San Fernando Valley State College

THE GREEK MASK
Its Origin and Function

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Drama
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PREFACE

The Greek ideal is the harmony of spirit in the balance of simplicity. This unity is at the basis of Greek art and drama. Thus, even an individual artistic concept is to be related in some way to an overall universal conception. The Greek hero is a poetic creation dramatically embodied in the form of a man. He is a symbol of something far beyond himself. In tragedy the hero is, at once, an individual statement and a symbol of something completely universal.

This particular trait of Greek drama stems from its religious core. The hero, therefore, is not a mere man; he is meant to stand for something beyond reality, for something essentially spiritual. The mask in Greek tragedy provided a visual means of portraying this spiritual quality. Because the mask can convey something larger than life, something of the supernatural and the unknown, and because it can serve as a visual symbol of the dramatists' poetic insight, it is particularly well suited to the Greek dramatists' artistic intent: or as Edward Gordon Craig has observed, "the mask is the only right medium of portraying the expressions of the soul as shown through the expressions of the face."
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ABSTRACT

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The origin of the mask can be clearly traced to pagan ritual. The early Greek religion involved human sacrifice in which the mask played a major role. The dancer-executioners who performed these religious acts wore the mask originally as a disguise against the revengeful ghosts of their victims. These masks came to symbolize the deity to whom the sacrifice was performed. The dancer donned the mask and was filled with the spirit of the god; he could then generate that spirit to his audience. The ritual masks therefore gave the dancer a power, the power of the god, that enabled him to perform, in the name of the god, certain magical feats.

Early ritual masks are of three types: the animal masks, such as the mare or the bull, which gave to its wearer the power of rainmaking; the Gorgon masks, a device
serving to protect the wearer from ghosts and to keep out trespassers; and thirdly, the white gypsum and the wine-lees, worn traditionally by Thespis' choruses, which were disguises rendering the ritual participants unidentifiable.

By the era of great tragedy the early ritual purposes of the mask were largely forgotten. The mask, like the Greek theater in general, had risen from ritual to art.

The tragic masks used in the Greek theater of the fifth century fall into three categories: the stock character masks of the major characters, the homogeneous masks of the choruses, and the special masks of original design used in a specific performance of a particular play. In general, all three types of masks appear to have been relatively free from distortion and though greatly oversized, were natural enough in appearance. The masks, however, were not devoid of imaginative, highly theatrical effects, such as Aeschylus' terrifying masks of the Furies, or the three changes of mask designed for the character of Dionysus in Euripides' The Bacchae.

The mask of the Greek theater was the dramatist's most important visual tool. It not only helped to compensate for the distance of the audience from the stage in the ancient theaters, but provided the Greek Tragedians with an aesthetic means of transcending the commonplace and achieving that spiritual communication which is the basis of their art.
CHAPTER I

ORIGIN OF THE MASK
Much of the religious foundation upon which Greek drama is built was hidden and obscured through the centuries. The Greeks themselves covered up many of their religion's primitive and barbaric origins. They have, however, left us a wealth of information in their myths and their dramas. Also within the last century, many scholars investigating the origins of the Greek theater, have brought new insights to the religious origins of Greek drama. Within the last century archaeological evidence and lost writings have been uncovered enabling scholars to expand their view of the early Greek civilization. I will have occasion to refer to these discoveries later in my discussion of the mask.

The original function of the mask, in my view, was not, as it is commonly asserted, in order to portray spiritual deities; nor was the mask originally employed in order to hide the actor from his audience. And, further, it was not originally for the purpose of theatrical representation. These functions of the mask came later, long after the original use of the mask had been forgotten. It appears more plausible that the chorus masks, or group disguises, were originally
employed as visors designed to hide the executioners (ritual participants) from the ghost of their victim or sacred king. And, in the cases of special masks, usually thought to have been worn to impersonate gods or goddesses, it is more plausible that they were actually worn because they had magical properties which gave the wearer a certain power in the name of the god or goddess, and not merely for representation.¹

The Greeks stood in awe of the ghosts of their departed heroes. They offered them libations and sacrifices. As William Ridgeway points out, a great deal of the Greeks' religion can be traced back to ancestor worship. The tragic plays give us a clear indication of how the Greeks felt about their ghosts. Antigone gives her life in order to assure Polynices the appropriate burial rites; Orestes commits matricide because if he did not revenge his father's ghost he would have to answer for it; Electra spends all of her time and energy plotting to placate the ghost of her father. Even the bones and remains of heroes were considered precious objects to be preserved.

Guilt, as J.-P. Guépin² points out, always follows

¹ This paper is necessarily accepting the well-supported scholarly opinion of many authorities, among whom are J.-P. Guépin, and Sir James Frazer, that the origin of Greek tragedy is to be found in the ritual and practices of human sacrificial rites.

the sacrifice of the victim. This guilt must be placated and discharged, otherwise the murderer will pollute all that come in contact with him. Therefore, as a safeguard, one must not only conceal one's identity from the ghost, but also undergo purification rites following the ordeal. And then one can not be certain that the ghost will keep away, so that he must be pacified with gifts, and loudly lamented to ward off his accusations for his death.

The common Greek method of evading the ghost was disguise. Robert Graves points out that the Greek procedure for avoiding blood guilt was to alter one's appearance following homicide by shaving one's head, and then going into exile for one year, so as to throw the revengeful ghost off the scent. In general, the primitive method of deceiving ghosts was to change one's looks in one manner or another:

Before the corpse can be safely disposed of, ghost and all, it is safest not only to simulate an extravagant grief, for its death, but to disguise oneself against its vicious haunting. You pour dust on your head, scratch your cheeks, rend your clothes, and throw sackcloth over you in the hope that the ghost will not recognize you any longer....

The ritualistic importance of disguising oneself had diminished by the fifth century, but Classical Greeks practiced these customs in simplified or altered versions,

leaving us traces of their original significance. For instance, Graves comments on the wine libations and small hair clippings, like those offered by Electra and Orestes to their dead father in The Libation Bearers, and describes them as classical substitutions for the original libations of blood and the shaving of the whole head. ⁴

The very first disguises worn by ritual choruses were amulets designed to protect them from revenge and the pollution of blood. By the era of great tragedy these disguises had become full-fledged theatrical masks and played a dramatic, as well as traditional, role. The cult masks, on the other hand, served not only to protect the wearer from ghosts, but as we will find, endowed the priest or priestess with certain magical powers in the name of the emulated god or goddess.

These cult masks, the forerunners of the theatrical masks of deities, seem to have been the earliest form of fully developed masks in use in Greece. The majority of them were grotesque and animalistic, and especially in the case of the Gorgon, bore a resemblance to Aeschylus' colored and terrifying masks of later times.

⁴ Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Maryland, 1955), II, 70.
CULT MASKS

Even in Classical times the mask was used in a number of special religious rites. Many of the gods and goddesses had masks which were employed in their cult rituals. Artemis Orthia at Sparta, Artemis Brauronian at Athens, Demeter Cydarea in Arcadia as well as Dionysus, to name a few, still used the mask in certain rituals in the fifth century, B.C.

By the time of Aeschylus the cult mask had lost much of its original magic significance, and was widely used for a number of festive, as well as religious, reasons. But originally it seems that the cult mask was restricted to the ceremonies of rain-making, ritual marriage and the rites of human and, later, animal sacrifice. The following section deals with the ritual function and purpose of a few of the better known cult masks, such as Dionysus at Lenaea, Demeter at Pheneus, and the Gorgons. These ancient religious masks and their functions had considerable influence on the later theatrical masks, and this discussion may shed some light on the rather hazy concepts we have of the origin of the mask in the Greek theater.
THE MASK OF DIONYSUS

At Lenaea, the mask of Dionysus was carried on a pole, draped with colored cloth and woven with cords of vine.\(^5\) The vine cords wound up and around the pole surrounding Dionysus, their tips sticking out from his head appearing like green rays of the sun, and dotted with huge grapes. This mask of Dionysus was his likeness as the bearded, mature god of wine. His head crowned with ivy, the god on a pillar, was carried in a processional preceding the dramatic contests.

The processional was led by female worshippers, acting as Maenads carrying torches. Seen on almost all of the vase paintings of this ceremony, there is a table in front of the god; on the table is a huge jar of wine from which the Maenads dip to fill their drinking mugs. The ladies are clad in the usual Bacchae dress of fawn skin and ivy. They carry thyrsi, flutes, and tympana.\(^6\)


\(^6\) For a complete discussion of the ceremonies at Lenaea, see Guépin, The Tragic Paradox, pp. 194-200 & 257-260.
And adorned in this attire, they launched the celebration of Semele, Dionysus' mother.

Semele means moon, and this ceremony was originally performed by nine orgiastic moon priestesses in its honor. The fifth century women ritually dramatized the death and rebirth of Dionysus by substituting a bull for the earlier human victim. After the sacrifice the horns of this substitute bull were preserved, just as the head of the original human victim was once preserved. The presence of the Dionysus mask at this celebration raises the suspicion that this "godhead on a pole" may have once been representative of such a victim.

In ancient times the head of a sacred king or hero was of tremendous importance: it was an oracular device and its ghost acted as an amulet to protect the city. This is still the case among some present day primitive peoples. For example, there is a rite of the Iban Dayakes of modern Sarawak, concerned with the head of their sacred victim. The head is made to sing, mourn and answer questions while being tenderly persuaded to enter an oracle shrine. Typically, every effort is made

7 Recent archaeological evidence for this custom was found at the temple of Delphi, where it was discovered that the entire altar section of the temple was covered with horns of bulls. And at Crete, a Minoan seal shows a goddess standing on an altar made up completely of bull's horns. Both altars were undoubtedly built up from the horns preserved after the sacrificing of the bull.

8 Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 115.
by the primitive Dyakas to placate and soothe the ghost, who is incarnate in the head of the victim, in the hope that he will forget his thoughts of revenge, consent to give oracles and serve as a guarding spirit to protect the village.

The Greeks commonly buried the heads of their sacred kings near the outskirts of their cities, where the heads could serve as a preventive against invasions. But the head of Orpheus is said to have been flung into the river Hebrus and it floated down the river to the island of Lesbos, singing. The head was then laid to rest in a sanctuary of Dionysus. The head would then have been ritually sung to, solicited for oracles, and at a certain time of the year, paraded to the city, possibly in the form of a mask—as at Lenaea. As the vase paintings of the Lenaea mask are all identical renditions, it is obvious that the mask was a specific one, undoubtedly also placed in a shrine of Dionysus between festivals. It is possible that the mask was kept in the sacred cave of Dionysus at Antissa where Orpheus' head was kept.

Since the account of Orpheus' head refers to an oracle head belonging to Dionysus' cult, it appears that

10 Pickard-Cambridge, Dramatic Festivals, pp. 28-33.
The mask of Dionysus used at Lenaea was likely to have been representative of this oracle ghost-head. Some proof of this assertion is found in the use of the mask at Lenaea. We know that a processional of the mask of Dionysus displayed on a pole, passed around the city, presumably so that it might shower its blessings on the populace, and we know from the vase paintings that the mask of Dionysus was fondled and decorated with care, and was treated with great respect, just as the Dyakas do to their trophied heads.

The oracle ghost of Dionysus was enshrined in his mask. This ghost was the spirit of the god. Like all fetishes, the mask was the god incarnate. It was paraded, as the Catholic images are paraded, through the streets in order that the god's spirit might fertilize the land and enter the people. It might be concluded then that the mask of Dionysus was originally designed to function as the home of his sacred oracle ghost. A replica of

11 Pickard-Cambridge, Dramatic Festivals, pp. 28-33.

12 William Ridgeway, The Drama and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races (New York, 1964), p. 74. Ridgeway presents a very convincing argument in connection with the concept of sacred rivers, sacred mountains, and sacred caves. He is of the firm opinion that such sacred places were originally sanctified because they were held to be the abode of some hero's spirit or the home of a sacred soul. If so, Dionysus' cave at Antissa would have been held sacred because his head, (or the head of his human representative), possibly in the form of the mask--but also the actual physical relics--resided there.
this mask may well have been used to represent Dionysus as the god of wrath in the final scene of Euripides' *The Bacchae* where Dionysus issues his oracles of punishment to Cadmus and his family. This idea will be further developed in Chapter II, when attention is given to the special masks of Dionysus designed for *The Bacchae*. 
THE MASK OF THE GORGON

At Pheneus in Arcadia there was a mask of Demeter kept in a stone chest. The priest of Demeter wore it when he beat the "underground folk"\(^{13}\) with a rod. Professor Ridgeway gives an account of this ceremony, quoting Pausaneas who says that the mask of Demeter at Pheneus was used to protect certain sacred writings called the Petroma. Ridgeway goes on to say that there can be no doubt that these "underground folk" are the dead and that such masks were widely used in association with the dead.

The mask of Demeter mentioned above, however, is a strange one. Unlike the mask of Dionysus discussed previously, this mask is not human likeness of the goddess. In fact, although Demeter had a couple of religious masks, none of them corresponded to her earthly image. The mask used at Pheneus was a Gorgon's head, and, as Professor Ridgeway correctly observes, this mask was frequently used in various cults and in association with the ghosts of the dead.

\(^{13}\) Ridgeway, *The Drama and Dramatic Dances*, p. 33.
Demeter's principal theophany is not a Gorgon, it is a mare. The Gorgon is not directly connected with Demeter, or her image. But it is connected with the sacred writings mentioned by Pausanias. Robert Graves has done an excellent study on the magical properties of the alphabet; in it he points out that the Gorgon's head was a warning to trespassers indicating that the uninitiated should keep away. The Gorgon head emphasized the secrecy of the writings. Graves explains the Gorgon as never having really existed; rather, it was "...only a prophylastic ugly face formalized into a mask. [It was a sign that the secrets of the alphabet were never to be revealed. This mask was]...assumed by the priestesses on ceremonial occasions to frighten away trespassers...". But elsewhere Graves says that there was a Gorgon known to Homer, one not three, as was common in later times. This Gorgon of Homer's was a shade in Tartarus, (Odyssey, xi, 633-5) and its head terrified Odysseus. This indicates that the Gorgon, like the mask of Dionysus, was a ghost. The presence of the Gorgon and the secrecy of the writings at Pheneus suggests that what the Gorgon's head was really protecting was the remains of sacrificed sacred kings.

15 Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 129.
under whose ghostly protection the Petroma was safe from pryers.

Also there are a number of mythical accounts in which priestesses wear the Gorgon head. In general, they seem to be wearing it during sacrificial rites of the utmost secrecy. We have an account of a priestess of Wolfish Aphrodite\(^{16}\) wearing one as she sacrifices cattle to her mistress, and another account from Libya of the priestess of Lamia wearing the Gorgon for her mysteries.\(^{17}\)

The Gorgon's association with the dead is made very clear in the myth of Asclepius, the physician son of Apollo. In the myth, Athena gives Asclepius two phials of Gorgon blood. The one taken from the left side of the Gorgon enabled him to raise the dead, while the one taken from the right side gave him the power to kill and destroy.\(^{18}\)

In other words, the Gorgon could grant the power of life and death. This power rested with the priestess who wore the Gorgon's head, when she murdered the sacrificial victim. The Gorgon's head, then, had a dual function: it granted to the wearer a power and since we know that the Gorgon was an anonymous ghost, the mask also served to protect the wearer from recognition by the ghost of the victim. After all, what better way is there to hide

16 Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 276.
17 Ibid., p. 206.
18 Ibid., pp. 173-78.
from a ghost than to pretend to be one?

The Gorgon head, used by many of the cults, was a protective shield against the Nether world. Mainly because it was a non-existent creature, the ghost would have an impossible task before him to find his assailant. Of course the mask came to symbolize the tremendous secrecy of the ceremony because to hide from a ghost is the most extreme of all precautions and, at the same time, the Gorgon head was so monstrous that it could also frighten away human intruders who might profane the mysteries and further alienate the ghost.

So, we see that Aeschylus did not invent "colored and terrifying masks" as tradition asserts. They were long in use prior to his time; but he was probably the first to bring them into the theater when he presented his Furies in The Eumenides. It is interesting that the Spartan word for mask, deikelistai, meant also the Gorgon head.
THE BULL MASK

Besides the two masks discussed above, there existed at least one more mask belonging to the cults of Dionysus and Demeter. Dionysus' principle theophany was a bull and Demeter's was a mare. In each of their cults, the deities were represented by their respective theophany in the form of a mask. The most important ceremony in which these animal masks were used was the ritual marriage rite, a rain making ceremony.

In the case of the bull mask, Frazer gives an account of a fascinating marriage rite celebrated in Athens between Dionysus' representative and the appointed Queen of Athens: "...the god was represented wholly or partly in bovine shape... [most likely] by an actor dressed in the hide and wearing the horns of the bull...." 19 This rite was performed on the second day of the Anthesteria, the festival of wine drinking and of the dead. The marriage took place at the Bucolium, or ox-stall, where the fourteen female participants tore

apart a bull, symbolizing the infant Dionysus.

Frazer points out that this ceremony is identical to the Cretan bull marriage rite of Pasiphae and the white bull, Minos. Originally the sacred king, in bull's horns, dressed as his god, would have coupled with the Queen and then met his death, being ripped apart by the fourteen women and devoured raw. This Cretan rite was a rain making ceremony in which Pasiphaea symbolized the moon and Minos the sun. The role of the moon was assumed by a priestess in cow horns and the sun by the Minos king wearing bull's horns. This ritual seems to have been very widespread in Greece, each local cult adopting their own deities and customs to the same basic rite.

There are several extant accounts of similar bull sacrifices in which the bull mask was used.\(^\text{20}\) The bull mask seems to have been reserved for the sacred king, or his later actor-representative to wear. It does not appear to have been worn by the rest of the ritual participants because it had magical powers.

The bull's horns gave the power of rain making to the sacred king. The moon was thought to control waters and by coming together with the moon priestess in the form of the bull, the king was granted the power to fertilize the land in the name of the moon goddess.

\(^{20}\) Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 293.
The magical quality of the bull's bellow, which was thought to portend thunder-storms, explains its connection with rain.\textsuperscript{21}

With such significance attached to the horns of the bull, it is understandable why the wearing of the bull's horns was restricted to the sacred king. Being a great sign of power, the bull's horns remained sacred down to Classical times and seem to have been restricted even in the theater to the kings, or gods, just as they were in early ritual. Agamemnon, for instance, wears the bull's horns home from Troy and is slaughtered, by Chytaemnestra in the form of a bull.\textsuperscript{22} Dionysus in \textit{The Bacchae}, possibly wore the bull's horns when he toppled the palace of Thebes with thunder and lightening.

\textsuperscript{21} Graves, \textit{The Greek Myths}, II, 122. This is why the ancient Greeks swung the bull-roars, or \textit{rhombi}, in a figure eight pattern - their noise simulated the roar of the bull. They also threw burning logs in the air, representing lightning which came to symbolize the bull's fiery breath. Dionysus' cornucopia is a bull's horn. It was the sign of wealth and prosperity which rain can bring to an arid land.

\textsuperscript{22} Guépin, p. 24-28.
MARE HEADED DEMETER

The second animal mask of great religious importance is the mare headed representative of Demeter, the barley or corn mother of Eleusis. Demeter's mysteries were probably the single most important cult, aside from Dionysus, in Greece. In fact, the Orphic Mysteries of Dionysus were largely borrowed from Demeter's rites, or it may be that Demeter's rites were taken from the Orphics. In any case, the mysteries held very similar principals. Essentially all of the Greek Mysteries had a common goal: after-life. Originally this after-life was reserved for the sacred king, or sacrificial victim, alone, but when human sacrifice was discontinued, the Mysteries were open to all Greeks of good character who cared to join.

The Greater Mysteries appear to have been Cretan in origin. They were basically concerned with the ritual mating of Demeter and Poseidon or later Zeus, or Iasius or Triptolemus or whatever the title of the sacred king happened to be. 23

23 Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 89-96.
At Phigalia, in Arcadia, this marriage rite presented the goddess and her mate in equine shape. Demeter was shown as the mare headed goddess and worshipped under the title of Demeter the Fury. In the myths this title is a reference to Demeter's mare shape assumed when she was forcibly mated with Poseidon shaped as a stallion. Demeter's anger over the rape by Poseidon earned her the title, Demeter the Fury.

The horse myths involving the horse masks, like those of the bull, allegorically refer to a very special ceremony; that of rain making. The horse was sacred to the moon, the moon having the power of water control. Horses were sacred to the moon because their hooves make a crescent shaped mark in the dirt, resembling a new moon. The mare masks, too, were rain making devices.

The rape of Demeter takes place during her daughter Core's absence, or, in the winter when the earth


25 Ibid., p. 129. As Sir James Frazer was the first to point out, originally all agriculture rites were a female prerogative. When the patriarchal Greeks invaded the Aegean, they usurped the powers of the females by forcibly marrying them, taking over or absorbing their rituals and customs. The myth of Demeter and Poseidon records such an incident. Demeter was performing her rain magic when she was attacked by Poseidon. Poseidon is also said to have raped a priestess who was wearing the Gorgon head. These tales refer to separate incidents when the male worshippers of Poseidon took over the female worshippers Demeter.
is barren. Core is the spring corn sprouting, meaning, of course, that Demeter as the mare was performing her rain ceremonies in order to make the corn grow when she was raped by Poseidon.

A fair estimate of what the horse rain ceremonies were like can be gotten from the myths. Basically, the ritual seems to have involved wild women, in moon yellow mare masks, with moon yellow manes who danced an erotic hobby-horse dance and dismembered a sacred king, their skirts raised so that his spurting blood would quicken their wombs and fertilize the earth. Demeter, as the corn mother, was naturally associated with the moon, as corn will not grow without water.

There is evidence that the male worshippers of Poseidon took over this female rite. The worshippers of Poseidon, the Centaurs, a pre-hellenic horse cult of primitive Magnesians, are said to have been brought to Eleusis by him. This suggests that part of the Eleusian sacred marriage rite between Demeter and her initiate was a hobby-horse dance performed by men in horse masks.

The mare mask, like the bull mask, gave the power of rain making to the wearer. It is because this importance was attached to it that the followers of Poseidon wished to take over these rites. Interestingly, the mare head made its new wearers women. As seen in

the ritual killing of the bull, who represented Dionysus, the death of the victim is always blamed on women. When men took over the female rites, they then dressed as women for the sacrificial ceremonies, because although they wanted the magical powers of these rituals, they did not want the blood guilt that went with them. The ritual impersonation of women by men will be noted again, as it is a characteristic found also in the earliest of the chorus disguises.

The mare mask seems to have been the inspiration which created the Satyrs, whose equine tails, ears and loin skins were theatrical representations of the Lapiths and the Centaurs. The Satyrs were always represented in Greek drama as lecherous drunken fools—a parody on the original orgiastic rites of those moon worshipping people.
The mare and the bull were not the only ritual animal masks known to have been used by the early Greeks; there are several other animal masks mentioned in mythology such as the boar and the bear. These too, were rain making tools. The Greek cult mask, whatever its form, was a totem possessing the power of fertility, enabling the wearer to quicken the earth in the name of his god.

Each community of early Greeks developed their own cult practices. The tribal totems differed from village to village, and the manner in which they worshipped their gods varied according to each one's local beliefs. Correspondingly, the cult masks were different in each area. Often they varied even within related cults of the same god or goddess. But, regardless of their form or shape, all of the cult masks of early Greece can be understood in terms of four basic ritual functions: (1) the fetish function of the mask, seen in the oracle ghost-head of Dionysus at Lenaea; (2) the protective function of the mask, especially evident in the mask of
the Gorgon which provided a ghostly shield against blood guilt and profanity; (3) the power function of the totem masks, such as the bull and the mare giving to the wearer the power to make rain; (4) the disguise function of the mask present in the mare head of Demeter as used by men impersonating women and women hiding from the ghost of the sacred king.

Taking a general view of the early cult masks leads to several conclusions: (1) none of the cults impersonated their gods or goddesses in human form by a mask. The only example of a humanized mask presented in this discussion was the mask of Dionysus at Lenaea, and it was an oracle head containing a power in and of itself; (2) nor were the masks used to hide the ritual participants from each other, the mask was used because it could transmit a power to the wearer, enabling him to perform in the name of his god, certain magical feats; (3) the cult masks, due to their power giving properties, were generally worn by one or few worshippers. Their heritage is evident in the later character masks of deities and heroes. Their influence on the theater can be directly traced to such dramatic creations as the Furies, the Satyrs, the bull mask of Agamemnon, the bearded mask of Dionysus; (4) most, if not possibly all the masks mentioned in the preceding section, and the discussion, including all of the major known mythical masks, were of Cretan origin. And, in fact, early group disguises, the
ancestors of Thespis' first chorus masks, also stemmed from Cretan roots.
THESPIS AND THE CHORUS MASKS

In comparison with the cult masks, even the latest ritual chorus disguises were very elementary forms. An element of this simplicity was still present well past the fifth century as dramatic choruses continued to appear in homogeneous masks. This homogeneous trait can be traced back to early ritual when the participants, while hiding from the ghost of their sacrificial victims, assumed look-a-like disguises.

According to history, Thespis' chorus was the first to employ these look-a-like disguises for dramatic purposes. Simple disguises are said to have been first worn by his chorus before the institution of regular dramatic contests. This was the first step toward the development of the theatrical mask which, tradition tells us, advanced from simple disguises to a plain linen mask introduced into the theatre by Thespis for his first tragic contest. Later, Choirilos did something undetermined to them, then Phrynichos designed the female mask, and finally, Aeschylus added color and horror to the mask.
Three ancient sources, The Suda Lexicon, the writings of Dioscorides and those of Horace, mention Thespis' chorus disguises. Each of these ancient writers had their own opinion as to what the first tragic chorus wore:

1. **The Suda Lexicon**: Thespis: in his first tragedies he anointed his face with white lead, then he shaded his face with purslane (Plutarch mentions that he wore white gypsum alone)...and after that introduced the use of masks, making them in linen alone.

2. **Dioscorides**: This is Thespis, who first moulded tragic song, inventing new joys for his villagers, when Bacchus led the wine-smeared (?) chorus....

3. **Horace**: ...they sang and acted, their Thespis' chorus' faces smeared with wine-lees.27

The Thespis tradition asserts that (1) Thespis first introduced tragedy to Athens; (2) that he was a chorus leader, whose performances were simple, undignified and largely choral; (3) that he is reported to have first introduced the idea of a dialogue exchange between the actor and the chorus members, thereby inventing the first actor; and, (4) that he was supposed to have used a rudimentary form of the mask, decorating his face with white lead with purslane or gypsum alone and/or wine-lees, then later adopted the use of the linen mask.

Thespis means "divinely sounding" and, as Pickard-

Cambridge thinks, may well be an assumed name. If so, this suggests that his traditions are more than likely to have been religious in origin, rather than secular. However, whether or not he was a real person, the tradition remains, and the following analysis of the known disguises of Thespis will, perhaps, aid in the discovery of the origins and development of the Greek theatrical mask.
MYRTLE

In general, the mode of dress assumed by the chorus in the Greek theater was reflective of their ritual heritage; this is especially evident in Thespis' first chorus disguises. Each of the disguises said to have been worn by his troupe were borrowed directly from early ritual. The Suda's statement that he wore foliage is no exception; in fact, this foliage had explicit connections with the dead. Thespis' use of purslane is probably a mistake, as the wreath that he wore was more likely to have been myrtle.

According to Suda, Thespis wore white lead under a face shade of purslane. Purslane is a pot herb used to season salads; in and of itself it has no mythical or magic meaning. Pickard-Cambridge thinks that Suda may have combined two separate disguises--the white gypsum which Plutarch mentions as having been worn alone, and the traditional use of flowers hanging over the face worn in the phallophorphoi, a Dionysian celebration.

held in Delos. He may be right, but it is probable that Thespis did, at least on occasion, shade his face with foliage, as this custom had a ritual purpose.

The wearing of a wreath, a wide-spread custom among the ancients, is according to Frazer, a protective charm. The wreath served as an amulet to shield the wearer against ghosts and the pollution of blood, connecting this disguise with the dead and the Dionysian festival of Anthesteria.

Before the regulation of tragic contests, Thespis was supposed to have performed his plays in honor of Dionysus Eleutherae at Dionysic celebrations. One of Dionysus' festivals, the Anthesteria, means the month when the "trees first leaf". It was the festival of wine drinking and of the dead. It took place in February, the thirteenth month, the month when the Greeks celebrated dramatic contests at Lenaea. The tree, symbolic of the thirteenth month, was myrtle, the death tree. It is possible that Thespis' chorus performed during this festival, and if so, it was here that foliage would have been worn as a ghost-charm.

Originally the death of the sacred king took place in February. In the fifth century, a civilized version, the reverent Eleusian Lesser


30 Pickard-Cambridge, Dythyramb, p. 82.
Mysteries, a dramatic reminder of Dionysus' fate, took place. Heracles is credited with having taken part in this sacred drama, wearing the myrtle wreath, indicating that the myrtle wreath was the standard attire for this ceremony.

There was an ancient connection between poetry and the myrtle wreath. Graves reports that the passing of the myrtle branch at Greek banquets was "...a challenge to sing or compose. Myrtle being a death tree, such poems will originally have been prophecies made at a hero-feast."32

Since Thespis was supposed to have first performed his plays in honor of Dionysus Eleutherae, and myrtle was clearly associated with singing and composing, and with the Eleusian-Dionysic revels; and since the account of Heracles wearing the myrtle wreath suggests that it was traditionally worn for Eleusian celebrations, it is a likely guess that if Thespis was shading his face with foliage, it was with myrtle.

If so, the myrtle was not used accidently, but for its association with death and for its protective proper-

31 Graves, The Greek Myths, II, 156.
32 Ibid., p. 267.
33 Graves, I, 106. Dionysus, too, was associated with death because he was a dying god and because he harrowed hell to rescue his mother. To secure her release, Dionysus bribed Persephone with a gift of myrtle branch.
ties. It will be remembered, too, that the festival of
Anthesteria also included an all-souls day when the
ghosts of the dead were supposed to return. This, of
course, gives us further reason for assuming that myrtle
was present at the celebration.
WHITE LEAD

Thespis' use of white lead, or gypsum, also has an ancient ritual history. The color, white, played a part in the early ritual ceremonies. It held a stigma of death and was originally connected with the worship of the great goddess. Participants in the Orphic mysteries still wore white smeared cheeks in the fifth century. By then the theater associated white face with ghosts and it had also come to stand for women.

The white face was originally used by the Curetes in their worship of Zagreus. Dionysus was identified with the Cretan Zagreus, who shared the same fate with him: death by dismemberment. The rite of Zagreus, including the use of white gypsum, was adopted by the Orphics in their worship of Dionysus. It may be that Thespis dressed his white faced chorus in imitation of this Orphic rite.

The ancient writer, Nomnus, describes the Orphic sacrifice as an intense Dionysic revel performed by the citizenry, men and women alike, smeared in "white mystic gypsum." It is interesting that Nomnus

34 Guépin, p. 297.
describes the white gypsum as "mystic", implying that it had magical properties, which meant that it acted as an amulet to protect the wearer from supernatural forces. Originally, it was a shield from possible divine revenge.

In the myth of Zagreus, when he assumed the shape of a bull, the Titans, dabbed in white gypsum seized him and tore him apart, eating his flesh raw.  

The Titans are, in this case, Curetes-Cretan leaping sword dancers. As Graves explains, "...the Titans were Titanoi or white chalk men; the Curetes themselves disguised so that the ghost of the victim would not recognize them..."  

The Orphics, who adopted this Curete rite, devoured their god, as did the Titans, under a shade of gypsum in the form of a bull. Since the bull was Dionysus, an Orphic, once he had partaken of the god, never ate meat again of any kind.

This Curete-Orphic rite ritually re-enacted the sparagmos of Dionysus-Zagreus. In this ceremony, white was worn by those who were being purified for initiation. Nommus tells us that the Orphics wore the gypsum when they mimetically represented Titans. "The custom fell

35 Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 118-120.
36 Ibid., p. 120.
into disuse, but in later days they were plastered with
gypsum out of convention. 37

Thespis' chorus may have presented a parody of
this Orphic rite smeared in white lead or gypsum. It may
be that the performance of Thespis witnessed by Solon
dealt with this topic. In his writing on the life
and character of Solon, Plutarch mentions that Solon
attended a performance of Thespis' chorus before the
regulation of tragedy. This performance so incited Solon
that he prevented Thespis from further performing plays
on the grounds that his telling of lies was unwholesome.

This passage has been explained in a number of
ways. Graves thinks that Thespis may have angered Solon
by impersonating him as Silenus: 38 Ridgeway is of the
opinion that what angered Solon was the irreverence of
producing a tragedy, a hero's tribute, outside of its
reverent format, the hero's tomb, and producing it
strictly for entertainment value. 39 Since Solon took such
drastic measures against Thespis, the subject matter
could likely have been, as Ridgeway feels, of a serious
religious nature, possibly presented by Thespis solely
for fun, and profit too. If so, he probably presented it,
as history has credited him with doing, in the white

37 Guépin, p. 296.
face which had great religious significance; that in itself, when presented in a nonreligious setting would probably have been enough to unsettle the conservative Solon.

There is a possibility that Thespis' **Youths** was the play which concerned the Orphic ritual. The **Suda** gives a list of Thespis' supposed works: *Games of Pelias or Phorbas, Priests, Youths, Pentheus*. Two plays on this list can be identified as mythical renditions. They both have one thing in common with the myth of Zagreus—the death of the hero by *sparagmos*—which connects them in fate with the Orphic Dionysus. Both Pelias, who died by being cut up into little pieces and boiled in Medea's caldron, and Pentheus who died being torn apart by the Maenads, are sacrificial victims like Dionysus-Zagreus. **Youths**, like the Curetes and **Priests**, like those of the Orphic mysteries, could also have dealt with the *sparagmos* theme.

The Greek title of Thespis' play, **Youths** indicates that it was about the Curetes. In Greek the title reads **Νικεαλ**, which is not one of the common Greek words for youths. **Νικεαλ** literally means unmarried youths, and, interestingly, it also means the ghosts of those who die unmarried. The Curetes, according to Cornford, were analogous to the Spartan Karneatai. He describes the

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41 H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*
Karneatai as young, unmarried youths. 42

The Cretan Curetes were young, unmarried youths. This is clear from their identification with the Rhodian Corybantes. The two groups were associated in the minds of the ancients because they both performed the leaping sword dance and they shaved their first beards in honor of the goddess. A youth of that age was usually virginal, probably originally a requirement. Theseus is reported to have shorn a "forepart of his head..." 43 at the age of sixteen in honor of Apollo, who later assumed the rites of the goddess. Therefore it seems that the play, 

\textit{Mígeos}, was about the Curetes, and since the Curetes wore white gypsum, Thespis' reason for performing in white face can be surmised. Thespis would have donned the white gypsum, or lead, in imitation of the Orphics who did so in following their Curete model. As the heart of the Curete-Orphic rite was the ritual enactment of the Dionysus-Zagreus \textit{sparagmos}. It is fair to assume that a play about Curetes would have revolved around this same theme; thus, the original necessity of wearing the white face as a shield against the ghost of the \textit{sparagmos} victim.

\footnotesize{(London, 1966), p. 766.}

\footnotesize{42 F. M. Cornford, \textit{Themis} cited in Ridgeway, \textit{The Drama and Dramatic Dances}, p. 56.}

\footnotesize{43 Graves, \textit{The Greek Myths}, I, 325.}
Thespis' use of white face, while fine for impersonating Curetes, hardly fulfilled the same requirements for characterizations of deities or heroes, which is why Professor Ridgeway contends that Thespis' white faced chorus was meant to represent ghosts. This assertion has some validity, since it is certain that by the second century, A.D., when Pollux wrote his list of tragic stock character masks, ghosts were represented in this manner. According to his list, ghosts were presented in the mask, Ὑξίς, (see #13, chart) Ὑξίς means pale or yellow, the complexion of the dead or dying. Ridgeway supports his claim by pointing out a line from Aristophanes to show that white was also the accepted color of ghosts in Classical times.⁴⁴

Alexander was the standard visual conception of the common departed souls. However, as Ridgeway insists, this did not hold true for hero-like spirits. Nilsson, the foremost authority on the Cretan civilization, writes that the general impression of Hades, as expressed by Homer was of a "...gloomy place where ghosts were but pale, twitting shadows."⁴⁵ This image is contrasted with Homer's concept of Elysium, where heroes dwelled after death. In Elysium they enjoyed a brighter atmosphere and a better existence. White face, then, would

⁴⁴ Ridgeway, The Origin, p. 89.
⁴⁵ R. W. Hutchinson, Prehistoric Crete (Baltimore, 1955) p. 228.
have been appropriate attire for ordinary ghosts, but not an acceptable appearance for gods or heroes.\textsuperscript{46}

White face was also symbolic of women. Guépin, when discussing the Orphic's use of white gypsum, states that the white color made its wearers women. White was, as he points out, the traditional color used to represent women on Attic vases. He therefore concludes that the original male participants in the Curete rite were men disguised as women.\textsuperscript{47} This is ritually sound because it was women, not men who first sacrificed the victim. This impersonation was a rather common ritual practice. Pickard-Cambridge writes that at least two of the disguises known to be in use at the time of Thespis are men posing as women. One of the vase paintings of these disguises show men dressed as Nymphs and the other men as Maenads, both of whom are followers of Dionysus. On both vases the figures have white faces.\textsuperscript{48} Dionysus himself was once disguised as a girl in hiding from the wrath of Hera.\textsuperscript{49}

On the surface, these various opinions seem at

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{46} Hutchinson, \textit{Prehistoric Crete}, p. 228.
\item\textsuperscript{47} Guépin, p. 297.
\item\textsuperscript{48} Pickard-Cambridge, \textit{Dythyramb}, pp. 80-82.
\item\textsuperscript{49} Graves, \textit{The Greek Myths}, I, 103-11.
\end{enumerate}
odds with one another; but ritually they are compatible. If Thespis was dressed in white face it was in order to copy the Orphics, who, in turn, were imitating the Cretan Curetes. These young, unmarried youths were probably originally priestesses, not priests. And as noted above, (p. 22), when men took over the female rites they pretended to be women, while sacrificing, in the hope that they would avoid blood guilt. As for Thespis' chorus representing ghosts, it will be remembered that also means the ghosts of those who die unmarried. Ritually, the ghost image refers to the spiritual essence of the rite.

By the fifth century the importance of the goddess, for whom human sacrifice originally existed, was greatly reduced. The patriarchal Greeks had managed to usurp most of her powers and her rites. As the practice of human sacrifice diminished, its ritual symbols lost their original significance, so that by the time that Aristophanes was writing, white face had come to signify ghosts.

In the era of great tragedy, the color white seems to have stood for both women and ghosts. Originally having been a disguise against ghosts, by the fifth century, white faces were the standard visual conception of these departed souls. But even in later times, white may have still retained some stigma or aura of importance, probably not consciously explainable, but just seeming to be the "right thing" much as we feel today that black
is the only "proper" attire for a funeral.

The white lead or gypsum, then, was worn by Thespis and his chorus in mock of the Orphics because this disguise was a copy of the customary amulet used to prevent possible harm from ghosts of sacrificed victims. As his performance dealt with a sparagmos topic, they may also have worn the myrtle wreath to serve as a death emblem and a protective device; and, since Thespis performed in honor of Dionysus, he and his chorus were reflective of women, Maenads, who performed like Curetes.

Taken in this light, the Thespis tradition makes sense. He began his early performances which were largely dance and choral in white face because he then performed like a Curete. Next, he may have added the wine-lees to his performance. And, finally when tragedy became an art form, he abandoned the use of white cheek, myrtle wreaths, and red face, and adopted the use of the linen mask.
WINE-LEES

Thespis' alleged use of wine-lee disguises is based on two scanty reports: one, Dioscorides' contention that Bacchus led Thespis' "wine-smeared (?) chorus," (it is not entirely clear what Dioscorides is saying about Thespis' chorus); and, secondly, Horace's statement that their faces were "smeared with wine-lees"; in other words, they had red faces.

The color red held a primary ritual significance in ancient Greece. Red was the color of the harvest moon; red was symbolic of blood, wine being a synonym for blood; red was the color of the food of the dead, symbolic of resurrection; and red was a symbol of royalty, for example, the sacred king. Graves explains that there was even a primitive taboo against red foods; they were reserved for feasts in honor of the dead only, because red stood for the sacred dead and held a promise of afterlife.\(^{50}\)

Red seems to have been the color used originally only on the sacrificial victim and not on the rest of the

\(^{50}\) Graves, \textit{White Goddess}, p. 167.
ritual participants. For instance, in Rome, the custom of reddening the faces of the conquering generals, who impersonated Mars at their victory parade, was a survival of the ritual custom of reddening the faces of the sacred kings. In Egypt, red was the color of the victims offered for sacrifice to Osiris, who was identified with Dionysus. Set, the enemy of Osiris, who murders him, was red haired. Frazer reports that not only human victims with red hair had to be found for Osiris' sacrifices, but also the oxen which were slaughtered in his honor had to have red coats. Even a single black or white hair would exclude them from sacrifice.

Because there was a connection between red and death and fertility, the color red was symbolic of royalty, including the concepts of deity and heroes. Dionysus himself, of course, was pictured with bright red cheeks. It might be that Thespis added a red faced actor to his white cheeked chorus in order to portray a hero.

At Athens, long past the fifth century, there was a celebration held in honor of Athena called the Panathenaea. It included the Pyrrhic. This rite, like that of the Orphics, was borrowed originally from the Cretans.

51 Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 111. Mars was a spring Dionysus—dying and being reborn god—before he became the Roman god of war.

The Pyrrhic was an armed sword dance done in honor of the infant Dionysus. Appropriate to the god of wine, the name of the dance, Pyrrhic, meaning fiery red, also referred to wine. The Greek word, pyrrha, fiery-red, was an adjective applied to wine.53 Wine also originally came to Greece from Crete.54 They first imported wine in jars obtained from the isle of Minos. The common Greek word for wine, ἀργυρός, is a Cretan word.

The original Cretan version of the Pyrrhic was performed by curete-like youths. As Cornford describes it, it is clearly a parallel to the sword dance of Zagreus performed by the Curetes in white gypsum.55 The Pyrrhic dance was a ritual pantomime telling essentially the same story of the Titan Curetes and the infant Dionysus Zagreus as the Orphic ritual drama did. Although the dance was called "fiery red", it was not likely to have been presented by red faced chorus members. Since the story dealt with the Curetes, they were undoubtedly portrayed in the traditional white face. And, white, while fine for Curetes, as pointed out earlier, would not have been suitable for a god or hero. Red, on the other hand,

53 Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 141.
54 Ibid., p. 107.
55 F.M. Cornford, The Origin of Attic Comedy (New York, 1961), p. 20. As Cornford states, the armed sword dance, originally done to drive away evil spirits, was, by the fifth century, thought of as a war dance.
was symbolic of deity heroes, and a red faced actor in the part of Dionysus would have conveyed the perfect god-like image. The name of the dance, then, probably refers to its hero, Dionysus, dressed in red face, his cheeks glowing as if flushed with wine.

Athenaeus reports that the Athenian Pyrrhic was also done to portray the story of Pentheus, interestingly one of the titles of Thespis' dramas. It could be that Thespis presented his Pentheus as an armed sword dance done by a white-faced Curete-like chorus, and employing a red faced actor, a sacred king, in the personage of Pentheus. The inclusion of a hero in his performance possibly explains the tradition that Thespis first invented the actor.

Perhaps Pentheus was a parody on the Pyrrhic, just as Youths seems to have been a parody on the Orphics. It is becoming increasingly evident that Thespis did not produce anything really original in his performances. As history has hinted, they seem to have been basically re-enactments of well-established religious rites, which might have been his only innovation prior to the establishment of regular tragic contests.

Since pyrrha, or fiery-red, was an adjective applied to wine, Thespis' parody on the Pyrrhic may be the real truth behind the "wine smeared face" tradition.

56 Cornford, p. 20.
Nearly everyone is dissatisfied with Horace's description of faces "smeared with wine-lees", as this statement is obscure mythically.\textsuperscript{57} Horace may have borrowed this from the earlier source, Dioscorides. Although Dioscorides' reference to Thespis' chorus disguises is somewhat vague, he does say distinctly that Bacchus, not Thespis, led Thespis' "wine-smeared (?) chorus".

Bacchus leading the chorus suggests that what Dioscorides meant was that wine was the instigator triggering the performance.

Perhaps, instead of wine-smeared faces, Dioscorides was using the term "wine-smeared" in the sense of "plastered," that is, intoxicated, not red faced. If so, the question of a red faced chorus disguise can be dismissed. Red was a color reserved for sacred kings to wear and would not have been acceptable make-up for chorus members.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 111. Lees is a residue of corrupt wine-matter and would not have yielded very good dye. But the ancients knew how to make a brilliant red dye, according to Theophilus, from the combination of urine and the vine, or the pomegranate or ivy, all three of which were closely associated with Dionysus. This dye had ritual death connections. It was used to color the faces of sacred kings. Thespis' actor may have used this well known potion, not wine to redden his face.

\textsuperscript{58} Pickard-Cambridge, Dythyramb, p. 80. Pickard-Cambridge, among those dissatisfied with Horace's "wine-lees" connects the lees with the Peloponn\aeian padded dancers, who were often pictured with red faces, surmising that this is the truth behind the "wine-smeared" legend. He is correct; these "Fat Men" were the usual male fertility symbols, donned in the customary red face.
The evolution of the mask had begun. Thespis had moved another step in the direction of a truly theatrical device when he introduced a red faced actor to his white cheeked chorus members. His career had progressed from *Youths*, done solely by a white faced chorus, to *Pentheus*. *Pentheus*, while still a ritual parody, displayed, for the first time, an actor attired in his own disguise standing out from the crowd.

Red face may have been one of the predecessors of the stock character mask. For instance, Dionysus' "flushed red cheeks," in *The Bacchae*, may have begun as smeared red dye. Like many of the first theatrical masks mentioned in the chapter that follows, Dionysus' image is noticably descended from early ritual.

Thespis' ritualistic plays, *Youths*, *Pentheus* and perhaps, *Priests*, might have been performed before the regulation of tragedy. The *Suda Lexicon* states that Thespis first entered a tragic contest in the 61st Olympiad, (536/5-533/2, B.C.). His last alleged work, *Phorbas* or the *Games of Pelias*, could have been staged at this contest. *Pelias* represents Thespis' final step in mask development as the vehicle of his traditionally credited linen masks.
CHAPTER II

MASK OF THE FIFTH CENTURY
THE LINEN MASK

Linen was sacred to Apollo. His priests wore linen and the strings of his primary musical instrument, the lyre, were made from linen.

Linen had once belonged to the hero Linus, the flax victim, mourned on the isle of the Peloponnese. He was the deity of the flax women, who made a living weaving that cloth. According to Pausanias, Linus invented rhythm, melody, and composed ballads in honor of Dionysus and other ancient heroes. But the Greek god of music tolerated no rivals. Linus' cult was forcibly absorbed by the worshippers of Apollo, who took over linen, incorporating it into the rites of their god.

Aside from being sacred, linen was a poor choice for mask making. The linen masks of Thespis would have been very hard to shape and mold. Since linen is a soft material, it would have to be stuffed in order to hold its shape. Later, masks were made from cork, wood, and leather, all solid substances. Wood, cork and the like were certainly available to Thespis, but perhaps he chose to use linen for reasons other than practical ones: possi-
bly because it was sacred and it was white.

Thespis' linen mask is described as "plain"\(^1\) that is, white or uncolored. It might be that Thespis invented the "plain linen" mask to be worn in his final play, **Pelias**, as a substitute for white lead or gypsum.

The story of Pelias, the uncle of Jason, who sends him after the golden fleece, is a *sparagmos* theme. Medea tricks Pelias' daughters into cutting him up in little pieces and boiling him in a caldron with the hope that he will be rejuvenated. Of course, he dies.

The full title of Thespis' play is, according to Suidas, **Phorbas of the Games (Ἀθλα) of Pelias**. Nearly every scholar translates Αθλα differently.\(^2\) Αθλα is a word commonly used in reference to athlete struggles or combats performed in competition for a prize. That part of the title may refer to the tragic contest itself. But it could also refer to athletic funeral games held in honor of Pelias. As Ridgeway has shown, both feasts and dramatic presentations were given in honor of the dead.

**Phorbas**, meaning fearful, is a good indication that the play dealt with Pelias' death. A play about the


death of Pelias necessarily involves women, the daughters of Pelias, who murder him, and of course Medea.

By this time, white had come to signify ghosts and the ghosts' original murderers, women. If, as suggested, the use of white gypsum or lead had gotten Thespis into trouble with Solon due to his parody of the white faced Orphics, he would have needed to find another way of conveying the same illusions. Plain, uncolored linen would have created a symbolism analogous to white gypsum without gypsum's political drawbacks. Considering the politics of the day, it is likely that Thespis did invent a plain linen mask to be used in his first tragic contest.

Since Pelias is a sparagmos theme, and white, the color for women, it is possible that Thespis' linen masks were employed for the purpose of depicting a chorus of women. The chorus members, men dressed as women, performing a sparagmos theme—death of the victim by women—brings to mind the ancient ritual of males impersonating females.

Thespis' plays, Youths, Priests and Pentheus, were likely parodies of sacred rituals; Pelias might have represented Thespis' final effort toward a true tragic drama. In this production his last contribution to the development of the theatrical mask took place. But Thespis' ending innovation was far from the last evolutionary change to take place in Greek tragic masks. History indicates that Thespis used nothing but plain
linen masks in his performances, which would mean that although white stood for woman, the hero Pelias, if present on stage, must have also worn a plain linen mask. Still, the plain linen masks represent an advance. Thespis by this time, might have discarded most of the ritual parody existing in earlier works, possibly under official pressure. The white linen-faced hero Pelias was not a detrimental element to the play. On the part of Thespis, this reflects a more strictly creative technique which would have allowed him a certain amount of poetic license.

Poetic license, or flexibility, may help explain what it was that Choirilos' "unspecified" change in masks rendered. Choirilos, according to legend, did something to alter Thespis' white linen masks. What he might have done was to make a distinction in the plain linen masks to signify males. Following that, Phrynichos, who is credited with the invention of truly feminine masks, possibly added the female features, and probably hair; and Aeschylus supplied the theater with his "colored and terrifying" masks of the Furies. From then on, the mask was an artistic tool, serving an aesthetic, as well as theatrical, function.
THE FUNCTION OF THE MASK

The highly developed theatrical mask of the fifth century was a far cry from Thespis' early disguises. One after another, the first dramatists added distinctions to its character. By the time of Aeschylus, approximately the date of the earliest archeological evidence, the tragic mask appeared attractive and natural, reflecting a human element in its design.

As the Greek theater rose from primitive ritual to art, it eliminated many ancient ritual elements without losing its essentially religious core. The mask was no exception; aesthetically, it came to function in the Greek theater as a visual means of conveying the spiritual value of Greek tragedy. But, besides its spiritual importance, the mask, according to many scholars, was retained in the theater because it served many practical, as well as dramatic, functions.

A number of writers have stressed the practical aspects as reason for the mask's retention in the theater; however, it is the opinion of this writer that although the mask did provide certain practical advantages, it
was primarily its aesthetic qualities, and not its technical province, that kept the mask as part of Greek dramatic art.

The standard argument favoring the mask's practical aspects is typical of that expressed by MacGowan and Rosse in their book, *Masks and Demons*:

It could contain a kind of megaphone to throw the voice across the great spaces of the open air theatres. It could be made a little larger than life in order that 40,000 might see it. With many tragic masks to choose from the three actors to whom Greek tragedy was limited could play many parts in the same play.

If the mask was actually a megaphone essential for audibility, there was good reason to retain its use in the theater. But Pickard-Cambridge reports that the modern experiments to re-create the mask, as near as possible along the lines of the ancients, has proved unsuccessful in obtaining anything like a megaphone effect, particularly with the linen masks which is said to have been used by Thespis. It is very doubtful that a megaphone could have been manufactured in the mask without using metal. Furthermore, there seems to have been no need for megaphones in the Greek theaters. Due to their construction design, the acoustics of the ancient theaters were nearly perfect. Peter Arnott states that

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"the bowl-shaped structure of the theater carried the words to the upper tiers of spectators, and the skene at the back acted as a sounding board." One might conclude, in view of the evidence, that the megaphone argument is not valid.

The theory that the Greeks donned the mask in order to be heard can be dismissed. If anything the mask would probably have muffled the sounds of the voices rather than increasing their volume. The fact that the masks were designed with huge mouth openings suggests that the Greeks were trying to compensate for a muffling problem.

Although the spectator could easily hear, viewing a tragedy in the ancient theaters was another matter. Again from Arnott, who has attended modern productions in the ancient theaters, it is learned that unmasked actors are almost completely lost. Even from the first row of seats, the fifth century actor would have appeared to be only four inches high, and from the back, less than an inch. It is obvious that any subtle changes of expression, such as are common in modern productions, would have been lost to the Greek audience, and it would have been advantageous to mask the actors in order to enlarge character and dramatic expression.

5 P. D. Arnott, An Introduction to the Greek Theater (Bloomington, 1959) p. 46.

6 Ibid., p. 48.
The argument that the three actor rule necessitated the use of masks, seems to be a conclusion drawn after the fact. Scholars have attempted to explain the three actor rule as a practical and/or aesthetic asset, believing that the mask was employed primarily to sustain this practice. But any aesthetic value gained from this rule is questionable since the aesthetic value of the Greek plays stands undiminished even in modern productions which do not adhere to the law of the three actors. Whatever practical value the mask actually offered to the Greek dramatist is somewhat trivial when compared with other dramatic effects that the mask could allow. More than likely, the matter of the three actors was merely a tradition. The mask simply ensured a continuance of the tradition.

From a dramatic standpoint, there were other more important functions for the mask in the theater than those usually listed. One valuable asset was that the mask could visually present numerous characterizations in a single play without having to rely on lengthy dialogue. The chorus members, for instance, always assumed some manner of homogeneous characterization, such as the women of Troy, or the men of Thebes.

The mask could even be used to provide divisions of the chorus to create two or more group personages. Sometimes, as in *The Eumenides*, varying masks allowed the chorus to become several homogeneous groupings. In this
play, there was a speaking chorus of Eumenides, a silent chorus of twelve citizens who formed a jury, a second silent group of Athenian citizens attending the trial of Orestes, and, finally, at the conclusion of the play, a chorus of women with torches who dress the Furies in purple robes and form a processional, singing the exodos.

Also present on the ancient stage were various supernumeraries. Aeschylus was especially fond of these silent portrayals. Although silent, visually they too were important characters because through their masks, they could project dramatic personages. Regardless of only three speaking actors, in terms of the mask, the number of different characterizations presented in a single play could be quite numerous.

The mask was well suited to Greek tragedy in general because of a tendency to portray types rather than individuals. The Greeks felt that above all else, characterizations must be consistent. Euripides, for example, was highly criticized for his "modern approach" to character portrayal because he allowed character development and change. The idea that characterization must be consistent leads to utter simplicity in character drawing. Francis Cornford's description of Agamemnon as a single state of mind affords an excellent example:

Agamemnon, for instance, is simply Hubris typified in a legendary person... As we see him he is not a man, but a single state of mind, which has never been preceded by other states of mind (except one, at the sacrifice in Aulis), but is isolated, without context, margin, or atmosphere. Every word he says, in so far as he speaks for himself and not for the poet, comes straight out of that state of mind and expresses some phase of it. He has a definite relation to Cassandra, a definite relation to Clytemnestra; but no relation to anything else. 8

The Greeks strove for the development of simplicity in character because they wanted their heroes to stand for something larger than life. In the manner of ancient rituals heroes, Agamemnon is hubris, Antigone is honor, Oedipus is also hubris, Medea is revenge, Hippolytus is innocence.

Instead of creating great personalities, the Greeks developed universal poetic figures. The poetic figure, often loosely described as a stock character, is less drawn from life than from poetic insight. He cannot be strictly dubbed a type character for he, like the mask he wore, was not based on reality. The poetic figure lived only in the Greek theater of myth and ritual, magic and marvel, the domain of metaphysical and spiritual catharsis.

The universal poetic character was the primary feature of Greek tragedy. Like his ancestor, the sacred king, the poetic character was the opposite of a

8 Cornford, p. 267.
realistic personality portrayal. The early Greek drama had no real characters at all, the actor dramatized the mask he wore. The mask did not portray the character, so much as the character portrayed the mask. In this way, the mask brought the spiritual essence of tragedy into the theater.

The mask had always been a means of conveying something beyond the ordinary: the mask transmits a nonhuman or superhuman quality, forsaking the real world and projecting a spiritual realm. A masked actor portrays someone, or something, quite apart from his own humanity. An ancient Greek actor, donned in his mask, as Cornford carefully explains, was a necessary aesthetic element of Greek tragedy:

The ancient drama wisely preserved the mask, which suppressed so far as possible the individuality and the accidental features of the actor, and represented in a conventional language of signs what the poet wished to be represented—the universal character. The masks, which modern writers wonder at, were retained... because the Greek spectator was trained in a tradition of art which taught him, when he went to the theater, to look for something more important than the damnable face of the celebrated Mr. So-and-So.

It might be well if the revival of Greek plays in the modern theater could be prohibited until the public had learned to tolerate nothing more realistic than the masked and stylized, puppet-like figures that trod, with stilted gait, the stage of Aeschylus and Euripides.9

9 Cornford, The Origin of Attic Comedy, p. 178.
In the ancient theater masks were used because the performers stood for a communal humanity. Reminiscent of early ritual, there were no individuals, just social and spiritual examples: the poet strove to create the universal poetic figure looming larger than life. It is for this reason he used the mask, since it could transcend the commonplace and move the spectator into a world of metaphysical existence.
THE TRAGIC STOCK CHARACTER MASK

Whatever Thespis, or Phrynichos, or Choirilos contributed to the art of the mask, is guesswork. There are no extant examples of these early tragic masks. Fortunately, beginning in the time of tragedy's first great master, Aeschylus, actual physical evidence of the mask is available.

The earliest archeological evidence of the tragic mask dates 470 B.C. It is a fragment of an oinochoe found in the Agora at Athens. On the fragment is a partial drawing of a youth, holding in his hand a large woman's mask. The mask is white and the face is framed with short, cropped black hair. In classical times the cropping of a woman's hair was a sign of mourning, bringing to mind the ritual shaving of the head—a ghost disguise.

On this mask, the hair falls in a natural line and there is no ὑκος present. The ὑκος, or raised elevation above the forehead, is regularly found on later tragic masks. Also absent is the usual wide, gaping mouth often present in later examples. Pickard-Cambridge suggests
that the artist, in rendering the mask in the painting, was responsible for the closing of the mouth, as well as for the fully painted-in eyes, which must have been left blank in the original.\(^{10}\)

Our next sources date from about 400 B.C. In nearly all of the examples of this period we find the \(\text{ὄγκος}\) being used as well as the wide open mouths. The faces on the masks, however, do not wear exaggerated tragic expression as do those of later periods. The faces are attractive and basically natural. Two of the three representations from this period are in a Relief from Peiraeus, showing three actors; two of whom are holding masks in their hands. One is the mask of a bearded man, with an \(\text{ὄγκος}\), but not distorted. The other mask is unfortunately very damaged, but possibly it is that of a woman with an open mouth and an \(\text{ὄγκος}\). The second example we possess is well preserved. The statue of the Muse from Mantua is holding the mask of a bearded man in her hand. He bears a serious expression, but naturally so, the mouth being open, not distorted, with a very high \(\text{ὄγκος}\).\(^ {11}\)

The volute-kater of Ruvo at Naples contains the most detailed painting of masks dated 400 B.C. The painting illustrates preparations for a satyr play.

\(^{10}\) Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, p. 179.

Presiding over the actors are Dionysus and Ariadne embracing. Love hovers above them. Below the gods, the figures are costumed and carry masks in their hands. One of the most interesting is thought to be Silenus. He is dressed in a shaggy suit, a lion pelt over his shoulder. In his hand is a mask of an old man, heavily bearded, a grave expression on the face, his forehead crowned with ivy. Twelve of the figures, probably chorus members, are dressed as satyrs. They have human feet and no horns, but wear short equine tails and shaggy loin cloths. Their masks are identical, dark beards, pointed ears, stubby noses. Their expressions are pleasant, but not jovial. The other dramatic characters, possibly Heracles, Laomedon, and Hesione, have very detailed features and abundant hair, and bear serious, but natural, expressions. None of the actors wear the ὄυκος, but two of them wear the pointed cap of the Asians. In all the masks the lips are open, but not excessively so. The leading characters' masks are very individualistic, each designed to depict unmistakably a certain mythical personage; conversely, the chorus masks give one homogeneous characterization to their wearers. Typical of this period, all of the masks are natural and attractive. 12

Two paintings of masks from the early fourth century exist: one is from a wall painting on the Gnathia Kater in Würzburg. It is the mask of a bearded, blond king wearing a small gold crown. The hair is raised by the crown but falls in a natural line and the eyes are painted in, presumably by the artist. The other mask is a relief on a monument in Athens. It has a large open mouth, and blank eyes, the face framed by natural looking light curls. This mask with its blank eyes and wild open mouth is more representative of the actual theatrical masks worn in the performances of Greek tragedy.  

In addition to the visible extant remains, Pollux—second century, A.D.—leaves a list of tragic stock masks, which he claims were worn in the theater of his day. His list gives a picture of the character types used in Greek tragedy. Pollux states that the masks he mentions were used in the productions of classical revivals, and it is reasonable to assume that his list was at least similar to the ones used in the original productions. He frequently mentions the δύκας and exaggerated tragic expressions not likely to have been seen on the faces of the fifth century, B.C., masks. Judging from the evidence of that period, the mask of the classic tragic

actor was relatively free from distortion, attractively presented, and quite natural in appearance. By Pollux's era, the masks developed a grotesque tragic quality. But his list indicates that a large number of varied characterizations with remarkable distinctions, and minute details, visually enhanced the ancient tragedies.¹⁴

Pickard-Cambridge explains the change in the stock tragic mask as one from individualization to standardization:

The texts also give very little information about the masks worn by the actors. It may be that the masks in tragedy, as in comedy, were far more individualized than they were when (perhaps towards the end of the fourth century) the tendency to standardization of typical masks had set in. A number of instances suggest that a hero or heroine who was regarded as beautiful or admirable wore fair hair; such were Phaedra, Iphigeneia, and Helena; Hippolytus and in some plays Orestes; in contrast with the wicked Polyneikes. Orestes; in his distress in Euripides' play of that name may have had a special mask displaying his squalor; and it seems almost certain that the feminine beauty of Dionysus in The Bacchae must have been shown in his mask. Personages in mourning were represented as shown, and the locks might be cut off during the play. Speaking generally, it seems likely that the poet and his mask maker enjoyed great freedom, and there is no hint of any unnaturalness or exaggeration.¹⁵

¹⁴ Please refer to chart in appendix.

¹⁵ Pickard-Cambridge, Dramatic Festivals, p. 184.
CHORUS MASKS

One source of information providing concrete evidence on the chorus masks are the vase paintings of the period. On several vases and katers one finds representations of chorus members who appear to be masked and dressed exactly alike. 16 The expressions are natural and attractive. The tragic choruses' masks appear not to have been individualized; rather, it seems that the chorus members were purposefully not differentiated in order to appear as one harmonious body. This is likely a carry-over from early ritual dating back before the time of Thespis, when the ritual participants disguised themselves identically.

The fifth century dramatists turned this custom into an artistic advantage—the beauty and aesthetic form of these ancient harmonious bodies has never been disputed. In later times, however, the chorus masks, like the stock masks, became extravagant and elaborately exaggerated, yet remaining homogenous.

16 Pickard-Cambridge, Dramatic Festivals, pp. 182-83. See figures 40a, 40b, and 40c.
Generally speaking, the fifth century chorus masks were not as distorted as in a later era, but the classical stage was not always moderate in its presentations. It seems that special homogenous masks for choruses existed for the stage, just as they did for ritual. For instance, the Furies of Aeschylus, as they appeared in his production of _The Eumenides_, were clearly modeled after the ancient Gorgons.

Tradition tells that when the Furies entered they emerged two by two. The effect was so devastating that the audience was frightened out of its wits. It is said that the women miscarried and young boys fainted.17

In the opening scene of _The Eumenides_ the Pythia describes the Furies, whom she has just seen in the temple of Apollo, comparing them to the Gorgons.

...I think I call them rather gorgons, only not gorgons either, since their shape is not the same, I saw some creatures painted in a picture once, who tore the food from Phineus, only these had no wings that could be seen; they are black and utterly repulsive, and they snore with breath that drives one back.

From their eyes drips the foul ooze, and their dress is such as is not right to wear in the presence of the gods' statues, nor even into any human house.18


In The Libation Bearers, Orestes, when he sees the Furies for the first time, again describes them as Gorgons:

Women who serve this house, they come like gorgons they wear robes of black, and they are wreathed in a tangle of snakes. I can no longer stay....

and,

Ah, Lord Apollo, how they grow and multiply repulsive for the blood drops of their dripping eyes.19

The Pythia also compared the Furies with those creatures who tore the food from Phineus. The myth of Phineus tells that the Harpies stole the food; they are described as "loathsome, winged, female creatures."20 In other words, they were Gorgons, like Medusa, who was always pictured in that manner. The original myth of Orestes explains what the traditional Erinnyes or Furies or Gorgons looked like: "These Erinnyes are crones, with snakes for hair, dog's heads, coal-black bodies, bats' wings, and bloodshot eyes...they carry brass-studded scourages, and their victims die in torment."21

The accepted mythical appearance of the Eumenides differs somewhat from the description of the Chorus' appearance as given by Aeschylus. Aeschylus' Furies

19 Aeschylus, p. 147.


21 Ibid., I, 122.
are Gorgons, but, with added theatricalism. The Pythia says that the creatures she sees are like Harpies or Gorgons, different in that they have no wings, and, the play never indicates that the Chorus carry the brass scourges mentioned in the myth. Also the dogs’ heads are not specified by Aeschylus. The Eumenides are described as having ooze dripping from their eyes in one place, and, blood dripping from their eyes in another. This suggests a dog-like trait and it is very probable that what frightened the fifth century audience so much was to see their imaginary conceptions of the ancient Harpie-Gorgons "come alive" before their eyes. The description of the Ancient Ones, while not totally consistent with what Aeschylus presented on stage was likely quite similar in effect.

Undoubtedly the tradition recorded by Suidas is based on Aeschylus’ introduction of the Eumenides. Aeschylus is given credit by Suidas as having first "used colored and terrifying masks,"22 Masks may well not have had much color differentiation previously, although, they were not all white as the legend seems to imply. It is far more likely that Aeschylus' innovation was not the introduction of color per se, but the extensive use of color to display specific dramatic impact, such as

22Pickard-Cambridge, Dramatic Festivals, p. 177.
"bloody ooze" on the faces—the bloody ooze is an artist rendition of the traditional "bloodshot" eyes of the Gorgons.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence available is that Aeschylus' masks of the Furies humanized them. They appeared as unnatural human types, as opposed to the mythical image which presents them in unnatural animal form. The humanizing increased the audience's horror and fear of them. When the Erinnyes took on the aura of reality and the audience identified with them, the general effect was terrifying indeed.

Dramatically, these masks played an important role. Aeschylus introduces the Furies in order to rehabilitate them into the Eumenides by the end of the play. The more human-like appearance of the ancient animal boggies made this transition plausible. The theatrical Furies wore black robes, probably had dark faces, as they are constantly referred to as the "Dark Ones;" their faces were streaked with blood and they had runny noses, bushy gray hair entwined with snakes, hugh drippy eyes, and mean expressions on their faces.

The influence of early ritual can be clearly seen in the Furies' masks but it is also evident that the animal qualities of these mythical characters
diminished. Clearer examples of this step can be found in Aristophanes' human-like animal choruses. This reflects an important religious transition from the primitive totem worship of early Greece to a higher intellectualization of their religious philosophy.
THE SPECIAL MASKS

The Greek dramatist seems to have enjoyed great creative freedom in the presentation of his plays. He was not restricted to the use of the tragic stock masks alone for his leading characters, as there is evidence that the Greeks sometimes employed especially designed masks in their productions. Some, such as the bull mask of Dionysus, were borrowed directly from ritual, and others, like many mentioned by Pollux, appear to have been purely imaginative.

In addition to his list of tragic stock masks, Pollux describes some special masks used in second century A.D. revivals of classical drama. Some of these also may have played a part in fifth century theater.

...tragedy employed special masks—ethkeu tróxya—such as those of Achaios wearing horns, the blind Phineus, Thamyris with one blue eye and one dark, Argos with his many eyes, Euphipe changing into a horse, Tyro with her face bruised by her mother Sidero, Achilles shaven in mourning of Patroklos Amymone, Priam, or the masks of a Titan, a Giant, a River, a Triton, a Fury, Death, or personifications, such as Muses, Nymphs, Horai, Pleiades, etc. 23

Pickard-Cambridge thinks that Dionysus' mask in *The Bacchae* may be an instance of the special mask in the classic theatre. His opinion is valid, and a careful examination of Euripides' test reveals that Dionysus may well have been represented by not only one, but three different masks, all of them specially designed for the production.

The god first appears in the prologue, he says that he is the god Dionysus disguised as a man.

> And here I stand, a god incognito, disguised as a man... 

and,

> To these ends I have laid my deity aside and go disguised as a man.24

In a later scene, Pentheus describes the stranger who has come to Thebes. Dionysus is this stranger; he is posing as a priest of his own cult.

> I am also told a foreigner has come to Thebes from Lydia, one of those charlatan magicians, with long yellow curls smelling of perfumes, with flushed cheeks and the spells of Aphrodite in his eyes. His days and nights he spends with women and girls...25


Further into the play when Pentheus meets with foreigner for the first time, he adds to the above description some more detail of Dionysus' appearance.

You are attractive, stranger, at least to women—which explains, I think, your presence here in Thebes. Your curls are long, You do not wrestle I take it. And what fair skin you have--you must take care of it--No daylight complexion; no it comes from the night...  

From the messenger's speech to Pentheus concerning the capture of Dionysus we hear that, "His ruddy cheeks were flushed as though with wine, and he stood there smiling...." This statement brings to mind the red-faced actor of Thespis' dramas. The red-face sacred king seems to be reflected in this mask.

With the above information assembled, we can now get a very good idea of Dionysus' first mask. He looks young, probably clean shaven, has the flushed red cheek of a maiden, the soft effeminate skin of a woman, long golden locks of "prissy" curls, an ironic smile on his face, a pale skin tone with no manly tan, and his eyes are glowing with the "spells of Aphrodite."

Euripides does not say that the disguised Dionysus is wearing the fawn-skin and wreath of ivy, which is the traditional dress of the god, worn by his

26 Euripides, p. 376.
27 Ibid., p. 375.
28 Ibid., p. 359.
worshippers. But, he does mention the thysus, and it is known from the messenger that Dionysus has been in the woods reveling with his followers; it may be assumed, since all others going to his revels are dressed in the ivy and fawn-skin, that, he too, must be adorned in that manner.  

Borrowed directly from ritual, the bull's horns may have been the second mask of Dionysus. It is introduced after he and Pentheus re-enter. Pentheus, in a woman's gown and wig, has been persuaded by Dionysus to accompany him into the woods in order to spy on the Maenads. As they enter, Pentheus comments on a change in Dionysus' appearance:

And you—you are a bull who walks before me there. Horns have sprouted from your head. Have you always been a beast? But now I see a bull.

29 Euripides, p. 365.

30 Ibid., p. 384. The bull's horns, as discussed, were worn in connection with the worship of Dionysus; the bull was his principle theophany. The bull's horns were associated with thunder-storms, being primarily a water charm. In the previous scene Dionysus has caused the palace of Thebes to topple with thunder and lightening.

Launch the blazing thunder-bolt of god! O lightenings, come! Consume with flame palace of Pentheus!

Continuing, Dionysus calls for the earth to quake, lightening to strike, and, thunder to roll. The Greeks probably used the burning torches and bull roarer, mentioned in Graves' account of Dionysus and the bull, to simulate the above effects. Graves, The Greek Myths, II, 112.

31 Euripides, p. 399.
The dramatic effect of having Dionysus change his mask heightens the irony of the scene. The audience is made clearly aware that Dionysus, who has appeared so gentle previously, and whose gentle words in this scene hypnotize Pentheus, is rapidly turning into a revengeful character. Euripides is using a change of mask, here, to visually match the change in tone of Dionysus' dialogue. His words remain gentle, but his emotions have changed. His mask reveals the irony of his words. This mask is familiar from the ritual accounts of its use; and, although it is hardly original in design, Euripides has made excellent dramatic use of it.

The bull mask, as reconstructed from the above evidence, seems to have been similar in features to the first mask, as Pentheus and the Chorus easily recognize the second Dionysus. However the smile may be gone now, the hair is probably short—as Pentheus cuts off Dionysus' locks in a previous scene—and his head is adorned with the headband supporting the bull's horns.

Arrowsmith thinks that Dionysus smiles throughout the play, but the tone of the scene in which Dionysus wears the bull horns indicates that his expression has hardened. Pentheus, for the first time, is a bit afraid of the "stranger", indicating that the smile has vanished.
The third change of mask may have taken place at the end of the play, where Dionysus appears as the god, no longer in disguise as a man. The inspiration for this mask, too, seems to have come directly from ritual.

Dionysus most likely appeared at this point on top of the skene in epiphany.

I am Dionysus the son of Zeus, returned to Thebes, revealed, a god to men.
But the men of Thebes blasphemed me. They said I came of mortal man...32

The dynamics of this entrance almost demand a change of mask. Dionysus is now speaking as a god, dealing out harsh sentences to those who have done him harm. He must appear as the all-powerful, revengeful god and not as the sweet, smiling youth of the opening scenes. I suggest that the mask he wore during his final appearance was not an original design, but was a copy of the traditional mask of Dionysus as the bearded, mature god of wine. The association of the audience with the standard mask and image of Dionysus

32 Euripides, p. 420. The brackets indicate Editor's reconstructions as there is a break in the manuscript just before the quoted lines.
would have increased their awareness of his brutality and cruel intentions. Euripides is reminding his audience that their "god of wine and revel" had another aspect to his personality. In fact, the entire play suggests a warning to the people of Athens concerning the wild worship of the god.

Such a mask existed, of course, at Lenaea, where it was paraded on a pole preceding the dramatic contests. It would have been very familiar to the spectators at City Dionysia, where The Bacchae was first produced. Also, the statue of the god, which was placed in the theater of Dionysus during the festival of City Dionysia, had a face similar to the Lenaea mask. Dionysus' image was in full view of the audience during the run of the play. The emotional impact of this "live" statue appearing on stage would have effectively invoked catharsis.

At this point in the play, Dionysus has become the angry, revengeful god of power; he is deathly serious and his words strike like arrows at the hearts of his subjects. The play ends in total despair and disillusionment, there is no irony in his commands to Cadmus and his daughter. Here the ironic smile, Arrowsmith thinks Dionysus is still wearing, certainly
has no place, and probably played no part.

But, it is a beautiful touch of irony that Euripides presents the god in all his glory at the end of the play. As Arrowsmith states, it is a remarkable indictment of the god, especially since it was presented in his own theater!

...that this terrible indictment of the anthropomorphic Dionysus The Bacchae makes would have been acted out in the hieros logos of the god and presented in the theatre of Dionysus.33

Euripides seems to have used not one special mask for Dionysus, but three, each in turn helping to display some further development of the complicated personality of the Great God of Wine. And, in every mask displayed, there is at least a tinge of the original ritual disguise present: the first mask of Dionysus with flushed red cheeks, which, suggests the red faced sacred kings; the bull's horns, belonging to the ancient rain ceremonies; and, the final mask of Dionysus, which, may have been a copy or take-off on the mask of his oracle ghost.

SUMMARY

In summarizing the evidence of the mask in the fifth century, it may be concluded that: (1) although the mask in the classical theater was designed with a great deal of personal creative freedom on the part of the playwright and the mask maker, the influences of early ritual were unmistakably at work in their creations; (2) the tragic choruses were masked and dressed alike in order to convey the impression of one harmonious body, which gave them great theatrical, as well as, religious value; (3) the special mask borrowed from ritual, was used, by this time, for dynamic effects, which were heightened by its ritual connotations; (4) by mid-fifth century, the appearance of the stock character mask was natural and attractive, being relatively free from distortion. But, finally, by Pollux's day, these characters became the familiar stock figures of ancient tragedy. Having lost their original religious significance entirely by the Roman era, they came to be enjoyed for their literary and theatrical values alone.
CONCLUSION

The big step from ritual to dramatic use of the mask was the humanizing effect which we clearly saw take place in Aeschylus' masks.

The mask of the fifth century was devoid of the earlier animalistic qualities and the non-human, ghost-like disguise effects. The mask's changes from early barbarianism to the later naturalism is reflective of the whole of Greek religious growth.

By the fifth century the mask had lost most of its original power. It, like the art of tragedy itself, had risen from early ritual to serve a truly aesthetic value in the theater. No one consciously thought of the mask as an amulet to protect the actor from the ghost of the tragic hero, no one mentions that those in white linen masks are women, nobody assumes by Aeschylus' era that if Agamemnon is wearing bull's horns that he is going to make rain, only a few were dimly aware that the ancient spirit of the dead hero was originally incarnate in the mask, nonetheless these
were the original functions of the mask.

As mask making developed into an art, and tragedy rose to an aesthetic height, the spirit of the hero, or god whom the mask represented, was, by implication incarnate in the mask. The actor donned the mask and was filled with the spirit of the god or hero; through the mask he generated this spirit to his audience. The mask of the Greeks was an all important dramatic tool because of its ability to go beyond reality and project the essence of their drama—the spiritual realm. It enabled the great Greek dramatists to give to posterity that unsurpassable aesthetic creation—the universal poetic character.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
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APPENDIX
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Σωφιδέα</td>
<td>Cropped-beard</td>
<td>a) the eldest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) white hair</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) hair attached to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d) close-cut beard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e) sunken cheeks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possible the mask of Priam.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Λευκόσκενήρ</td>
<td>White-gray man</td>
<td>a) gray hair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(haired) man</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) low δυκασ</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) curls round head</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d) stiff beard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e) projecting brows</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f) pale complexion</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Bieber finds an example from Pompeii.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Μαραπομάλης</td>
<td>Spartans—</td>
<td>a) dark hair with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Spartan citizen)</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) gray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) pale face</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Μνημόλειος</td>
<td>Dark (complexioned)</td>
<td>a) dark skin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) curly hair and beard</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) large δυκασ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d) cruel face</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(τραχύς—rude)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perhaps one of the masks used for Heracles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Λευκόσκενήρ</td>
<td>Yellow (haired)</td>
<td>a) light curls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) small δυκασ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) good complexion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Βαθύθερας</td>
<td>Man-like monster</td>
<td>a) similar to above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) pale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This chart is prepared from the information of Pollux, as recorded by Pickard-Cambridge in Dramatic Festivals of Athens, pp. 190-93. The Greek translations are my own.
## Pollux's List of Tragic Masks

**Young Men (5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Ποικύπερις</td>
<td>Honest youth (literally good for all work)</td>
<td>a) thick dark hair</td>
<td>Maybe Achilles or Perseus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) good complexion leaning toward swarthiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ὀλιγός</td>
<td>Destructive banful, cruel; also refers to kinky hair</td>
<td>a) hair closely to Ὀγκος (large)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) brows raised</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) grim look</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. πέρηπδος</td>
<td>Somewhat curled hair</td>
<td>a) like above, #8</td>
<td>The mask is πασσός Ἰππίνας (bears a god of good).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) but younger</td>
<td>Beiber thinks Dionysus wore it in The Bacchae, but there is no mention of bright red cheeks, which Dionysus is especially said to have had. Pickard-Cambridge also disagrees with Beiber because the description so carefully given in the text implies a special mask.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ἀπόλλων</td>
<td>Soft, tender</td>
<td>a) light colored curls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) pale complexion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) bright expression (σταδίς - gay, joyful)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO.</td>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>TRANSLATION</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>\μνωρόγ</td>
<td>dirty, filthiness</td>
<td>a) looks swollen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) downcast eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) disclosed skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d) very dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e) long light hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>\εὐσκεπός</td>
<td>second dirty, filthy youth</td>
<td>a) similar to above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>\νικαρός</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) thinner, younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>\εὐσκεπός</td>
<td>pale, yellow, shallow</td>
<td>a) hair all around head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>\κχρός</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) complexion of a sick man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) for a ghost or sick man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>\τρόφωρος</td>
<td>firmly set, pale, yellow, shallow</td>
<td>a) is like #7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) but pale to denote sickness or love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>TRANSLATION</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>δίφθερτος</td>
<td>Slave (male) clad in a leather jerkin</td>
<td>a) wears a cap, no ὄνυξις, b) white, straight hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>δίφθερτις</td>
<td>Slave (female) clad in leather, but younger</td>
<td>c) is the oldest d) pale e) unkind sneer f) drawn up forehead g) gloomy eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>ψηνωτόγυνος</td>
<td>Wedge bearded Slave</td>
<td>a) in prime of life b) high ὄνυξις, flat top, hollow sides c) light hair d) pointed beard e) stern red face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>ὰνώσιμος</td>
<td>Snub-nose slave</td>
<td>a) turned up nose b) high ὄνυξις, c) hair straight up middle of forehead d) red face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>οἰκετικόν γυνή</td>
<td>Old slave woman (household slave)</td>
<td>a) no ὄνυξις, b) lambswool cap c) wrinkled face</td>
<td>Suitable for the nurse in Hippolytus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>οἰκετικόν ηεκόουρον</td>
<td>Middle aged slave (household slave)</td>
<td>a) longish hair b) part grey c) low ὄνυξις, d) pale complexion</td>
<td>Half-shorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>TRANSLATION</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>REFERENCE</td>
<td></td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Μολύξικτον</td>
<td>Citizen lady with falling</td>
<td>a) oldest, most dignified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kοτάκηκος</td>
<td>hair--long</td>
<td>b) long white hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) moderate ςύκος</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d) rather pale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Ελαμπέδεα</td>
<td>older married woman, wife</td>
<td>a) grey hair, tinged with yellow</td>
<td>Mask is significant of Calamity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γυναικίδεα</td>
<td>but Freed woman (widow)</td>
<td>b) small ςύκος</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) shoulder length hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Πτέρακηκος</td>
<td>Pale falling hair</td>
<td>a) short hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ουράς</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) shorn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Μολύξικτος</td>
<td>middle aged recently half-</td>
<td>a) like #23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ουράκηκος</td>
<td>shorn</td>
<td>b) she is not as pale</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Μολύξικτος</td>
<td>Maiden girl--usually virgin</td>
<td>a) no ςύκος</td>
<td>Tragic mask of mourners, with hair cut close.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ουρακηκεισ</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) parted hair, combed back and</td>
<td>Possibly mask of Electra.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cut short</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) rather pale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. the second</td>
<td>Mourning virgin</td>
<td>a) like above, #25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Μολύξικτος</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) but no parting of hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ουρακηκεισ</td>
<td></td>
<td>b) no close-cut hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Κάρπη (2)</td>
<td>(Maiden) virgin bride</td>
<td>a) youthful face</td>
<td>Maybe mask of Danaeans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) young girl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>