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The bacchae best translation

Dionysus: Here I am, Dionysus, Zeus's son, the god whom Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, birthed, with a bolt of lightning for a midwife. I am back home in the land of Thebes. My sacred form exchanged for this mere mortal disguise, I have arrived here where the Springs of Dirce and the river Ismenos are flowing. I can see my lightning-blasted mother's tomb right there beside the palace, and I can see as well her former bedroom's rubble giving off the living flame of Zeus' fire—Hera's deathless rage against my mother. I am pleased that Cadmus has set the site off as a sanctuary to keep her memory. I am the one who covered it on all sides round with grape leaves and ripe grape clusters. I have left behind the gold-rich country of the Lydians and Phrygians, the Persians' sun-struck plains, the battlements of Bactria, and passed through wealthy Arabia and Asia Minor where, all along the barren ocean, towns with handsome circuit walls enclose non-Greeks and Greeks alike. I came to this Greek city first of all, made it dance and instituted my wild rites so that the people here see my divinity with their own eyes.I have compelled this town to rant and howl, dressed it in fawnskinBacchae I have compelled this town to rant and howl, dressed it in fawnskin, put my pine-cone-tipped and ivy-vested spear into its hands, and all because my mother's sisters claim that Zeus is not the father of Dionysus— how could they speak such slander? They allege some mortal sired the child on Semele, and she blamed Zeus for her disgraceful error on Cadmus's advice. That's why (they say) Zeus smote my mother with a lightning bolt— because she lied about the pregnancy. So I have maddened them in retribution, driven them from their homes, and they, untinged, have occupied a mountain. I have forced them to don the vestments of my rites. In fact, the women of Thebes—all of them, every one— under my influence, have fled their homes in madness. Mixed among the daughters of Cadmus, they lounge about in broad daylight on cliffs beneath the green fir trees. Since Thebes is still ignorant of my rites, it needs to learn them— even against its will. I must defend the honor of Semele by teaching mortals it was a god she bore to Zeus.Beat time now, and let the townsfolk stare!Euripides What's more, Cadmus has handed down the privilege of kingship to his grandson Pentheus, who, as I see it, wages war on god— he bars me from the honors owed to me and never names me in his prayers. My godhood therefore must be driven home to him and all of Thebes. I will be off again, once matters have been settled here, to show my glory elsewhere. If the city of Thebes attempts to drive my Bacchants from the mountain with spears and anger, I shall lead the Maenads against it like a general. To that end I have disguised my superhuman form beneath the trappings of a mortal man. (Turning to the Maenads) You who have left Mount Tmolus, the bulwark of Lydia, all you devotees whom I have led out of barbaric lands to serve as confidants to me in peace and war, take up the drums they use in Phrygia, my and Mother Rhea's special instrument, and gather round the royal palace of Pentheus! Beat time now, and let the townsfolk stare! I meanwhile will go up to Mount Cithaeron, join my Bacchants and enjoy their dances.Translated from the classic Greek by Aaron Poochigian ***** Aaron Poochigian earned a PhD in Classics from the University of Minnesota in 2006 and is completing an MFA in Poetry at Columbia University. His book of translations from Sappho, Stung With Love, was published by Penguin Classics in 2009, and his translation of Apollonius'Jason and the Argonauts was released October 2014. For his work in translation he was awarded a 2010-2011 Grant by the National Endowment for the Arts. His first book of original poetry, The Cosmic Purr (Able Muse Press) was published in March of 2012, and several of the poems in it collectively won the New England Poetry Club's Daniel Varoujan Prize. His work has appeared in the Financial Times, Poems Out Loud and POETRY. Anne Carson's most recent endeavour into the world of translation is a translation of Euripides' Bakkhai, commissioned specifically by the British theatre company Almeida for their recurring series 'Almeida Greeks'. It was performed on stage for the first time in 2015 and featured British screen actor Ben Wishaw in the main role of Dionysus. The Bakkhai is considered by many as Euripides' most polarizing and interesting work - arguably, his best. Through the course of the history of Classical studies, the play has often been read as a social commentary on the state of fifth-century Athens; a discussion on the constant strife between nature and order, divinity, and humanity, and an impassive, criticizing gaze turned towards the chaos and fragility of Athens at the time, almost helplessly caught in the delirium of the Peloponnesian war and its disastrous consequences. In the context of Anne Carson's translation of Euripides' Bakkhai, modern scholarship concerning Dionysus is quite important: Carson is, first and foremost, a classicist. Her academic background, therefore, plays a large part in her approach to translation. During Classical theory history, the god Dionysus, so central to the Bakkhai, has always proven to be a highly polarizing figure. He is first and foremost a god of wine and, therefore, of drunkenness, implying a lack of control that ancient society (as well as our modern one) may not have been all that comfortable with facing on a day-to-day basis. He is a god of excess, characterised by an entourage of priestesses, the Bakkhai or Maenads, and, in iconography, also accompanied by male, sexually charged satyrs. He is, however, also a god of magic and of rituals that were not open to the public or, at least, not open to the predominant male citizen class. Similarly, to Orpheus, it has been argued that his cults attracted mostly women and slaves. Dionysus has always been a figure shrouded in mystery. He is, after all, more often than not, the 'beardless' god, androgynous, often clean-shaven and therefore emasculated. In modern times, his aura of savagery and mystery has also been enhanced by Nietzsche's development of his concepts of Dionysian and Apollonian theatrical canons, in which the Dionysian canon is strongly characterised by an act of 'breaking of boundaries.' According to Albert Henrichs, this view of Dionysus as external to societal norms and therefore as a symbol of revolution and reassessment of them has been heavily internalised in both the mainstream view of Dionysus and the scholarship concerning him and his cult. Either in the ancient world or contemporary research, he is almost always seen as an Other: There seems to be a difficulty in reconciling the god and the human within the same figure, and this leads to a narrative that predominantly identifies Dionysus as an othering element within his own stories. How does this come to play in Anne Carson's work, who is a classicist operating within scholarly environments today? How does she approach the play and the way Dionysus is represented in her translation? In the opening monologue of the Bakkhai, Dionysus tells the audience about himself and his current predicament: he has travelled across Asia to reach Thebes, the first of the Greek cities he shall visit, and has discovered that Pentheus forbids his cult here. Consequently, he has decided to punish both Pentheus and the entire House of Kadmus for their lack of respect. In Carson's (and Dionysus') own words: Here I am, Dionysus. I am son of Zeus, born by a lightning bolt out of Semele - you know this story - the night Zeus split her open with fire. For comparison, a more literal translation would be: I, Dionysus, come to this Theban land, as the child of Zeus whom the daughter of Kadmus, Semele, gave birth to. When she was brought to labour by a striking fire. Firstly, it is important to notice that Carson's poetry is fragmented, visceral, and rapid. The meter of Greek tragedy is canonically the iambic trimeter. However, respecting rhythm or even line length is not Carson's priority. Instead, the rhythm is much quicker than the trimeter would allow. The text has also been changed, not just graphically or rhythmically, but also in terms of its content. The line 'brought to labour by a striking fire' has been conceptually divided in two. The idea of birthing found in the original Greek verb, locheutheisa, 'to undergo labour', is maintained in 'born by a lightning bolt out of Semele', while the 'striking fire' (astrapephoroi, striking or flashing, and puri, fire) is kept not only in Carson's 'lightning bolt' (which is, for all intents and purposes, something made out of fire that strikes) but also in the line 'the night Zeus split her open with fire'. Semele is struck in the Greek, and therefore torn open in Carson's translation. The underlying violence that, since Nietzsche, exists within the general perception of Dionysus is captured by Carson in these first three lines by reminding us how horrific his birth truly was: tricked by Hera, Semele asked Zeus to reveal to her his true form, thus incinerating her (or, per Carson's view, splitting her open). But this is not the only way that, within this passage, Dionysus is othered. There is an additional line that does not exist in the Greek: 'You know this story.' the god tells the audience about his own birth. This will not be the last time Dionysus addresses the audience within his opening monologue: he does so repeatedly, in several instances that Carson has added in for, in the original Greek, Dionysus never gives a sign of acknowledging those present as spectators. By having Dionysus address the audience, Carson is making him drag the spectators into his own maenadic circle. It is, however, an unhappy circle - and Dionysus reminds us of it by following his invitation to participate with the violent story of his own birth. Therefore, he is othered - while he certainly asks us to participate and join him in the play that's about to begin, he reminds us in the same breath that nothing about him is normal, not even something as unifying and universal as his own being born. This simple address is only a taste of another, much larger (and much more important), addition done by Carson. After he has described his trip through the East, he addresses the audience once more by telling them exactly what he is: I am something supernatural not exactly god, ghost, spirit, angel, principle or element - There is no term for it in English. In Greek they say daimon - can we just use that? What is so extraordinary about this passage, though it has no corresponding lines in the Greek, is how Carson is able to convey that the language into which the play is being translated does not have any terms that could be used to appropriately describe him. The words exist, certainly, but only in the original tongue the play was written in not just Greek, but in the Attic Greek of the fifth century. Dionysus is asking the audience to see him in a word that isn't just uncommon in English: it simply doesn't exist. Carson's Dionysus is a foreign god who uses foreign words to describe himself. Through her choice of words, her translation is inevitably and willingly made foreign. In her introductory essay, Carson describes Dionysus as a 'mythologically obscure' god, 'always just arriving at some new place to disturb the status quo.' This is, simply put, a thesis statement: Carson believes that the matter she is speaking about is intrinsically foreign, a view which is shaped and influenced by the hundred years or so of previous scholarship about Dionysus which emphasise this. If Dionysus is a strange god, then strange must be the words used to describe him. Carson also acknowledges this, by having Dionysus present daimon as the simplest solution to the complex problem of his nature: a word he knows we cannot comprehend, for we do not have the tools to do so. Written by Justin Biggi Bibliography Euripides. The Bakkhai. Trans. Anne Carson. London: Oberon Classics, 2016. Carpenter, Thomas H. "On the Beardless Dionysus". In Masks of Dionysus, edited by Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Pharaone, 13-43. New York: Cornell University Press, 1993. Otto, Walter Friedrich. Dionysus, myth and cult. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965. Perris, Simon. The Gentle, Jealous God: Reading Euripides' Bacchae in English. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

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