COM5207 Tragedy *Bacchae* 2 (Week 4) Dr Rachel Bryant Davies

**Recapping last week: please use your handout from last week/ download from QMPlus.**

**Discussion Group Passages (each group leads one of A-F, using ebook, Carson, Soyinka passages)**

1. Prologue: Dionysus explains why he’s come to Thebes and what’s going to happen ebook pp.45-46
2. 2nd Episode: Pentheus thinks he’s interrogating an escaped priest/stranger (Dionysus) ebook pp.60-61
3. 2nd stasimon: Chorus sing of birth of god & therefore their connection with Thebes ebook pp.63-4
4. 3rd episode: Dionysus persuades Pentheus to dress as Maenad ebook pp. 70-71 (line 841=start of Carson passage)
5. 4th episode: Pentheus appears dressed as Maenad; Dionysus instructs him in his disguise ebook pp.79-80
6. Exodus: Cadmus helps Agave realise she’s killed her own son Pentheus ebook pp. 91-92

* Using the extracts provided on QMPlus compared with the e-book (page numbers on slides and handout), and the synopsis reminders (and in light of your previous character analyses), answer the following questions. Think about: style, vocabulary, innovations from e-book translation…
  + **Which version of the scene do you prefer? And why?**
  + **Does your understanding of characters change between versions? How?**
  + **What about your interpretation of events? What and how?**
  + **Do these versions emphasise different themes? If so, which and how?**

**Themes**

* In light of our character, scene, and translation analysis…
* **Make notes on the following thematic strands: are they present in your passage, and how?**
  + Gods: nature, power; relationship with humans, worship
  + Human authority/pragmatics vs religious belief/faith
  + Identity; self-knowledge
  + Disguise / recognition
  + Madness / inspiration
  + Agency / coercion
  + Family ties
  + Concepts of civilisation / communities
* **Which of these do you think is most important? Why?**
* **Which came across to you most in the different versions: Soyinka, Gibbons, Carson? Can you point to a reason why/specific passage?**
* **Which of these strands do you think is most interesting (could be easy or hard) to show on stage and why?**

***Bacchae* and concepts of Tragedy: quotes and questions to bear in mind through the course.**

**Question: Do you agree or not with the following quotes. Explain why you agree or disagree.**

* ‘Tragedy has always been modern.’
* ‘Tragedy may concern states of emergency; but we should recall Walter Benjamin’s point that such states are routine for the dispossessed, and that the fact that everything just carries on as normal is the crisis. Whether crisis and the commonplace are opposed depends largely on where you happen to be standing.’ (Eagleton, p. 75)
* ‘tragedy is that form of art which requires the intolerable burden of God’s presence. It is now dead because His shadow no longer falls upon us at it fell on Agamemnon or Macbeth or Athalie. Or, perhaps, tragedy has merely altered in style and convention.’ (George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, London, 1961, 353).
* ‘at the very moment that God appears to man, then man ceases to be tragic. To see and hear God is to go beyond tragedy.’ (Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, Taylor and Francis 2013 edn, 37).
* ‘In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies; in Greece the tragic chorus danced.’ (W. B. Yeats, *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,1892—1935*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1936, xxxiv.)
* ‘Perhaps the most important function of the tragic chorus is to open up the drama to non-linear possibilities that a strict narrative can inhabit or deny. […] Intermingling past, present, and future, the chorus also free tragedy from a strict temporal sequence.’ (Rush Rehm, *Understanding Greek Tragic Theatre*, 1992 revd 2016, 69).
* Does ‘Tragedy’ mean different things…
  + to those who believe in a God or gods, compared to those who do not?
  + to those marginalised by their society, compared to those who make the rules?
  + to those directly involved in the events, compared to those who spectate? (this could be actors v protagonists)
  + Depending on the format in which it is presented?