of speakers or voices refers not only to dialogue between separate speaking bodies on the stage but to other speakers or voices contained within a single speaker or voice, a phenomenon dramatized by considerable quotation of imaginary persons and by shifting rhythms and metrical structures within speeches. In *Bacchanterna*, the intersection defining feminine ecstatic discourse thus occurs at several levels. The voice of the Chorus Leader intersects the communal voice so that her orgasmic convulsions arise concurrently with language that she addresses directly to the chorus. The feminine discourse of ecstasy also entails a dialogue between present and past, between real and imaginary voices: mythic or dreamt voices are in dialogue within and with the narrative voice, implying that ecstatic speech is to a large extent a condition of speaking for someone else, for an imagined, mythic person. A larger implication is that feminine ecstatic speech involves impersonation within extensive narration. The communal voice of rapture appears to be one that tells a story (of a solitary woman who inspires the love of a god rather than a man) which occurs outside of the conscious reality of the speakers, in either an archaic, timeless, mythic age or a dream. The narrative language itself, the description of the past event, is extravagantly sensuous, permeated with adjectives that link rarified images of nature with qualities of erotic feeling or perception: pearl-castle flesh, star-speckled dance, and the leopard-drawn gold chariot. Images drawn from mineral and floral colors predominate so that, for the speakers, a mood intensifies by the

naming of a rare color in nature, in contrast to the characters in neoclassical tragedy, who tend to intensify an emotion by ascribing an allegorical or abstract value to the bodies of speaker and listener.[7]

Even more interesting is the attempt of the speakers to describe simultaneity of action at a single point in time: talking about Dionysos means talking about events happening in various places within Dionysos's realm at the same time. The description assumes the qualities of a panoramic vision. The panoramic effect also includes Stagnelius's desire to represent reality as a dialogue between two levels of consciousness. Thus, the Chorus Leader tells what happened to her while she was asleep, while we were listening to the chorus describe the Ariadne-Dionysos story. Reality consists of parallel levels of language and speech which the listener can only hear (process) one level at a time. Presumably, however, ecstasy arises precisely from an elaborate, intricate construction of simultaneous levels of language, a parallel unfolding of

[7] Consider, for example, lines 679–83 of Racine's *Phèdre*, which we may regard as a model of classical allegorization through adjectival construction.

> *Les Dieux m'en sont témoins, ces Dieux qui dans mon flanc*
> *Ont allumé le feu fatal à tout mon sang;*
> *Ces Dieux qui se sont fait une gloire cruelle*
> *De séduire le coeur d'une faible mortelle.*
> (The gods are my witness, those gods who inside me
> Have ignited the fatal fire in all my blood;
> Those gods who have made a cruel glory
> Of seducing the heart of a feeble mortal.)

The speaker uses adjectives to abstract her own identity as well as the identity of that power ("the gods") controlling her condition. "Fatal fire" and "cruel glory" do not construct a clear image of either identity; instead, they produce a more precise description of the speaker's mood. The speaker compounds the allegorization process by ascribing metaphorical actions (igniting, seducing) to the abstract identities which have the effect of turning seemingly non-abstract identities (blood, heart) into abstractions. The listener does not see the speaker's body or mood more vividly; rather, the speaker analyzes relations between essentially invisible aspects of her identity: the listener tends to see the speaker rather than what she is talking about. Racine employs this strategy, which in this instance he actually borrows from Seneca, throughout this text and his other tragedies. By contrast, the bacchantes, in Stagnelius's text, delight in adjectival constructions which allow the listener to see the dream-like image of the invisible as an intensely sensuous phenomenon: "rosenröda peplum" (347), "Ariadne, dyster och blek" [362] (Ariadne, melancholy and pale), "med snöhvit panna och purpurkinder" [418] (with snow white forehead and scarlet cheeks), and "Kring hans gyllne hår/En purpurklasig ranka" [481] (Around his golden hair/a purple cluster of grapes) are but a few typical examples. Occasionally, however, a speaker does shift to a more allegorical mode of adjectivization: "Karlekens plågor stillar" [446] (Love's quiet torment).

narratives, and intersection of voices. Stagnelius is able to dramatize that perception only by representing the levels in a linear, sequential fashion: the voice of the dream, which is the dreamer's; the woman's, which occurs after the voice in the dream, which is Dionysos's; the man's without anyone awake hearing him during the moment when the choral voice of the community speaks of him. Obviously Stagnelius has disclosed an extraordinarily complex perception of voice: voices not only speak through other voices, they speak when no one can hear them, for while no one hears the voice of Dionysos in the dream, the dreamer herself does not hear the turbulent choral voice of the community. It is possible that a collage-like dramatic technique exists for allowing the voice of the unconscious, the voice in the dream, to be heard at the same moment the spectator hears the great voice of the community, although I am not aware of any drama which applies such a technique or achieves the complexity characterizing Stagnelius's perception of voice. By having the male voice in the dream be heard through the female voice of the dream and after the dreamer has dreamt it as well as after the communal voice has spoken, the text dramatizes very effectively the perception that repression, that the voice of the unconscious, is not so much unspoken as unheard.[8]

Finally, a more abstractly formal dialogue occurs when different rhythmic and stanzaic patterns of language represent different voices within and between speakers. Ecstatic speech by no means implies a release from conventional formal constraints; rather, the language linked to ecstasy involves a dialogue of established forms, of shifting metrical structures. Indeed, the closer the language brings the speaker to orgasm, the more complex are the formal constraints on speech. At the point of convulsion, the language adopts a narrower, more intricate

[8] I am assuming, of course, that whatever is unconscious is by definition repressed and that the unconscious speaks only in a manner detached from the intentionality normally ascribed to a speech-act. What gives the voice of the unconscious a repressed status is the fact that one cannot hear it directly. Dionysos signifies the unconscious insofar as he has no voice or body, no existence, in the play, except as someone spoken of or spoken for by a female speaker. Dionysos is in the female speaker and in no way external to her. Whatever he says to her in a dream can only be heard by others when it is spoken again by the voice of the dreamer herself. In this instance, the sign of repression is language, a voice, within the speaker which can be heard, not at the moment it speaks for itself, but at the moment the speaker impersonates it and constructs the illusion that it belongs to someone else. Stagnelius's complex scene implies that the voice of the unconscious speaks to the female speaker while the female community speaks of something else, but that voice is heard only when it is spoken of or spoken again by a speaker who does not recognize the voice as her own.

rhyme scheme than is to be found in all but a handful of dramas. This feature of the text contrasts significantly with the practice of strictly neo-classical drama, where the alexandrine signifies an insurmountable barrier between the speaker and ecstasy; but even in a romantic or certainly modernist context, it is very strange indeed to find the speech of a person experiencing orgasmic convulsions portraying wildness through much more complicated rhyme and metrical patterns, through a much more dense calculation of utterance, than is ever the case with the alexandrine. The chorus replicates this complicated signification of wildness in its speech immediately following the Chorus Leader's convulsion. The feminine signification of ecstasy thus becomes synonymous, not with any primal cry of release, but with elaborately intricate patterns of speech.

An equally strange element in Stagnelius's text emerges chiefly from his efforts to construct an ecstatic discourse that complicates relations between innocence and seduction. It is true that in the great speech of the Chorus Leader, Dionysos speaks with a voice that can be termed seductive:

> *" Kom! skåda sjelf till hvad olympisk salighet*
> *Jag kallar Hades fångar, jordens sorgsna barn."* (526–27)[9]
>
> ("Come, behold yourself in that olympic bliss
> I call Hades' prisoner, earth's mournful child.")

But that voice belongs as much to the Chorus Leader as to Dionysos. By impersonating the voice of Dionysos, however, the Chorus Leader distances herself from complete responsibility for her emotional

[9] In her dream, she appears alone before the god, and he speaks only to her; the bacchantes do not appear in the dream. Thus, it is ironic that only one person hears the voice which creates communal unity; or rather, the voice which creates communal unity is an impersonation of a voice which one can only hear alone. Classical or conventional consciousness tends to treat seduction as a highly calculated mode of action, which occurs when one tries to satisfy a particular, problematic desire by appearing to satisfy another shared by the Other. This matter of concealing a real desire from the Other means that seduction entails a loss of innocence in the seducer. But Stagnelius links seduction to ecstasy in the sense that Orfeus' voice, his ecstasy, is unintentionally seductive to the bacchantes. His voice does not make the bacchantes ecstatic; instead, it awakens in them the desire for an ecstasy which is greater than that which they actually experience through their own complicated mode of speech. His voice is seductive, rather than merely attractive, not because the speaker intends to undermine the unity of the bacchantes, but because the bacchantic listener perceives such disunity as the effect of the voice. The voices, the ecstasies of the bacchantes have no seductive effect upon Orfeus; they neither awaken nor satisfy any desire for unity within him. For both Orfeus and

condition: this other voice within her is what motivates her actions as leader of the Bacchantic community. The voice of Dionysos is seductive only as long as she is unconscious, in the world of a dream. Awake and speaking to the chorus, she has no seductive purpose, for her purpose is not to rouse the chorus to ecstasy but to justify the destruction of Orfeus, who, from the perspective of the chorus, most definitely has a seductive voice, even if, from the spectators' perspective, he has no desire at all to seduce. Stagnelius has attempted to dramatize a more complex perception of innocence than prevails in conventional views of ecstasy, for he shows:

1. that ecstasy is a reality, not the mere promise or illusion of a seduction;
2. that ecstasy achieves powerful reality through the phenomenon of voice, not something seen;
3. that the ecstatic voice constitutes an intersection, not so much between speakers, but between levels of consciousness, narrative, linguistic form; and
4. that the voice achieves convulsive power when it becomes highly and intricately constrained in a formal sense while intersecting more than one level of consciousness.[10]

The text avoids binding an expanding state of consciousness to a consequent loss of innocence. But this perception implies that ecstasy appears as an unintended though not accidental consequence of something said with another object in mind. It is thus not really speakers (visible identities, specific bodies) who prod listeners to ecstasy; rather,

the bacchantes, ecstasy is in speaking, not listening, but each cultivates a different mode of ecstatic speech. An implication of this observation is that ecstatic unity of feeling does not depend on unity of feeling between the speaker and the Other; one's ecstasy does not depend on another's. This implication is clear in the case of Orfeus, but even the communal ecstasy of the bacchantes depends on offering to the god a sacrifice, a victim, whose otherness is such that he cannot feel what they feel. Ecstasy remains a sign of difference and differentiation; the power of this most pervasively and intensely desired emotion to create social unity is merely cultic and not universal.

[10] If we accept that language is a sign of consciousness, then levels of consciousness implies levels of knowing something or knowledge of how to use language. The play not only suggests that such knowledge is different for each sex and therefore constitutes a separate male or female discourse; it also suggests that within each discourse, especially the female discourse, different types of knowledge require the use of different voices within the speaker. A voice refers to a unique set of rhythms and rhetorical voices which embed knowledge that is not spoken of or about, and it is this knowledge, manifested through intricate intersections and formal constraints, which bestows convulsive power on the speaker.

it is the ecstatic energy of language itself which excites speakers. The speaker retains her innocence as long as the source of ecstasy is language, the intersection of voices within speakers, rather than speakers themselves, rather than the motives for speech. We may translate ecstatic energy to mean degree of ambiguity, as exemplified in large part by the phenomenon of intersection. Whereas normal ecstatic discourse perceives consciousness of ambiguity as dependent on loss of innocence, thus, preventing language from becoming a source of ecstasy and requiring that it remain only a means of seduction, Stagnelius perceives consciousness of ambiguity as evidence of innocence. That which is ambiguous is unintended and is the presence of another voice within a voice. Discourses of seduction assume that consciousness of ambiguity entails disguising one meaning within another; Stagnelius does not: the speaker saturates her speech with other voices, with otherness, and this otherness functions simultaneously, ambiguously, as a sign of communal anonymity and ecstatic self-abandonment. Stagnelius's perception of the speech controlled relation between ambiguity, innocence, and ecstasy is yet more mysterious. On the one hand, the referents of the female ecstatic discourse, obsessively focused on the invisible, imaginary figure of Dionysos, suggest that female ecstasy is a response to a myth or illusion. On the other hand, the signifying practice of this discourse, the relations between signifiers, suggest that the reality of ecstasy is the construction of a voice which signifies something other than its referents, signifies, indeed, the otherness of the speaker. Within this perception of ambiguity, the referent does not conceal or disguise its signifier; the ambiguity defining the feminine ecstatic discourse entails a convulsive intersection of referent and signifier.

The utopian aspect of Stagnelius's mood arises when he envisions ecstatic experience as something integrated or absorbed into a community (the chorus), if not an entire society. The Chorus Leader sinks to the earth in convulsions (*Hon nederfaller till jorden under konvulsioner* [603]) before the chorus, and the chorus, speaking in the same rhyme scheme as the orgasmic speaker, treats her action as an abstract of its own apotheosis. Classical ecstatic discourse regards the pursuit of ecstasy as a movement in tension with societal norms, which signify themselves through a code of appearances that embodies a single, shared, universal level of perception. A great distinction between catharsis and ecstasy prevails because the classical discourse, which

assumes that ecstasy is beyond the power of language to construct, contain, or represent it, makes no precise distinction between society and community: ecstasy is invariably a condition of supreme fearlessness which estranges a person from the world, from the other, from people. Individuals achieve ecstasy, in which being outside oneself is synonymous with being outside all norms; societies achieve catharsis, the purgation of impulses and desires which threaten social unity. Ecstasy estranges; catharsis normalizes.

Stagnelius, however, dramatizes the complex conditions of language which permit ecstasy to assimilate a speaker into a group and, indeed, to constitute the phenomenon which bonds masses of people together. Yet he qualifies this utopian possibility by stressing in a sense the over-homogeneity of the ecstatic community. The ecstatic community exists only because a further powerful distinction prevails between male and female modes of communication. The ecstatic community is completely female. According to the logic of the text, the sexual homogeneity of the ecstatic community exists because of a feminine perception of a cosmic tension between two manifestations of maleness: the invisible god and the corporeal man. Communal ecstasy rests upon the desire for unity with a god rather than a man; the voice of a man may be overwhelmingly seductive, but it is essentially a voice of skepticism, doubt, and distrust. It is the voice of one who achieves his identity through solitude, through an attachment, not to a timeless and undying myth, but to death, to an intense awareness of the body's transitoriness and vulnerability. And the monumental signifier of this dualism defining the feminine ecstatic discourse is dialogue itself. From the feminine perspective, as embodied by the voluptuous exchanges of speech between the chorus and the Chorus Leader, dialogue is central in creating an ecstatic community, a rapturously unified body of speakers. But from the masculine perspective, as embodied by the solo figure of Orfeus, dialogue is that language, that reality, between speakers. At this point, where sexual difference becomes the central embodiment of cosmic dualities of energy, it appears that ecstatic discourse arises logically (and tragically) out of biology, a perception which classical aesthetics, with its deterministic rhetoric of fate, always embeds within its signification system.[11]

[11] For this reason, too, classical drama, which in general values technical competence within intricate formal constraints over originality of subject matter, tends to create more complex representations of female identity than drama which strives to establish its value by resisting anonymously defined rules assigned to its genre, as if the liberation from a genre also constituted an escape from the fateful pressures of gender. And Stagnelius, by linking ecstatic discourse to fantastically elaborate manipulations, formalities, and intersections of language and voice, discloses his inclination toward that classical obsession with order which produced the complicated female protagonists of Racine's *Phèdre* (1677), Alfieri's *Mirra* (1786), Schiller's *Die Braut von Messina* (1803), Kleist's *Penthesilea* (1808), and Grillparzer's *Des Meeres und der Liebe Wellen* (1829).

But then Stagnelius complicates this anxiety-ridden, almost desperate concern for order and constraint in female speech by contrasting the ecstatic discourse of the bacchantes with that of the solitary, fugitive male, Orfeus. Unable to escape the bacchantes, Orfeus appears stoically before them (936) and requests that he be allowed to sing a final song. His petition is not an attempt to seduce the bacchantes, for he stands ready to die by their swords (Här står jag färdig att för edra glafvar dö [941]). Indeed, for him, a song is the perfect emblem of a heroic death, the ideal art for eternalizing the memory of the dead, and the aesthetic complement to the sound of battle, when a man is in the midst of death. The chorus grants the request but remarks that it no longer fears the power and "veka toner" (gentle tones) of Orfeus's lyre. Though his voice may stir animals and stones, it is not appropriate that it possess "Bacchi Tärna" (bacchic maidens) who are more accustomed to the metallic sound of cymbals, pipes, and horns (952).

Orfeus then sings a brief song. Here, too, the voice accommodates very intricate formal constraints. Orfeus sings six stanzas of four lines each. The first two lines of each stanza are eleven syllables long; the second two lines are seven. The first two lines always form a rhymed couplet, but the second two lines never rhyme with each other. Instead, they rhyme respectively with the second two lines of the preceding stanza. Thus, for eleven-syllable lines, a new rhyme emerges with each stanza, while for seven-syllable lines a new rhyme emerges only in the first, third, and fifth stanzas. Though it is brief, Orfeus's song is, from a formal perspective, perhaps even more complex than the monumental dialogue between the Chorus Leader and the bacchantes.

With this intensification of formal complexity, ecstacy becomes more distinctly linked to melancholy. Each stanza seems nothing less than an elaborate metaphor describing the power of death to fracture human vanity and ambition. Orfeus compares human time to the disintegration of clouds and waves by wind and earth (stanza 1); he compares the movement of "sckickelsens lagar" (destiny's laws) to the fall of a rose, (stanza 2). In stanza 3, he addresses an obscurely identified listener

(du), who is more likely the singer himself than one of the bacchantes. He sits innocently (menlos sitter) eating within the ancient, traditional community but can only slake his hunger, his burning desire (törstande brand) among the waves— the home of phantoms, frail illusions, and Acheron's sighing (stanza 4). In stanza 5, he speaks of himself as one who, in the fire of youth, celebrated life but who now warns that he, through his voice, his song, punishes vanity: "Jorden ej hyser ett väl" [978] (Earth hath not one glory). In the final stanza, an astonishingly compressed tension between bright, encouraging commands and a dark, undercutting image of a tragic sound is encountered:

Klinga, helga teorb, för sista gången!
Höj, o bleknande mund! den sista sången.
Svanen, gungad i säfven,
Uppger i toner sin själ. (979–82)

(Resound, golden lute, for the final time!
Raise, o pallid mouth, this final melody.
The swan, swaying in the reeds,
Dissolves into tones his soul.)

The metaphorical tension between images is reinforced by the tension between eleven- and seven-syllable lines. Whereas the chorus tends to produce descriptions of a symbolic nature, in which, for example, "Glänsande armen" [415] (radiant arms) and "rosen-läppar" [424] (rose lips) signify the luminous, real, material consequence of Dionysos-worship on the bodies of maenads, the monologic Orfic speaker produces metaphoric descriptions in which, for example, the listener sees the speaker's body as a swan's, sees the speaker's soul as a tone. In him, we find a fusion of metaphor, monologue, and very precise control over language.

With the Orfic discourse of ecstasy, drama almost ceases to imply a dialogue between a speaking self and an other outside the self; the "du" includes the voice that speaks it. The Orfic song is the otherworldly abstract of the voice; it is that tonality, that signification, that death-suffused finality of utterance which is other than the language which makes dialogue and the intersection of voices possible. For the bacchantes, ecstasy results from finding another voice within the speaking self; for Orfeus, ecstasy results from making the voice other than the self which speaks it. Through song, the voice becomes a metaphor, not for the power of language or its referents to contain the self, but for the power of voiced language and its signifiers to dissolve the self into tones, into something other than an image, a body, human flesh. The last stanza of the song objectifies the ideology of masculine ecstatic discourse: ecstatic self-abandonment is a final (sista) mode of dissolving into an invisible otherness (toner). The finality of ecstatic dissolution means that no one has anything more to say, the speaker has no need for another voice, dialogue comes to an end. But this finality of the lyric rather than dramatic voice also means that the masculine perspective understands ecstasy, the dissolving of the self into tones, as a supremely fearless encounter with death, not with a mythic eternity signified by a figure such as Dionysos.

The formal organization of the stanza indicates that a condition of ecstatic self-dissolution is an extreme condition of thinking and speaking metaphorically, of seeing the self in a strange other, of seeing one identity as another. The listener perceives the Orfic speaker as a swan; the soul as a tone. The sign of death manifests itself as a final melody (sista sången); the tension between I and You manifests itself as a tension between eleven- and seven-syllable lines, as a tension between rhymed couplet (eleven-syllable lines) and rhymes which complete themselves in the following stanza (seven-syllable lines). Ecstatic self-abandonment (or self-dissolution) operates as a mode of heightened, ultimate (or final) self-metaphorization and capacity to construct metaphor. Masculine ecstatic discourse manifests itself as (or like) a transfiguring voice of death, it is so completely other than the monumental intersection of voices, the turbulent surge of life, which creates the great communal I of the chorus. It is this detachment from dialogue which links the masculine ecstatic discourse to melancholy, to an intense, heroic pressure for an abstract, inhuman (though not divine) otherness: in the end, the image of the Orfic swan-male dissolved, through song, into an invisible tone awakens in the listener a more mysterious current of feeling than the mythic image of Dionysos dominating the communal unconscious.

The chorus seems deeply moved by Orfeus's song, and responds with a speech (984–95) rich in negatives: it does not know (Jag vet ej) what reward to bestow, what power resides in the lute. Though it acknowledges his innocence, it cannot endure his radiant brow nor gaze into his ancient eyes, it cannot behold his extreme struggle nor hear the surge of his death-scream (Ej hans dödsskrän vågar jag höra [995]). The bacchantes appear shocked or numbed by Orfeus's voice;

their encounter with male ecstasy has a paralysing effect or, as they put it, his voice fills them with an impotent (vanmäktig) feeling. What indeed is there to give him, even in the way of pain, when he wants nothing of life or the world? Orfeus says (998) that he worships the same god as they do, but that the god assumes different names. The chorus replies that a world-god (verldens Gud) has only one name (Dionysos). Nevertheless, Orfeus asserts that he is willing to honor Dionysos "med offerblod och sång" [1012] (with sacrificial blood and song). The bacchantes then advise him to lead the procession to the dark, rural temple and sacrificial altar they have built for Dionysos. Orfeus and the bacchantes disappear after he congenially announces that he will sing a hymn to Dionysos, but, of course, such a hymn is also the voice proclaiming his own doom. The spectator never hears this hymn. Now completely captive within the female community, the voice of the living Orfeus becomes as invisible as the god Dionysos: within the female community, maleness in either its human or divine manifestations loses its body and becomes something spoken of and spoken for, rather than speaking.

The following scene (1026-80) presents a dialogue between the shepherd Hermas and the shepherdess Polydora, the only named female in the text. It was Hermas who betrayed the hiding place of Orfeus when Polydora, his bride-to-be, threatened to abandon him if he did not disclose the secret grotto to the bacchantes, of whom she is one. But now having witnessed the melancholy, solitary ecstasy of Orfeus and having assumed responsibility for his destruction, she understands the impossibility of love between the sexes:

> *Ej mannen älska kan, ej qvinnan sjelf*
> *Kan älska, nej! Farväl för evigt, Hermas!* (1063–64)
>
> (Man cannot love, nor can woman herself
> Even love, no! Farewell forever, Hermas!)

The ecstatic unity of the couple is an illusion; only the gender exclusive Bacchic community can experience ecstasy as a unity of speakers. The drama concludes with the two shepherds, Lycis and Timon, giving an account of their secret observation of the mysterious and rather morbid Bacchic ritual in which Orfeus was the object of sacrifice. The spectator does not see the ritual itself, for its ecstatic power depends upon its secrecy—it exists for the audience, for the

public, for society, only as a detached male commentary, a female notion of orgy rendered public through a speculative and uninvited male intelligence. In a silver cloud, almost the image of a saint, the ghost of Orfeus appears before the men and announces his liberation from the tortures of the earth. He condemns Hermas to perpetual wandering for his cowardice before the "qvinno-hären" (woman army) and observes to Lycis that "I andars verld ock kärlek enda budet är" [1207] (in the other world, love, too, is only a word). Thus to Timon he remarks that only "högt på jorden skall man sjunga mitt beröm" [1211] (high above the earth can one sing my glory). The stage scenery presents a vast image of the Lyre and Swan constellations, and this image, aligned with the nocturnal glow of the poet's description of it and his final evocation of Hermes, "Majas vingtbeklädda Son" [1219] (Maya's wing-clad son), links the solitary Orfic voice of ecstasy to a cosmic order of signs, to celestial patterns of movement which point to an inscrutably divine order of consciousness but produce no intense sense of unity between the stars scattered across the void. For the bacchantes, ecstasy is possible only under conditions of utmost secrecy and cultic exclusivity, for it is bound up with ritual violence, with frenzied acts of sacrifice, with intoxicated submission to a god, with some invisible power that is greater than any human presence. Ecstasy does not emerge from a transgression of taboo; ecstasy unfolds within a myth-saturated rhetoric of mystery involving the authority of language in dreams and the motivating pressure of another voice within the speaker's.

This emphasis on mystification rather than transgression means that, from the feminine perspective, ecstatic experience is due to the inclination of the Bacchic community to create an atmosphere of secrecy, to forbid, to enclose, to return to the cave and contain the secrets of life within the womb of the earth. The magnitude of communal ecstatic unity remains tied to the magnitude of repression, sacrifice, and anonymity (namelessness) experienced within the community. The atmosphere of secrecy and exclusivity intensifies through dialogic and choral deployment of language, for it is through dialogue, as well as through the intersection of voices, that the speaker achieves a sense of exclusivity in relation to all that language, as an intricate and autonomous form, organism or body in itself, speaks independently of the meanings speakers consciously ascribe. The value of a secret lies in its power to bond people together at the same time that it amplifies the exclusivity

of their identity. The medium by which the female ecstatic discourse exchanges secrets for supreme feelings of trust and unity is dialogue controlled by complicated, esoteric rules that allow each voice to intersect with the other.

By contrast, the Orfic (masculine) discourse of ecstasy belongs to an identity formed out of solitude, formed indeed outside of society. The discourse constructs a different, ironic mode of exclusivity: the speaker transgresses the values of the Bacchic community without desiring to do so, his speech seduces inadvertently and uncontrollably. It is a fugitive discourse: the representation of Orfeus in the text suggests that, for Stagnelius, the author's marginal, alienated status in modern as well as archaic society is due to the essentially agrarian, chthonic influence of a feminine concept of communal unity which equates erotic desire with mysterious, religious sentiment, with a cavernous hunger for an invisible, metaphysical savior, and with the myth of earth and fertility. The Orfic discourse is monologic, not because the speaker hopes to achieve greater exclusivity, but because his speech is based on the perception of language as a cosmic power which always separates speakers. From the masculine perspective, ecstasy is possible only by plunging into language itself, as if one were plunging into the universe, an immense void, in which tensions between words are as complex as tensions between stars. The Orfic voice discloses no secrets, no other voice within itself, no voice of the unconscious, for language manifests itself everywhere around us, like the sky. Language itself is the sign of otherness in the sense that the dead Orfeus can still speak high above the earth; from the masculine perspective, the supreme state of otherness is death. The ecstatic condition of being other than oneself, thus, depends on a powerful, metaphorical awareness of language itself as the voice of death. Yet the Orfic rhetoric of ecstasy is mysterious, filled with mathematical precision and semantic obscurity, indifferent to illusions of communication and unity, indifferent to motives for speech and assertions of power. Because this discourse, which resists the capacity of language to remain invisible to its speakers, is so enigmatic that it becomes unintentionally seductive, it emanates secrets that not even the gods can know. Ecstasy is this heroic state of supreme fearlessness before language, of supreme trust in language but not in speakers.

In perceiving language, and especially speech, as a kind of organism or body, as the real manifestation of the other, Stagnelius anticipates a particular vein in modernist philosophy. Heidegger, for example, in a

cryptic 1950 essay, introduces and repeats, rather obsessively, the notion that "Language speaks" (198): "Man speaks in that he responds to language," which "speaks for us in what has been spoken" (210). But the phenomenon of speech, of voice, is difficult, if not impossible, to detach from the manifestation of a living form. Lacan is more explicit: "The word is in fact the gift of Language, and Language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is"(*Speech and Language* 64). Lacan's famous statement, that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (*Fundamental Concepts* 20), suggests we should perceive language as the materialization of the unconscious, which Lacan considers the primal manifestation of otherness in relation to the self or speaking subject. Elsewhere, Lacan asserts that the unconscious, "the libido is to be conceived as an organ, in both senses of the term, as an organ-part of the organism and as an organ-instrument" (*Fundamental Concepts* 187). However, I do not want to suggest that Stagnelius perceives the otherness of language in the same way that either Heidegger or Lacan does; rather, I would suggest that one begins to contemplate language as a body, as the form of the other, when, as Stagnelius, Heidegger, and Lacan do, one begins to contemplate the relation between language and ecstasy, speech and desire. Put differently, it is when language, as in Stagnelius's text and in psychoanalysis, structures the relation between the speaking subject and the other in intensely sexual or sexualized categories that language begins to project the attributes of a body, something living, which intervenes between the speaker and the other and establishes a condition of untranscendable difference that marks a limit to the capacity of any speaker to feel unity with another. Heidegger's concept of Being supposedly transcends sexual difference, even though the dominant signifier of Being is "language which speaks" and which, therefore, entails life and a body of it own. The monumental sexualization of ecstatic discourse in Stagnelius's play urges us to believe that the question of Being remains obscurely answered when one ignores the question of sexual difference in language, as Heidegger does when he repeats, with increasing opacity, that "language speaks."

Bacchanterna applies the emotionally turbulent logic of romanticism in defining the speech-ideological conditions, the attitudes toward language, under which ecstasy emerges but remains respectful of classicism in its choice of subject matter and extravagant concern for monumentality of form. Just as the text embodies a formal conflict

between romantic (esoteric) and classical (universal) signifying practices, so the attitudes toward language embedded in the text separate themselves into masculine and feminine discourses of ecstasy, which neither romantic nor classical signifying practices can unite, even though both codes operate in conjunction to produce each discourse. The text represents the feminine notion of communal ecstasy as dependent on a mysterious or religious atmosphere of ritual violence. Insofar as ecstasy achieves reality through violent acts of sacrifice, through the exclusion/repression of the utterly other, heroic, male voice from the community, the feminine speaker will perceive language as a system for storing secrets, for saying only what the one god and his community of worshippers may hear, for saying that which no other may say alone except for the one god and the one choral voice defining the community. This attitude, when operating as dialogue, as an intersection of voices within speakers, binds speakers together into an orgiastic, utopian unity, which, however, the non-utopian, sexually-integrated public can know only through the detached, unintoxicated speech of spying male reporters (Lycis and Timon): as long as the orgy is as invisible as the god it celebrates, such ecstasy is unspeakable, remains yet another secret which simultaneously seduces and excludes the listener by being spoken.

As the work of a male author, the text constitutes a male construction of the feminine concept of ecstasy in much the same way that the Chorus Leader speaks for Dionysos. Each discourse, masculine and feminine, speaks through and for the other. Lycis's account of the Bacchic ritual, despite its voyeuristic aspect, inhibits spectator identification with the Bacchic discourse of ecstasy: the speech places the orgy at a distance in time as well as space and prepares its listeners for a far greater manifestation of cosmic being than any image of the secret, subterranean excesses of the Bacchantes: the ghost of Orfeus utterly alone among the stars, the voice of death signifying, merely by being heard within this image, that ecstasy is a transcendence of the world through poetic speech, through the stellar luminosity of language itself. No doubt concerns about censorship and decorum in pre-modernist culture contributed to Stagnelius's decision to contain the Bacchic orgy within the speech of a second-hand messenger. But these concerns are subordinate to the acknowledgement that drama—as discussed in those twentieth century writings about Stagnelius's play which analyze the problem of influences upon it rather than the

disturbing language within it—tends to preserve a mood of secrecy in regard to relations between language and the most pervasively and intensely desired emotion: ecstasy.

Figure 1

Intersection of Voices in the Chorus-Chorus Leader Scene of Stagnelius's *Bacchanterna* (Ståhle 235–44)

Code:
S=Speaker (Chorus or Chorus Leader)
CH =Chorus
CL=Chorus Leader
LN=Line Numbers
BPL =Beats per Line
RS =Rhyme Scheme
QL =Quoted Lines (lines, voices of imaginary or dreamed characters impersonated by the speaker)
IA =Impersonated Voice of Ariadne
ID = Impersonated Voice of Dionysos
ICL = Impersonated Voice of the Chorus Leader

Voice	S	LN	BPL	RS	QL
A	CH	1–20	9–11	lines 9–10=aa ("dal/kristall"); 11+14 ("brud/ Gud"); 19–20 ("gräs/ paras")	0
B	CL	21–40	12	0	0
B	CH	41–57	12	0	0
B	CL	58–61	12	0	0
C	CH	62–81	7	0	0
D	CH	82–160	22 stanzas; each stanza=4 lines; 1st three =11 BPL; 4th =5 BPL	0	9 stanzas=0
E					10 stanzas= 40 lines IA
F					3 stanzas= 12 lines ID
b	CL	161–165	12	0	0
G	CH	165–182	12	abcdac; abab (8 lines)	8
B	CL	183–287	12	0	62 lines=0
H					40 lines ID
I					2 lines ICL

Voice	S	LN	BPL	RS	QL
J	CL	287–31	221 lines=6 BPL; 4=11 BPL	aaabcbaddcc; aaabcddee; abcbc	0
K	CH	313–332	14 lines=4 BPL; 6=11 BPL	aaaaaabbcc; ababcdcdee	0
L	CL	333–340	10–11	aabb	0
L	CH	341–342	10	aa	0

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