

The Baccheye  
The Eyes and (Mis)Perception within Euripides' *Bacchae*

Much ink has been spilled on the nature of madness within Greek tragedy, as well as the link between the various senses and such madness. Current scholarship indicates a relationship between the eyes and madness in tragedy, as well as a complicated relationship between the verbal actions of sight, seeing, and who is seeing what within Euripides' *Bacchae* (Gill, 1996; Singer, 2018; Foley, 1980; Gregory, 1985). Further, twisted, contorted eyes are attested as a symptom of madness and appears in plays other than just *Bacchae* (*Heracles* being a notable example) (Singer, 2018). However, this relationship between the eyes and madness, and more broadly the eyes and perception, can be further explored. There exists presently no discussion concerning the various nouns for the physical eyes included within *Bacchae* and their meaning to the play – yet mentions of the physical eyes often seem to correlate with a character's mental process (or failure therein) in a wide majority of uses within *Bacchae*.

Three nouns referring to the eyes are utilized throughout *Bacchae* – ὄμμα, ὄσσε, and κόρη. I propose that Euripides' utilization of these nouns within the text relates specifically to important aspects of a character's (mis)perception or abilities to reason. Typically, these nouns signify a misperception of reality or misunderstanding for the character whose eyes are described (501, 692, 1060, 1087, 1123, 1167, 1264, 1385), but occasionally they signal a misperception by the character employing the noun (236, 469). Through an analysis of each of the eleven instances that these words appear within the text, I will demonstrate that each use of these nouns marks a distinct and critical moment of misperception, misunderstanding, or a dramatic shift in a character's mental capacities for reason (whether it being a descent into madness or a return to normal cognitive functioning), and that these nouns mark the specific place in the text that these

shifts occur. At the level of line structure, I will show that the usage of these nouns often occurs within an antithetical relationship, with *ῥῆμα*, *ῥοσσε*, or *κόρη* acting as a fulcrum between true and false perceptions. Moreover, it will be shown that many of these instances appear at critical junctures in the play's plot – Pentheus' interrogation of Dionysus; Pentheus' death; Agave's anagnorisis; and even in the final spoken lines of the play – and that the utilization of these nouns is the signpost with which Euripides deliberately marks these (mis)perceptions and mental capacity within the text of the play.

#### Works Cited

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