



The Bacchae

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Places Discussed

Pentheus's palace. Home of the Theban ruler Pentheus, Dionysus's cousin, in front of which the action of Euripides' play takes place. The palace represents the social structure of Thebes and the power of its king. For this reason the god drives the women of Thebes, who had refused to accept Pentheus willingly, away from the palace. The women worship him in the countryside, that is, beyond the boundary of Thebes. This place provides a way for Aeschylus's Greek audiences to connect with the plot of this exotic play. When Dionysus is captured and brought before the palace, Pentheus questions his divinity and imprisons him in the palace as a fraud. In retaliation, Dionysus demonstrates his power and divinity by destroying the palace and driving Pentheus insane. The destruction of the palace illustrates the ability of the god to dominate human civilization in general and Theban society in particular. The tension between the worlds of Pentheus and Dionysus is further emphasized by the place of Pentheus's death, which occurs offstage. Savagely torn apart by the women of Thebes, including his own mother, the king dies not in his city but in Dionysus's realm, the countryside.

Bibliography:

Euripides. *The Bacchae of Euripides*. Translated by Geoffrey S. Kirk. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Provides a translation and notes that are useful to anyone new to Euripides' last complete play. Kirk provides a notable comparative text to other classic and ground-breaking versions of Euripides' play.

Euripides. *The Bacchae of Euripides*. Translated by C. K. Williams. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990. This version of the play is useful primarily for Martha Nussbaum's introduction, which presents an alternative view of the play and sets it in relief against another Greek tragedy.

Grene, David, and Richmond Lattimore, ed. *Greek Tragedies*. Vol. 3. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1960. Richmond Lattimore is a scholar known for his work on Euripides. Arguably the most faithful translation and introduction to *The Bacchae* published to date. Includes contextual notes and a clear view to an understanding of Euripides at the end of his career.

Segal, Charles. *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' "Bacchae."* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983. Provides contextual background for *The Bacchae* and explains why it is such a radical text. Also discusses other works that deal with Dionysus and speculates on Euripides' response to those texts.

Soyinka, Wole. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1974. Nobel Prize-winning African author Wole Soyinka provides a new interpretation of *The Bacchae*, which brings to the fore important questions in the original text. Soyinka uses a communion rite to explain the death of Pentheus and the need to strew his body across the countryside.

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