

Fletcher Sample Play Project Assignments

Play Project for *The Bacchae* by Euripides DUE Friday, 9-3

As with every play, begin by reading the text in the *Norton Anthology*. You'll want to make notes about characters, plot points, and notable features for the quiz.

For this and the next few Play Projects, imagine that you're working as a dramaturg (a kind of in-house historian/critic) for a professional theatre company known for great productions of classical texts. For the last few seasons, your company's productions have been very traditional: standard, no-surprises interpretations of plays like *Oedipus Rex*, *Medea*, and *Agamemnon*. The Artistic Director for the company wants next year's season ("New Perspectives") to offer more unorthodox, innovative approaches to these plays.

The first show on the production calendar is *The Bacchae* by Euripides. You get this e-mail from the Artistic Director: "It seems like just about everyone does *Bacchae* the same way—the tragic downfall of a Great Man (Pentheus) for the mistake of doubting Dionysus' divinity. Without re-writing the plot, can you brainstorm a take on the play that highlights some other dynamic in the script? Maybe something with the women in the play (it's named after the women who serve Dionysus, after all). Or the creepy-cool gender/cross-dressing weirdness (I've always thought of Dionysus as seducing Pentheus). Or the fact that Pentheus sees the new religion as a foreign invader... I don't know—you're the dramaturg. Just give me a quick sketch of a possibility and we'll talk more."

Consider the following historiographic perspectives we've studied this week: feminist, GLBT/Queer, Multicultural/Postcolonial, or Marxist. In a 600-800-word memo, choose ONE of these perspectives and explain how and why that approach would make for an interesting re-interpretation of *The Bacchae*. Your memo should have three basic parts:

1. Name and explain the perspective you've chosen. Remember that these perspectives can either be revisionist or deconstructionist (though the Artistic Director won't know those terms as such). You should explain in your own words what you mean by the perspective you choose.
2. Relate and explain at least **two specific features or moments in the text** that lead you to nominate that particular perspective as appropriate for *The Bacchae*. If you choose a Marxist approach, for instance, you'd want to share how different groups defined by economic/political power appear and interact in the play.
3. Suggest at least one way in which a production based on the perspective you nominate would look or feel different than a generic "classical Greek" production. This could be a matter of lighting, casting, staging, set/costume design, sound—whatever you imagine.

Basic notes:

- As with all written assignments, you should write as clearly and correctly as possible, using complete sentences, proper spelling/punctuation, etc. Use Word's word count function to keep track of your length. Edit your paper before turning it in.
- I'll be looking for your knowledge of the historiographic perspective you choose and your specific references to the text.
- Remember, I should get the sense that you've read this text carefully and fully. If your memo could have been written after doing nothing more than consulting Wikipedia, that's a problem.
- Contact me if you have questions or concerns.

**Play Project on *The Busy Body*
Due Friday, January 23**

As you know (or as you will know), *The Busy Body* was written during an ongoing controversy between Jeremy Collier and Restoration-era comedies of manners about the morality of the plays. Restoration ideas of humor (particularly around the concept of “wit”) struck Collier as being mean and degrading. His critiques pushed playwrights to adopt a more sentimental tone in the early 18th century. The question is, where does *The Busy Body* fall in terms of the witty-but-kind-of-mean versus less-mean-more-sentimental?

Suppose that you are Susanna Centlivre. *The Busy Body* will receive its premiere next week, and everyone’s eager to see what Collier and his followers think of the play. A newspaper has invited you to write an open letter to Collier that either 1) tries to convince him that your play responds to his critiques and represents an improvement upon the amoral or mean-spirited plays of Wycherley and Congreve; or 2) blasts Collier’s critique and demonstrates how your play is precisely in the spirit of earlier witty comedies of manners.

Basically, I’m asking you to take a stand about whether you think *The Busy Body* qualifies more as a witty Restoration comedy of manners or if it exemplifies a turn toward sentimental comedy. Your “open letter” in the voice of Centlivre should be about 1½ to 2 pages long and typed in 12-point font with normal margins. In grading your papers, I’ll be looking for the following items:

- A clear, well-supported argument. I should have no question about whether you think *The Busy Body* to be more Restoration-witty or 18th-century-sentimental.
- Proof that you’ve read *The Busy Body* carefully. It was typical for playwrights to reference specific passages from their own work when defending or critiquing themselves. You should follow their example, using and citing the page numbers of specific quotes where appropriate.
- Proof that you are familiar with Restoration comedies of manners, with the concept of “wit” as discussed in class, with Collier’s critique of Restoration theatre, and with the meaning of sentimentality as it relates to Restoration/18th century drama.
- Finally, evidence that you’ve proofread your work—that you’ve written in complete sentences, that you’ve fixed obvious typos, **and that you’ve made sure to underline or *italicize* the titles of plays.**

As always, contact me if you have questions or concerns.