

Plot

With *The Bacchae*, Euripides followed closely the classically established structure of the Greek Tragedy. Regardless of the fact that this piece was the first to blur the line between tragedy and comedy, its structure remains fairly classic and simple. The Chorus provides the Exposition, followed by a Prologue from Dionysus and a Parados from the Chorus. Following this, the play is divided into alternating scenes and stasmas until the Epilogue, which is also given by the Chorus. The plot goes as follows: Dionysus is upset because the people of Thebes have not honored and feared him, so he sets out to drive mad a group of followers (The Bacchae), who spend their days reveling in the forest. He comes down in mortal form and convinces Pentheus, King of Thebes, to go to the Bacchae and catch them in their act of revelry. He does so, and is torn to pieces in a blind fury by all of the Bacchic followers, including his mother, Agave. Upon returning from the forest, Agave learns from her father, Cadmus, that she was a part of the murder of her son. With the Epilogue, the Chorus states to the audience that the best choice is not to question the gods.

The reversal of this piece occurs to every character except for Dionysus. Pentheus experiences a reversal when Dionysus convinces him to cross-dress and visit his followers. As the play's tragic hero, his integrity is compromised by the experience, since a young, stoic king of the time would not be expected to venture into the woods to spy on a group of frolicking, deranged women. Granted, he knew not the tragedy that would soon befall him, but the reversal occurs nevertheless. With additional characters, specifically Agave, the reversal occurs through Dionysian manipulation.

Since this play has an obvious moment of recognition, it has a complex plot. There could even be an argument for multiple recognitions, although one holds precedent over the other for making this a complex plot. The first recognition occurs when Cadmus informs Agave of the error of her ways. She and the other Bacchic followers saw Pentheus in his disguise and thought him to be a lion, so once she learns

of her incorrect assumption, the first recognition occurs. The second and more prominent recognition comes with the epilogue, wherein the Chorus gives a PSA of sorts to always honor, respect, and fear the Gods. They recognize that the characters erred in their behavior and judgment, thus providing the play's message and basis for a complex plot.

Character

Dionysus appears as the leading character in this play, which is fitting for a Greek tragedy of this magnitude, especially with the Chorus' epilogue being what it is. Fitting the typical bill of a conceited Greek God, Dionysus speaks very openly about his unhappiness with the people of Thebes, and their unwillingness to respect, honor and fear him. This specific anger combined with the personality of Dionysus as it had been established in the time of Euripides provides a nice juxtaposition of character versus action. Dionysus' character comes across as cunning and comedic, shrewd yet lighthearted. While we assume that he knew he was leading Pentheus to almost certain death, his attitude before the slaughter comes across as lighthearted and breezy. Yes, he is a God, and he is part of a group of gods historically known to be ruthless and cruel, but this portrayal shows just how theatre can make even a god seem human.

Pentheus is the play's tragic hero because of his stubborn and proud nature, and his desire to rule a clean kingdom. He is the current King of Thebes, and his title was bestowed upon him by his grandfather, Cadmus. In studying this play, Pentheus does not jump out as the classic example of a tragic hero. His established character, particularly in scenes with Dionysus, comes across as young, nervous and inexperienced. He does have a very obvious hamartia, however, since his pride in the name of his country leads him to the Bacchae, in an effort to clear his name as a ruler and restore order to the kingdom. In classic style, his hubris leads to his death at the hands of those who do not understand him.

Agave and Cadmus provide healthy foils to each other, and, in part, to Dionysus and Pentheus. Agave spends a majority of the play in a mad Bacchic revelry, and ultimately murders for him, not knowing what she is doing. Cadmus, while a supporter and follower of Dionysus, recognizes that Agave's actions are not healthy and are, in fact, a result of widespread disrespect for the god. As her father, and father to Semele, who was widely disbelieved for having birthed Dionysus, Cadmus understands the importance of trust and honor in the presence of a god. So, when Agave returns from the mountain after murdering her son, Cadmus shows wisdom and establishes himself as a wiser man than most when he aids in her recognition.

Idea

In traversing the script and considering the ideas of rebellion, conformity, discombobulation and rage, we all agreed that our general idea was "Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll." Of course, we understand with this that a production of *The Bacchae* cannot be produced with a mere vague, nonspecific idea of long hair and bright colors. So, we specified. The image of the Bacchic followers frolicking and making deranged love in a field brought forth the vivid image of Woodstock, with flower children reveling in the music of Jimi Hendrix, and using the widespread teachings of love, not war, to enjoy each other's company and preach about acceptance. Of course, this movement got out of hand, and the hippies were ostracized for their protest. From this, we saw their similarity to Dionysus' followers in *The Bacchae*.

A similar idea garnered from studying the script was "Sticking it to the Man." So, in a way, the Rock 'n' Roll motif comes full-circle. In the play, a great deal of dramatic action stems from the fact that the people of Thebes do not respect Dionysus. Of course, in this time, the Olympian Gods were respected ten-fold above the local politicians, so the lack of respect shown to Pentheus is nothing compared to the lack of respect shown to Dionysus. Only Dionysus can really punish the people of

Thebes. Thus, he drives them mad and they kill, etc. Until the recognition occurs, the idea of “Sticking it to the Man” drives the action of the play.

Diction

As is the case in most modern translations of classical plays, the dialogue in *The Bacchae* had a very conversational, modern and colloquial mood. Even though the piece is technically a drama, the banter, specifically between Dionysus and Pentheus, felt almost lighthearted and farcical. Of course, this is more than likely the cause of the translator, and the original text likely seemed a lot colder, but still, the format and word choice in the dialogue provided a relaxed atmosphere to an otherwise high-stakes plot. Part of this was juxtapositional choices between characters, as well. In the scene between Pentheus and Dionysus, the juxtaposition between the characters is made clear through the dialogue. Dionysus comes across as loose and relaxed, modern and free, while Pentheus is rigid and strict, stiff and harsh. While each character fluctuates slightly on these descriptions, the divide is very clear.

In terms of format, one element that separates this script from most Greek tragedies is the structure of the scenes. In most works by Euripides, scenes are dominated by interchanging monologues, trading point after point with paragraph after paragraph. While there are moments of great monologue in this play, for the most part, the scenes are comprised of small, specific dialogue that is intricately important to the plot. Once again, a good example of this idea comes in the scenes between Pentheus and Dionysus. They speak in quick, alternating lines, exchanging pieces of information vital to development of plot and character. This format breaks slightly when the Messenger enters, speaking greatly of what he saw of the Bacchic followers.

Music

There is very little silence in *The Bacchae*. This happens in part due to the aforementioned rapid-fire dialogue, and this stems from the need to drive forward the plot at a blistering pace. When broken

down, the plot of this play encompasses a great deal of new information in a decently short amount of time. With every exchange, regardless of character, the audience receives a new piece of information, and all of it becomes relevant to the plot and the culmination of the play. If named characters speak onstage, they always provide a new plot development, and during the stasmas, the Chorus provides a great deal of pointed (if not a tad biased) statements of observation on the characters and their treatment of the Greek Gods. Their dialogue patterns are extremely melodic, since each individual member of the chorus speaks in an identical format.

The musical elements of the play stem mostly from the dialogue and its patterns, but there are two key exceptions. In this translation, the chorus is noted to have tambourines, which they presumably are to use during the stasmas. These go along identically with the quick dialogue. Additionally, the earthquake in one of the Interludes provides a loud booming noise, a huge juxtaposition to the pattern of the dialogue.

Spectacle

Much like the intricately-woven plot of the Newbery Award-Winning novel Holes, the spectacle of *The Bacchae* provides a lot of small detail that means an enormous amount when moved to a larger scale. The entire play takes place in front of the skene, the three-door house, which is described in incredibly specific detail. This element perfectly offsets and supports the fact that the audience sees none of the action provided in the dialogue. The Bacchic followers are never seen in their natural habitat, as often as their actions are described in great detail. Pentheus' death is not shown, but his body is the last thing onstage, which makes for an interesting culmination of theme. The people of Thebes historically disrespect Dionysus, whose rage is the intrusion of the plot. Since their disrespect and horrendous actions in the forest lead to the death of their King, one could surmise that Euripides

intended to leave his body onstage as a reminder. Should the audience attend the play with any inclination to disrespect a God, the bloody remains of a King might squash their plans.

Past the blood, there are several small elements of spectacle that define this play. The audience experiences the Earthquake, but not the bloodshed, showing that a god's rage can be more powerful than a human's. However, human characterization and influence comes across in the incredibly specific costuming noted in the script. The Bacchic followers are specifically noted to wear deerskin and tote Dionysus' thyrsos, and Dionysus himself carries a large thyrsus throughout all of his appearances onstage. Pentheus' drag costume showcases the power of the gods to humiliate disloyal followers. Additionally, while the play includes a tragic hero whose death is the result of hubris, there is not a single use of the Deus Ex Machina noted in the script.