

## Dionysos and His Twisted Sisters: An Accidental *Bacchae* and Pop Culture Classics

One of the great challenges of teaching Classics is convincing students—many of whom may be taking a course out of requirement not choice—that, despite the gulfs of time and expression that lie between us and the ancient writers we love, the desires, concerns, and joys of ancient Greeks and Romans are as relevant in the time of Beyonce as they were in the time of Agave. To that end, modern adaptations of Classical material, even loose ones, effectively stimulate student engagement with more remote or difficult (in their eyes) material. This is even truer when the adaptation or resonance is unexpected.

And so: Twisted Sister's music video for their enduring 1984 hit "We're Not Gonna Take It" is an unexpectedly accessible, teachable, and enjoyable adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*—apparently by total coincidence. In this audio-visual presentation, I will begin by outlining the resonances between the two works: the arrival into the domain of a ruler obsessed with authority and order of "a pleasure giving, laughing god with long blond hair" (Segal 203); that ruler's undoing through violence, culminating with a tree and a threnody by a mother figure; the works' shared debt to hymns; a sensory doubling two-thirds of the way through, and more. I will explain the pedagogical value I see in these resonances, and suggest classroom discussion that could arise at several levels.

I will also briefly investigate the circumstances and implications of this notable instance of this so-called "multiple invention" or "accidental pastiche." Is there anything in the works' particular moments that would lead "the proverbial angry young man, mad at the world, writing a song to express that just total frustration and disdain for everything that I believed was

somehow in my way” to choose such a set of setpieces and metaphors so similar to Euripides’, with, as I will also show, seemingly little or no exposure (Jones 2025 3:30)?

Finally, I will offer a few more pop-cultural inroads to Classical concepts with which I have had teaching success.

#### Works Cited

- Jones, Jaybeau. "Twisted Sister Frontman, Dee Snider." January 8, 2025. *Music Drives Us*. Podcast, audio, 27:44. Accessed October 4, 2025. <https://www.musicdrivesus.org/latest-news/music-drives-us-podcast-featuring-dee-snider>.
- Segal, Charles. "Introduction, *Bacchae* [*Bakkhai*]." Introduction to *The Complete Euripides : Volume IV: Bacchae and Other Plays*, by Euripides, Peter Burian, and Alan Shapiro. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- "Twisted Sister - We're Not Gonna Take It (Official Music Video)." Video, 4:32. *YouTube*. Posted by Twisted Sister, August 3, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xmckWVPRaI>.