

mkhicks3@terpmail.umd.edu

University of Maryland - College Park

The μανία of Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*

Driving Questions

1. What would it mean for Pentheus to fully accept Dionysus into the city of Thebes?
2. What would it mean for Pentheus to accept his own μανία, to break down not only the physical boundaries around Thebes, but also the ones that he has built around his own mind and those of his citizens?
3. Does Pentheus know what, exactly, he is keeping at bay?

Thesis

1. Pentheus' containment and control of the μανία of Dionysus and that of his own is necessary for the prosperity and preservation of Thebes, its citizens, and himself.
2. Pentheus must know what he is fighting against, what it is exactly that he is working to control.

Major Claims

1. 2-fold identity of Dionysus (the stranger vs. the divinity)
 - a. Pentheus does not truly understand either of these identities
2. Pentheus must know the nature of the part of himself that he works so hard to contain, this μανία that he harbors inside of himself.
3. Just as Pentheus does not accept the worship of Dionysus into the city of Thebes, because he does not recognize him as the divinity which he is, Pentheus does not know who he himself is nor what he is doing.
4. Pentheus cannot live without Dionysus, and his demise is his punishment for attempting to do so.
5. However, it is not Pentheus himself that Dionysus is trying to destroy, but instead the tight control and limitations that the King of Thebes administers.
6. Pentheus was correct in recognizing the threat that Dionysus posed to his city and to himself.

7. Pentheus is only able to experience his own *μανία* and know his whole being when he allows himself to be pulled towards a more middle ground; for to reside at either extreme, as Euripides shows us, results in death.

Passage 1: (*Bacchae* 215-220)

Πε: ἔκδημος ὦν μὲν τῆσδ' ἐτύγχανον χθονός,
κλύω δὲ νεοχμὰ τήνδ' ἀνὰ πτόλιν κακά,
γυναῖκας ἡμῖν δώματ' ἐκλελοιπέναι
πλασταῖσι βακχεῖαισιν, ἐν δὲ δασκίοις
ὄρεσι θαάζειν, τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα
Διόνυσον, ὅστις ἔστι, τιμώσας χοροῖς·

Pe: I happened to be away from this land,
but I hear of the new evils throughout this city,
that our women have abandoned their homes
in feigned Bacchic frenzy, and in the thick-shaded
mountains move rapidly, honoring with dances
the new god Dionysus, whoever he is.

Passage 2: (*Bacchae* 221-225)

Πε. πλήρεις δὲ θιάσσοις ἐν μέσοισιν ἐστάναι
κρατῆρας, ἄλλην δ' ἄλλοσ' εἰς ἐρημίαν
πτώσσουσιν εὐναῖς ἀρσένων ὑπηρετεῖν,
πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δὴ μαινάδας θυσκόους,
τὴν δ' Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ' ἄγειν τοῦ Βακίου.

Pe. they have placed filled wine-bowls in the middle of their Bacchic revel,
slinking off one after another towards a
desolate place to serve the beds of men,
indeed, they consider themselves to be Maenads, priestesses,
but they rank Aphrodite before Bacchus.

Passage 3: (*Bacchae* 72-75)

Χο. ὦ μάκαρ, ὅστις εὐδαίμων
τελετὰς θεῶν εἰδὼς
βιοτὰν ἀγιστεύει καὶ
θιασεύεται ψυχὰν

Co. Oh blessed one, whoever has known
the rites of the god is fortunate
he lives his life purely and
initiates his soul

Bibliography

- Carpenter, Thomas H., and Christopher A. Faraone, editors. *Masks of Dionysus*. Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Csapo, Eric. "Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction." *Phoenix*, vol. 51, no. 3/4, 1997, pp. 253–295.
- Diller, Hans. "Euripides' Final Phase: The Bacchae." *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, edited by Erich Segal, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 357–369.
- Dodds, E. R. "The Blessings of Madness." *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1963, pp. 64–101.
- Euripides. *Bacchae*. Edited by E. R. Dodds, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Foley, Helene P. "The Masque of Dionysus." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. 110, 1980, pp. 107–133.
- Kalke, Christine M. "The Making of a Thyrsus: The Transformation of Pentheus in Euripides' Bacchae." *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 106, no. 4, 1985, pp. 409–426.
- LaRue, Jene A. "Prurience Uncovered: The Psychology of Euripides' Pentheus." *The Classical Journal*, vol. 63, no. 5, Feb. 1968, pp. 209–214. *JSTOR*.
- Lynch, William F. "Euripides' 'Bacchae': The Mind in Prison." *CrossCurrents*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1975, pp. 163–174.
- Perris, Simon. "Perspectives on Violence in Euripides' 'Bacchae'." *Mnemosyne*, vol. 64, no. 1, ser. 4, 2011, pp. 37–57.
- Podlecki, A. J.. "Individual and Group in Euripides' Bacchae." *L'Antiquité Classique*, vol. 43, 1974, pp. 143–165.
- Saxonhouse, Arlene W. "Freedom, Form, and Formlessness: Euripides' 'Bacchae' and Plato's 'Republic'." *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 108, no. 1, Feb. 2014, pp. 88–99.
- Segal, Charles. *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*. Princeton University Press, 1982.
- . "Etymologies and Double Meanings in Euripides' Bacchae." *Glotta*, vol. 60, no. 1/2, 1982, pp. 81–93.
- Simon, Bennett. *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*. Cornell University Press, 1978.