The images presented through literature of fertility cults have changed over time. Contrasting The Bacchae by Euripides, which was written in the fifth century B.C. with Thomas Tryon's Harvest Home, copyrighted in 1973, shows the influence Christianity and how many of it's symbols have become either incorporated or openly rejected by literature about fertility cults. Euripides' play also demonstrates how the worship of fertility and the gods who control it was a normal, acceptable part of the society, while in Tryon's novel, the cult is an aberration in American society, secretive and not talked about in public.

The Bacchae was written before the ideas of Christianity existed, so the cult worship presented in the play is untainted by Christian ideas and symbols. But, Euripides seems to indicate that the worship of gods who are responsible for the growth of plants and food has occurred before, in the form of the worship of Demeter, the Greek goddess of the grain and harvest. Her worship seems to be accepted by the Grecian society. Tiresias, a Greek prophet who is found in many Greek legends, praises Demeter in the play, declaring that she is a blessing to man because she provides him with food on which he can survive. It seems reasonable to assume that there was some form of worship and celebration for her by the Greeks during the year. Euripides does not indicate whether secretive worships occurred in conjunction with the more public ones.

But the worshiping of Dionysus, god of the vine, seems to be very different than that of Demeter. Euripides attempts to portray the first celebration by the people of Thebes of the god Dionysus. The god is the son of a mortal woman, yet his father is Zeus, the ruler of all the other gods and the world. Dionysus was made immortal, i.e. a god, through the rituals of possession, a secret ritual which cannot be revealed to mortals, by Zeus, and he is the god of the vine. The wine he gives them from his grape vines is as important to men as the food Demeter provides, because it allows them to forget their troubles and hardships at the end of each day. Dionysus' other special powers include the ability to give clairvoyance, in the form of the ability to foretell the future, and the creation of a hysteria in men. Dionysus is not a weak god, but controls very powerful means of punishing those who disobey him.

This first celebration and worship is very shocking to the people of Thebes. The most frightening aspect seems to be that the celebrants are only women. The Greek society was patriarchal, and the idea of women moving about and refusing to listen to their husbands and fathers threatens the structure of the society. It is unclear from Euripides play whether the women have gone to the celebration as independent conscious decisions or whether it is through the influence of Dionysus on their thoughts and actions. But, there are no men involved in the celebration as it is portrayed by Euripides. Only two men in the entire city, Tiresias and Cadmus, dress to go to celebrate the presence of the god. The rest of the men seem to be only concerned about the rumors they have heard concerning what happens at the festivities.

Euripides describes the components of the first of the biennial celebrations of Dionysus as follows: Thyrsi, spears with ivy vine wound around them, are made, and repaired, during the celebration, for use in catching animals used as a combination sacrifice and ceremonial food. Chanting is involved, in specific verses and responses, as well as dancing, both having special ones used only during the worship of Dionysus. The god himself speaks to the participants, driving them to do his bidding. Raw strength and the spear-like thryrus are used to capture the god's victim, who is sacrificed by a priestess completely possessed by her worship. Her eyes are dilated and roll freely, she foams at the mouth, and she hears nothing. The sacrifice is clawed to death by all the women, after the priestess has made the first gesture. Orgies are alluded to by the author, who reassures his audience that, despite Pentheus' belief that the women are having sexual relations with men as part of the worship while claiming that they are priestesses, a chaste woman is such because of her character, so that no decent woman may be seduced during the celebrations. Euripides also takes any responsibility for unchaste women away from the god, saying that a woman's chastity is not one of Dionysus' powers to control. These alluded to orgies seem unrealistic, considering that there are no men present at the celebration. Perhaps Euripides is actually referring to lesbian activities by the women, which would certainly pose a threat to the men of Thebes. Throughout the entire celebration the women are possessed by a hysteria, which seems to have been induced by the god, but they don't seem to mind it, and many seem to actually enjoy it.

Dionysus also provides the women with all their wants at this festival, replacing the women's husbands and fathers which further threatens them. By merely tapping her thyrsus on the ground, a woman will be given fresh water and wine. And, further nourishment is provided by the earth in the form of milk when the women scratch at the ground. And in the throes of worship, the women seem to eat raw meat as part of a blood sacrifice to the god.

Dionysus is especially threatening to the men of Greece because he seems to be very effeminate. He wears his hair in curls, like a women, has rosy cheeks that seem to be the result of drinking too much wine, has a scent like that of women's perfume, and spends all his time with women. He has no interest in fighting, submitting to the soldiers who come to capture him, even insisting that they put him in handcuffs and do their duty correctly. He is not awed by the King, Pentheus, who mocks Dionysus about his lack of muscles for wrestling competitions, and how untouched by the sun his skin is. Only women stay in the house and worry about their complexions. But despite his lack of what society terms as masculinity, the women of Thebes follow him, dressed in fawn skins and carrying thyrsi. He gives them much freedom, asking in return that they follow his commands.

But Dionysus, like the other Greek gods, is jealous and wrathful when angered. Although the entire family of Cadmus, with the exception of Pentheus, goes and joins the worship in the forest, Dionysus still disgraces and destroys the entire family in order to punish Pentheus. Pentheus scorns the god's existence, and tests his powers by imprisoning Dionysus. Of course, mortal jails cannot hold the god. Dionysus disgraces Pentheus by directly influencing his thoughts. He has Pentheus dress as a woman, a very degrading act for a king. Bringing him to observe the Bacchantes in the forest, it is Dionysus who encourages Pentheus to climb a tree, so that he will have a better view of the women's activities. But, the women also have a view of Pentheus. Dionysus creates a hysteria in the women, making them believe that Pentheus is really a lion which is to be offered as a sacrifice. He stands below the tree, speaking to his worshipers, giving encouragement and guidance.

Dionysus then fades from the scene, leaving the Thebans to finish meting out the punishment to Pentheus' family. Agave's anguish when discovering she killed her own son, and the rest of the family's sorrow are horrors for the Greek society. The family is left at a loss of what to do, except that they are no longer welcome among their own people. Dionysus has provided an example for the rest of Thebes as to what will happen if they do not give him proper honor and worship.

Harvest Home, by Thomas Tryon, incorporates the aspects of the older fertility cults with modern religion and lifestyles. It was a bestseller and therefore had a widespread audience, as did Euripides. But the novel is intended to be a "thriller", and, as such, follows a certain form. The novel is in the first person, and the reader experiences the events through Ned's eyes. But, the reader also knows he is unaware of a key detail in the writer's mind, because their are allusions to danger in the beginning as the author says 'I remember.....' but quickly changes the time frame so that events unfold over time.

The first occurrence which is a possible link to the fertility cults is the hangover which the author has, which can be a reference to the author having worshiped Dionysus the night before, drinking too much wine. Ned then goes on to describe the family's search for a house. When they find their home-to-be in Cornwall Coombe, the reader again finds a reference to the fertility cult that exists in the town, when Ned mis-hears the words "back ante-room" as the "bacchante room". The worshipers of Dionysus were often called "Bacchantes," so this room seems to belong to the fertility cult. It is in this room that the cult begins its invasion into his life. Ned's daughter Kate suffers from an psychosomatic form of asthma, directly related to the health of her parents marriage. After moving to Cornwall Coombe, her attacks seem to disappear. But as soon as Ned seems to be having an affair with a woman in the town, Tamar Penrose, Kate has a massive attack and is pronounced dead by the doctor. But the cult, through its leader Widow Fortune, saves her. Kate is brought back to life in the bacchante room, and Ned's marriage falls apart at the same time. All through Kate's recovery, Ned is excluded from the conversations going on in his daughter's room. His wife Beth barely speaks to him, and finds great pleasure in being with other women, especially the Widow Fortune. Ned's marriage never recovers, as his wife becomes more and more involved with the cult and its secrets, which he cannot share or even know of.

But the cult in Cornwall Coombe does not really exist secretly. It has many public aspects, some of which are manifest in the church itself. The fairs and holidays that take place allow everyone in the town to participate. And these events do give indications to what is really being worshiped; not the Christian god, but the more ancient Goddess/Mother, who gives fertility to the earth and/or sea.

The worship of a god who causes the earth to be fertile is much older and developed in Harvest Home than in The Bacchae. The women in the cult are no longer directly spoken to by the goddess whom they worship, but they act in agreement with each other, under the direction of a leader. The men of Cornwall Coombe also have no control over the women, but they do not seem to be threatened as the Greeks were. Instead, the cult operates on the fringes of the organized Christian religion. But it is the cult that controls the day to day activities of the town.

The celebrations of the Goddess, who provides man with life, in the form of corn for Cornwall Coombe, begin with the Agnes Fair. The fair actually has few references to corn, but consists mainly of all the components of any county fair - displays of livestock and foodstuff, judging of pies and other homemade items, physical contests, and picnicking and relaxing. The pastor and his wife are active observers, as well as all the women who are members of the cult.

But a certain amount of excitement at the fair is directly related to the worship of the Goddess. It is at the Agnes Fair that the Harvest Lord can prove his physical prowess by competing in the horse-drawing, wrestling, and pole-shinnying contests. The horse-drawing contest seems to have its roots in the ancient Greek chariot races. The winner is the man whose horses can drag a load the farthest distance. But, although Justin Hooke, the Harvest Lord, wins, he is disgraced by modern technology. Despite the distaste of the villagers of modern machinery, Worthy, a young villager, drives up on the tractor he has been rebuilding, hooks it to the load, and drags it out of sight. Here, it is the modern technology which wins a small battle with the ancient ways of the cult. But, the cult will eventually regain its position when it rids the town of Worthy's heretical ideas by killing him.

The next contest, a wrestling match, is also won by the Harvest Lord at the fair which Ned attends shortly after moving to the town. In this particular match it is clearly a case of good versus evil, as the opponent of the Harvest Lord is an uncivilized son of a troublesome family who have chosen to grow tobacco rather than corn. The match also represents, on another level, the conflict between the Goddess, and her grain, and the modern capitalist society. Because the opponent's family grows tobacco for the money it is worth, the man cannot win the contest against a farmer who grows corn for food. Perhaps there is also some reference to

Christianity here also. In the Bible, Jacob, father of Israel, wrestles with an angel and wins. Except that at the Agnes Fair, it is the Harvest Lord, the future "father" of the corn, who wins the contest and blessing from his opponent. Yet, in previous years, evil had won the wrestling match. Fourteen years before Ned moved to Cornwall Coombe the Harvest Lord was disgraced in front of the whole village by losing the wrestling contest to Gracie Everdeen. Gracie had been excluded from the women's cult because of a disease, acromegaly, which caused her body to keep growing abnormally long after puberty. As Sophie Hooke tells Ned, "No one wants a Corn Maiden who's sick." If the Corn Maiden is diseased and sick, is the Goddess she represents also sick? The villagers of Cornwall Coombe seem to think so, because they believe the terrible drought the next year was brought on by Gracie.

The final contest, pole-shinnying, also seems to relate to the fertility cult. The pole is an obvious substitution for the male phallus. There is considerable excitement when the Harvest Lord does well in the contest. But, significantly, he is beaten by Worthy, who will later be chosen as the new Harvest Lord by Missy, to replace the old Lord with his youth. More importantly, Worthy purposely tests the strength of the pole by swaying on it, and eventually causing it to split and break. Symbolically, this seems to foreshadow Worthy's testing of how far he could push the cult before it took actions against him. Unlike the pole, Worthy does not seem to "damage" the fertility of the cult when he is eventually broken, although the split pole could easily become a sign of an infertile male penis. While Worthy is able to escape harm from damaging the pole, he eventually is killed by the cult.

An interesting point in the book is that Kate has an asthmatic attack when Worthy breaks the pole. Kate represents the future fertility of the cult, as she will hopefully bring new blood to the town by becoming a Corn Maiden and participating in the Harvest Home rituals. When Worthy threatens the fertility, he also threatens the future, as Kate should be his Corn Maiden. But Kate is saved using the old herbal ways by the Widow Fortune, demonstrating that, in the end, the cult will prevail.

The other aspect of the Agnes Fair which makes it different than any other country fair is that the new Harvest Lord is chosen at this occasion every seventh year. The manner in which he is chosen seems to demonstrate how the cult has become intertwined with the town's Christianity. The new Lord was chosen by a secret ballot of the women, who would meet in the church on the afternoon of the fair and cast their votes. The man with the most votes then became the new Harvest Lord. The church, by allowing this use of its facilities, gives tacit, if not outright, consent to the existence of the cult and its ideas. However, the women seem to use this method only out of necessity, preferring that someone with oracular powers, such as Missy who "reads" animal entrails, pick the proper man.

A final activity of the Agnes fair which has parallels in Catholicism and some sects of Protestantism, is the braiding of shapes from leaves. Catholics use the palm leaves from Palm Sunday to make crosses which are kept in the home for the entire year until Ash Wednesday, when they are burned to make the ashes. At the Agnes fair, the old men weave corn husks into many differently shaped figure. These are then hung on doors and chimneys around the town, in the belief that they will give good luck to the inhabitants. The decorations will be kept until the Harvest Home, when the newly harvested corn is husked. The shapes don't seem to be important - what is important is that they are made from the corn.

Later in the story of Harvest Home, Ned discovers a corn doll in the field of the Harvest Lord. The doll is given the shape of a female, as opposed to Missy's androgynous corn doll, and seems to carry deeper messages. Its eyes, according to Ned, are mysterious, malevolent, and omnipotent. The doll does not forget or forgive. In the book it is compared with artifacts from nine other cultures from around the world, all of which represent the female body as aspects of the Goddess, who provides food from the sea and/or earth, and sometimes destroys men. The image of the Goddess is found in primitive cultures, many of which are agrarian, in the manner of Cornwall Coombe where modern technology for farming is scorned and discouraged, so that the way of life has not changed greatly since the village was founded. Because the doll represents the Goddess, Ned cannot burn it, as fire has masculine connotations in Western culture, but must return it to is own element, the earth, by burying it.

The villagers themselves realize that their worship of a goddess of the earth and grain goes back much further than their ancient Cornish roots. They also recognize that the Goddess is worshiped by groups that had no contact with the cultures from which their own worship evolved. Its seems to be common knowledge in the village the the Cornish Goddess was brought from Crete by sailors, so the village worship is a descendant of the Demeter and Dionysus worships in Euripides' play. Ironically, Ned, who is descended from Greeks, does not believe in the ideas of the cult.

Village history also tells of the Indians, who inhabited the land when the first settlers arrived, worshiping a goddess of the grain and earth. The settlers adopted both the Indian's staple grain, corn, and the goddess who provides it, in lieu of their own goddess, who provided other grains that had been found in Europe such as wheat and rye. Christianity, when it came to America and Cornwall Coombe, did just as it had in Europe - it destroyed all visible temples and places of worship of the old gods. But, at the people's insistence, it left the trees and other growing living things around the places of worship alone. Since the spirit of the gods is actually in nature and not buildings made by men, the actions of the Christians did not stop the worship of the Goddess by the people but only drove it into secrecy.

The church itself still incorporates the worship of the god of corn and wine found in The Bacchae. Harvest Home includes a sermon by the Cornwall Coombe pastor, in which he lectures about sin being present in a land of corn and wine, a quote directly from the Bible. This is simply the aspects of Demeter and Dionysus given to the Christian god. The congregation is advised to thank the Lord for his gift of a bountiful harvest, which will give the people money on which to survive another year and, more importantly, food/bread for their tables. The pastor could just as easily be thanking the Goddess for the exact same blessings with the same prayer. The sin to which the pastor refers is unclear, although the speculate that it is Gracie Everdeen who is meant. Gracie rejected both the cult and the church fourteen years previously by publicly damning the corn and harvest.

The worship of the cycle of planting, growth, and harvesting of the crops has been incorporated into Judiasm and alter into Christianity. In Cornwall Coombe, the people measure their year by the different parts of the growth cycle in conjunction with the moon, instead of by the Christian calendar. So, when the town offers the first corn of the harvest, the church service has little to do with Christian worship. The corn tithes are brought to the front of the church, after a sermon about leaving food for the poor as exemplified by Ruth in the Bible, and presented to the town elders. The Widow Fortune, head of the cult, even brings two ears. It is not that she doesn't believe in the Christian god, but that there must also be worship of the Goddess, who is far older and as eternal as the god which the pastor worships. After the tithes have been brought forward, a blessing is said over the pile, while the congregation bows its heads. A closing hymn of thanksgiving is sung, thanking G-d for providing for the winter that is coming. But the final stanza does not mention G-d. Instead, it appeals to the Harvest Lord for his blessing, a very un-Christian action. It also contains oblique sexual references to the Harvest Lord's erect penis emerging from beneath corn husks, something that will occur in reality during the women's worship on the night of Harvest Home.

It is after this hymn that Worthy, the Harvest Lord-to-be, bursts into the church. While it is scandalous when he cries for G-d to damn the corn, the real uproar of the people occurs when he asks the Christian god to damn the Mother. This curse causes the men to jump up, and the town women to wail and sink in their seats. All fear that by cursing no only the corn, but also the Goddess, Worthy will bring another waste to the crops for the next year. In their hearts, despite their beliefs in the Christian god, it is the Goddess who controls the cycles of the crops, and G-d cannot have any power to prevent or undo Her actions.

The aspects of the cult worship are stylized into the Corn Play, which is performed publicly. It, too, is a part of the seasonal calendar. It occurs immediately following the Husking Bee, showing that the harvest activities are finished so that the people can now have the leisure time to watch a play. But at the same time, it reminds the audience that spring will soon arrive again, and the cycle will repeat itself.

But the play also reveals the hidden beliefs of the cult. The play takes the audience through an entire cycle of the Goddess' activities. It opens with her being wed to the Harvest Lord. She walks down the aisle of the theater, preceded by flower girls and surrounded by handmaidens. Like a bride, she is dressed entirely in virginal white. But the audience does not focus on her. Like the Corn Maiden and others in the party, they all await the Harvest Lord, whose masculine attributes will provide new life when merged with Corn Maiden's feminine ones. In contrast to her white garb, he wears a crimson cloak, the color of blood. The veil is lifted away from the "bride" as she is presented to the Harvest Lord.

At this point, the play begins to be narrated as the various figures on stage act out the cycle of growth and harvest. The narration explains how the earth willingly accepts the Harvest Lord's plowing and planting of seed, so that it is fufilled. But at he same time the plowing on stage is a demonstration of a woman taunting a man, as her approaches her again and again with his plow, only to have her scramble away. Only by her teasing does the finish his task of plowing the entire field, i.e. the stage, so that the seeds can be planted. Once the seeds are planted, she is his, but only to the extent that the two stand facing each other. After the rains, spring festival arrives. The first growths of the corn appear, and the Harvest Lord, who has been fertile with his seeds in the earth, can be crowned.

At the crowning the Harvest Lord and Corn Maiden dance together. This dance is a courting dance. Its steps are ritually prescribed by tradition. This is a formalization of the dances performed at the worship of Dionysus, and shows that the aspects of the original Greek cults from which this Cornish cult derives carry through the years and changes in locations.

Throughout the symbolic time while the corn ripens, represented by the moon above the stage changing shape and size, the Harvest Lord boasts of his accomplishment. He shows the audience how his work, the corn, grows bountifully and unblighted. At this point in the play, the incestuous aspects of the Eternal Return are mentioned, as the audience goads the Harvest Lord to "make the corn with the Mother." For when the winter comes and the crop is harvested, the Harvest Lord grows old and dies. But from the corn he produced, a new Young Lord is born, who will, in the spring, mate with the Corn Maiden to again produce crops. The never ending cycle of the Eternal Return continues, as the Corn Maiden, representative of the Mother/Goddess, is eternal.

The play also demonstrates man's inevitable mortality as he struggles futilely against the Goddess and her worship. As much as the Harvest Lord believes himself to be in control, he is really only carrying out the desires of the Agrarian goddess. Ned has this demonstrated to him shortly after the night of the play, when Tamar tempts him. He finds that he hates her, because she is able to control him by answering his questions and accepting of all his abuse of her. Even more frustrating, Ned finds himself unable to control his own body, which feels great concupiscence towards Tamar in complete opposite to his mind. Ned attacks Tamar, not to raper her for his own physical pleasure, but to punish her. He attempts to user his male sexual drive as a tool forcing her to submit to him, to put her back into the earth which she reveres. But she accepts this abuse, and even encourages it. His attempts to degrade her by putting mud in her face and mouth are also useless, as she was, is, and always will be, the Corn Maiden, the mortal representative of the eternal Goddess. As the Corn Maiden she is an extension of the earth which Ned forces her into. Since his actions are merely the plowing and seeding of the earth, his efforts can have no effect. In the end, it is Ned who submits, completely submerged in the strength and will of the Goddess. Like Pentheus in The Bacchae, Ned has underestimated the power of a god.

Ned also fails to recognize the scope of the cult in Cornwall Coombe. He confesses his intentions to go to the evening's Harvest Home celebration to the neighbor's wife, only to discover that she had been born and raised in the town. Despite the precautions of the women, Ned does escape from the town's version of a holding cell, and emerges through a secret tunnel into the church. But this symbolic flight to the safety of Christianity is useless, because the worship of the Goddess is older and in control of Cornwall Coombe society. At the church, Ned discovers the entire female population of the village receiving a blessing and tools for their festivities from the church. Obviously, the church is giving approval and credibility to the women's beliefs, because, as demonstrated by the pastor's nervousness, it cannot eradicate them. Still, Ned cannot do anything, as they leave. His escape from the women seems impossible.

Yet, Ned does escape, through the bell tower. And the bell tower is used by the author as a symbol of its ringer, Amys, who, like Ned, feels that the worship of the Goddess is foolish and unnecessary. Amys is also like Ned, a man of the city. Because neither of them are farmers, they cannot appreciate the magnitude of the Goddess' influence on the life and well-being of a farmer.

The actual Harvest Home celebration has many similarities to the Greek Dionysian celebration in The Bacchae. Ned watches from the belfry as the women, dressed in white, gather on the village common. The Corn Maiden and the Harvest Lord are put into a cart and covered with an ancient quilt. On the quilt is sewn a depiction of the cycles of the corn and the celebrations of the Goddess. The cart, surrounded by the women, is led away to the woods. The women's mood is quite solemn, although there is an air of communal spirit and endeavor.

This scene is very reminiscent of The Bacchae. Tiresias comes to collect Cadmus in order to go worship the god. Both wear special outfits, of fawn skin, and carry thyrsi, just as the village women have special dresses and hoes for their celebration. Tiresias and Cadmus are both reserved and jubilant as they go to worship Dionysus, happy because the god has given man wine for which the two men are grateful, but also worried because they are the only two males in Thebes who are willing to go to the forests to give honor to the god. Their happiness is rejuvenating, allowing them to forget their ages, just as the god's wine allows men to forget their troubles.

All along the route to the forest for Harvest Home, and the clearing in which the celebration will take place, sentries are posted to insure that no one who doesn't belong gets through. But Ned evades this guard, managing to station himself within sight of the clearing. The procession of women arrives slowly, amid singing and music from various instruments. Liquor begins to be passed among the participants as the Corn Maiden and then the Harvest Lord arrive. Both are now on foot in order to show respect for the Goddess, just as Tiresias and Cadmus set off on foot to the forest to worship Dionysus. The liquor continues to flow while the women break up into smaller groups, dancing and singing. This description is just like the one Euripides play contains of cult worship activities in ancient Greece.

The Harvest Lord is washed by the women, a ritual cleansing and purification. This could be a biblical reference to the welcoming rituals performed by a host to his guests, or of Jesus washing the feet of others to show his humility. The Harvest Lord then watches the dancing and singing, just as Dionysus did. All continue to drink, become intoxicated from the alcohol, and begin to experience hallucinations from the drugs that are in the drink. Eventually, as the moon rises, the celebrants stop as the Widow Fortune comes forward. She speaks to the women, explaining how the Harvest Lord, as the anointed "Lord of the growing corn", has given bountiful corn crops for seven years. Every kernel of corn that has grown during his reign is the result of his youth and vitality. But, she reminds the women, it is the Goddess who actually provides the harvest, in return for the women's belief. The Harvest Lord grows old, loses his strength, and is unable to produce the corn. But the Goddess lives on forever. At this point, the secret of Harvest Home is revealed: an ear of corn. These women worship what the soil creates, just as the Bacchants worshiped the vine and its products, both common elements in their respective societies, yet totally essential to life.

But the corn cycle, the Eternal Return, also requires death. And the Harvest Lord, after impregnating the Corn Maiden, is killed so that the Young Lord can take his place next spring. The Harvest Lord is both the lover and the son of the Goddess. The coupling of the Harvest Lord and the Corn Maiden is done in a ditch that the women have dug with their church-consecrated hoes. Throughout the act, the chanting of the women rises and falls. Some of the women have fits of hysteria, which was a power of Dionysus. As soon as his semen has entered the Corn Maiden, the Harvest Lord is killed. His blood is collected as it flows from his neck, and is spilled into the freshly turned soil by the women. In many cultures, it is the blood that contains the life, and by spilling it into the ground, the ground will be made fertile for another seven years, able to give life to the crops. Lastly, Tamar, as a former Corn Maiden, and as a representative of the Goddess, shows that the Goddess is eternal by embracing the dead body of the Harvest Lord. It is the Eternal Return, with the Harvest Lord dying and being reborn, although the Goddess is immortal.

But a non-believer, Ned, has now seen the rituals which no man can see and live to tell about. Just as in The Bacchae, the women chase after him, in a frenzy to preserve the secrecy of their rituals. But his punishment for scorning the existence of a god is worse than Pentheus', for Ned is not permitted to die. His sudden repentance in the face of death, and the overwhelming power of the Goddess is too late. His punishment is death-in-life, by being blinded and having his tongue cut out. Because he is helpless in this state, he can never tell others, possibly through writing, what has happened, almost always being in the care of one of the women who did this to him. He must also live with his now pregnant wife, who carries the Harvest Lord's child, a child which Ned could not give her because he is infertile. And he is spoken of as if he was dead by the women in the house, for effectively he no longer has any life. His pursuits had been artistic, and without sight he has no way to paint and express himself.

Harvest Home seems to echo the plot of The Bacchae in many ways. Importantly, Ned is descended from Greeks, and should therefore bring with him to Cornwall Coombe the aspects of the ancient Greek fertility cults. But Ned is like Pentheus, proud and scornful of new gods. He makes desperate attempts to maintain his control over the women in his life, but cannot prevent their worship of the god. Ned is always amazed to come back to his home and find his wife gone. Yet, when she is there, he pays little attention to her. Despite his claims that they are close friends, he never seems to listen to her, and is completely unaware of her needs. He doesn't even recognize that she wants more out of her life and friendships than she is getting. And when she does find it in her associations with the other women in the town, he barely notices she is gone, and takes little interest in her day when she finally returns. It is this bonding between women that occurs in the cults, which could also indicate lesbianism, that threatens the males of both cultures.

By taking his wife and daughter away from him, Ned is threatened in very much the same manner as the patriarchal Greeks. He finds his marriage, which had grown stale, disintegrating. His sex life, which had become passion-less, is given new excitement by the drugged alcohol used by the cult on Harvest Home night. But Ned is infertile, and unable to make his wife conceive, even with the drugs. His wife does believe she is pregnant from this drugged encounter, though, and has all the symptoms of a pregnancy until Ned forces her to go to a doctor. The doctor, of course, is a representative of modern technology and culture which discounts the powers and abilities of the cult. And, it is partially because of his infertility that his sexual attempts to Tamar fail. He has no power over a woman because he cannot act as the other half of a fertile couple.

Ned is given many warnings by the cult to stop his investigations into their activities, and to learn his proper place. Pentheus, too, is given many warnings by Dionysus himself. Both ignore them and continue to fight blindly against what they see as an enemy to their ways of life. But in both cases, the men are welcome to participate and learn more about the cult, although they must be respectful of certain limitations. Neither accepts these opportunities, and for this they are eventually punished.

The fertility cults in Harvest Home and The Bacchae are very similar in many ways. But they are also very different. They occupy different places in their respective societies, and perform different functions for the women. The later one is also influenced by the changes in the world, incorporating Christianity into its celebrations. Yet in the end, both celebrate basic need of human life.