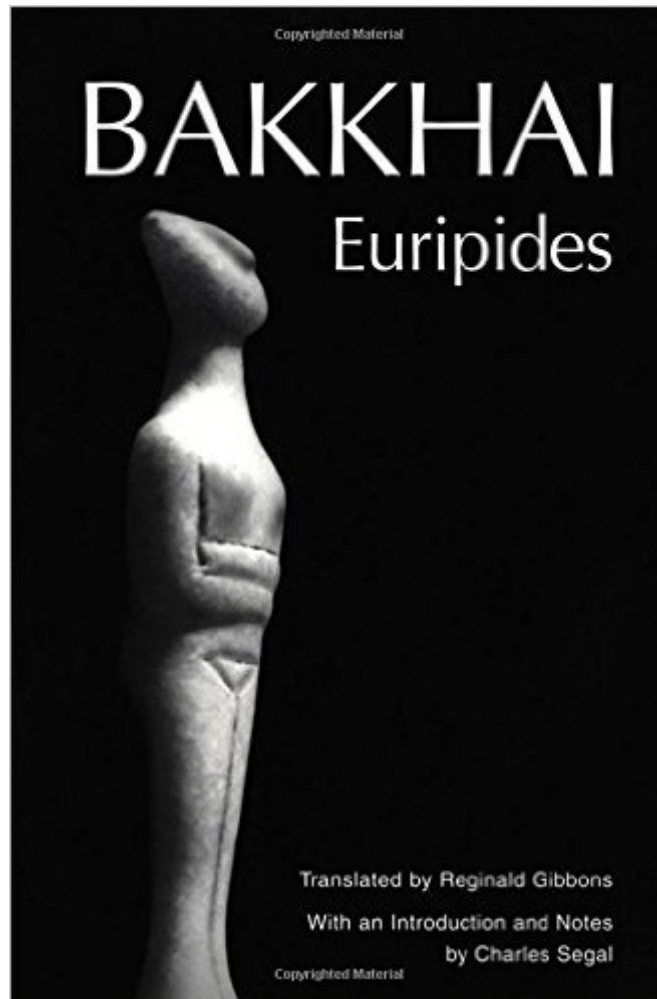


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Bakkhai (Greek Tragedy In New Translations)



Synopsis

Regarded by many as Euripides' masterpiece, *Bakkhai* is a powerful examination of religious ecstasy and the resistance to it. A call for moderation, it rejects the temptation of pure reason as well as pure sensuality, and is a staple of Greek tragedy, representing in structure and thematics an exemplary model of the classic tragic elements. Disguised as a young holy man, the god Bacchus arrives in Greece from Asia proclaiming his godhood and preaching his orgiastic religion. He expects to be embraced in Thebes, but the Theban king, Pentheus, forbids his people to worship him and tries to have him arrested. Enraged, Bacchus drives Pentheus mad and leads him to the mountains, where Pentheus' own mother, Agave, and the women of Thebes tear him to pieces in a Bacchic frenzy. Gibbons, a prize-winning poet, and Segal, a renowned classicist, offer a skilled new translation of this central text of Greek tragedy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"*Bakkhai*" ("The Bacchae") was written by Euripides when he was living in Macedonia in virtual exile during the last years of his life. The tragedy was performed in Athens after his death as part of a trilogy that included one extant play, "Iphigenia at Aulis," and one which is lost, "Alcaeon in Corinth." These factors are important in appreciating this particular Greek tragedy because such plays were performed at a festival that honored the Dionysus, and in "*Bakkhai*" he is the god who extracts a horrible vengeance. The tragedy clearly demonstrates the god's power, but it is a terrible power,

which suggests less than flattering things about the deity himself. Pentheus was the son of Echion and Agave, the daughter of Cadmus, the founder of the Royal House of Thebes. After Cadmus stepped down the throne, Pentheus took his place as king of Thebes. When the cult of Dionysus came to Thebes, Pentheus resisted the worship of the god in his kingdom. However, his mother and sisters were devotees of the god and went with women of the city to join in the Dionysian revels on Mount Cithaeron. Pentheus had Dionysus captured, but the god drove the king insane, who then shackled a bull instead of the god. When Pentheus climbed a tree to witness in secret the revelry of the Bacchic women, he was discovered and torn to pieces by his mother and sisters, who, in their Bacchic frenzy, believed him to be a wild beast. The horrific action is described in gory detail by a messenger, which is followed by the arrival of the frenzied and bloody Agave, the head of her son fixed atop her thyrsus. Unlike those stories of classical mythology which are at least mentioned in the writings of Homer, the story of Pentheus originates with Euripides.

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