

## **Notes on Bacchae by Euripides**

Lines and discussion topics:

1. Line 820 – Did Pentheus want to observe the maenads?
2. Line 215 – New brand of God
3. Line 1300 – Why was Cadmus punished?
4. Lines 902-905 – How was the Odyssey reflected in Bacchae?
5. Line 274 – The two first principles of human life
6. Lines 330-340 – Family Honor
7. Line 310 – Tiresias' warning
8. Why is Elvis on the front cover?
9. Can you compare Pentheus to Telemachus?

### **Line 820 – Did Pentheus want to observe the maenads?**

Pentheus talks to Dionysus and tells him that he wants to observe the women in the dancing rituals, probably mostly out of curiosity.

How much of this was Dionysus' influence on Pentheus?

Pentheus probably wanted to see if the rituals were for real.

### **Line 215 – New brand of God**

This line was mentioned by Pentheus, showing his strong disapproval of the “new brand of God” and expressing his desire to kill his followers, the Maenads.

Would you want the leader of a group to lead you to the slaughter of his women?

This situation is analogous to a politician trying to shut down a “titty” bar.

Dionysus had it planned out from the beginning, making Pentheus dress as a woman and hide in a tree before selling him out and getting him killed.

In a way this strong disapproval of the new brand of God led to Pentheus' demise, because the Gods' had a much greater power of persuasion, as shown by Dionysus' "plan".

### **Line 1300 – Why was Cadmus punished?**

The reason why Cadmus was punished was because there was a connection with Greek family views. Is Cadmus guilty by association?

With Greeks, while Gods were superior to man, they were not morally superior as the circumstances of punishment suggest.

### **Lines 902-905 – How was the Odyssey reflected in Bacchae?**

Odysseus and Dionysus were both put up as perfect examples of how to succeed. Both had similarities in how they took back their kingdom – Dionysus came back as an effeminate man; Odysseus came back as a beggar. Both showed long periods of struggle as well.

### **Can you compare Pentheus to Telemachus?**

(Tied in with reflection of the Odyssey)

T = Telemachus, P = Pentheus

T. was protecting his mother from suitors  
P. was watching his mother drink and dance

T. in favor of Gods  
P. in disfavor of Gods

T. was in the Odyssey, which was portrayed as an epic  
P. was in Bacchae, which was portrayed as a play  
Therefore there was a difference in the way the audience was to view characters.

T. was helped into dominance by Athena  
P. was dominant throughout the play until he was brought down by Dionysus

T. succeeds in his goal  
P. fails because he dies

Conclusion: Telemachus and Pentheus were not really similar.

### **Line 274 – The two first principles of human life**

An interesting description of Dionysus being able to produce wine as “that which helps forget the evils of the day.”

Tiresias praises Dionysus.

Dionysus gave men the ability to gladden their hearts

Wine wasn't discovered until Dionysus was born.

Food nourishes the body, wine nourishes the soul.

Since we don't have a date for when this happened, we don't know for sure if this (wine) was prevalent before Dionysus was born.

Life was painful in the days when wine and Dionysus were not in existence.

### **Line 310 – Tiresias' warning**

These warnings were based off the lines mentioned about the two principles.

Tiresias' words about the two principles of life acted as a basis for the warning.

Tiresias was accepting change, whereas Pentheus was opposing change.

Tiresias provides the moral of the story through warning against Pentheus' actions.

### **Why is Elvis on the front cover?**

A possible significance of Elvis being in the cover could be because that his god-like status as the “King of Rock and Roll” was analogous to Dionysus' happening trend of drunken revelry, both of which were major changes.