Euripides

Bacchae

A Dual Language Edition
translated by Ian Johnston
ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΟΥ  EURIPIDES’
Βάκχαι  Bacchae
A Dual Language Edition

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Generations of men are like the leaves. In winter, winds blow them down to earth, but then, when spring season comes again, the budding wood grows more. And so with men: one generation grows, another dies away.  

*(Iliad 6)*
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EDITORS’ NOTE

This volume presents the Ancient Greek text of Euripides’ *Bacchae* with a facing English translation. The Greek text is that of Gilbert Murray (1913), from the Oxford Classical Texts series, which is in the public domain and available as a pdf. This text has also been digitized by the Perseus Project (perseus.tufts.edu). The English translation and accompanying notes are those of Ian Johnston of Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, BC. This translation is available freely online (records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/). We have reset both texts, making a number of very minor corrections and modifications, and placed them on opposing pages. This facing-page format will be useful to those wishing to read the English translation while looking at version of the Greek original, or vice versa.

Note that some discrepancies exists between the Greek text and English translation. There is an important gap of 50 lines or more in Euripides’ manuscript between lines 1329 and 1330 of the Greek text. Since the content of the missing lines is fairly well known, this translation has attempted to provide a reconstructed text for the missing portion. Occasionally readings from other editions of or commentaries on Euripides’ Greek text are used, accounting for some minor departures from Murray.
Introduction

Euripides’ Bacchae, the last extant classical Greek tragedy, has for a long time been the focus of an intense interpretative argument, probably more so than any other Greek tragedy (especially in the wide range of very different interpretations the play). In this necessarily brief introduction, I wish to sketch out some details of the source of this disagreement and review some of the more common interpretative possibilities. In the course of this discussion, my own preferences will be clear enough, but I hope to do justice to some viewpoints with which I disagree.

Some Obvious Initial Points

To start with, let me review some of the more obvious and important facts of the play, things about which we are unlikely to disagree and which any interpretation is going to have to take into account. After this quick and brief review of the salient points, I’ll address some of the ways people have sought to interpret them.

First, the central dramatic action of the Bacchae—the play’s most obvious and important feature—is an invasion of Greece by an Asian religion (something which may well have a historical basis from a time well before Euripides, but that is not our concern here). The opening scenes of the play repeatedly stress the non-Greek qualities and origins of the followers of Dionysus, tell us that they have been involved in a sweep through Asia Minor, converting cities as they go, and indicate clearly that Thebes is the first entirely Greek city subject to this new force, the first stop in what is to be a continuing campaign of forceful conversion of Greek city-states. Dionysus may have been born in Thebes (more about that later), but he and his followers identify themselves and their cause repeatedly as an invasion of Greece by Asian (non-Greek) ways—and what he brings with him is also seen by the Greeks (at least by Pentheus) as something non-Greek, something new and threatening (the difference is, of course, emphatically brought out by the clothing and movements of the chorus in contrast to the clothing and movements of the citizens of Thebes).

It’s also clear enough what this religion involves, a rapturous group experience featuring dancing, costumes, music, wine, and ecstatic release out in nature away from the city (in the wild, potentially dangerous nature of the mountains, not in the safer cultivated areas). It is presented to us as a
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primarily (but not exclusively) female experience, one which takes women of all ages away from their homes and their responsibilities in the polis and confers on them amazingly irrational powers, beyond the traditional controls exercised by the male rulers of the city, and brings them into harmony with wild nature (most obviously symbolized by the dancing in bare feet).

In the Bacchic celebrations the traditional lines of division between human beings and animals and between different groups of human beings (social and gender differences) break down and disappear or are transformed. The play stresses the beauty, energy, creativity, and communal joy of this Bacchic ritual, while at the same time repeatedly informing us of the destructive potential latent in it.

The central conflict in the play focuses on the clash between this new religion and the traditional Greek way of life--both the customary political authority (embodied in Pentheus) and the long-standing religious and social attitudes (manifested most clearly by Tiresias and Cadmus, two figures of major symbolic importance in traditional Greek literature and myth). These characters are faced with the issue of how they should respond to something very foreign to what they are used to. They discuss the matter, argue amongst themselves, and make different decisions. The play thus forces us to examine a range of options and to confront the question about how one should deal with Dionysus and what he represents in the light of traditional Greek ways of running the human community.

The most significant of these responses is that of Pentheus, the king. On the surface, he is acting like a traditional tragic hero, accepting responsibility for protecting the city in the face of an obvious political crisis (all the women out of town raising havoc among the local villages, tearing cattle apart, and so on) and acting decisively to restore order. But we quickly sense that Pentheus, unlike, say, Oedipus or Achilles (or even Creon in Antigone, for that matter), has complex inner problems (especially concerning sexuality), so that his responses to the crisis (all that talk of prisons, soldiers, massacres, and so forth, along with his constant military escort, his fascination with Dionysus’ appearance, especially the obsession with his hair) come across more as a psychological response to certain personal inadequacies or inner pressures (things he’d sooner not think about or is even unaware of in himself) than a genuine desire to do the right thing for the city or to assert a self-confident sense of his own greatness based upon a past record of achievement. This aspect of the play makes it the most psychologically compelling of all the Greek tragedies, and dealing with this psychological dimension is obviously essential in any coherent evaluation of the play.

Finally (to conclude this short list of obvious features), the actions of this play are brutally destructive: the palace is destroyed, the major characters are all punished horribly by an omnipotent god who is supremely confident about his powers and (much of the time) superbly contemptuous of the human beings he is dealing with (the references to the enigmatic smile of Dionysus are important here). In his distribution of punishments, Dionysus seems to refuse to consider that some of those he is punishing so dreadfully made some attempt to accept his worship and to persuade others to do the same. At the end of the play Thebes (the oldest city in Greek mythology, the place where the Greek race originated, as the play reminds us) is in ruins, its ruling family (the origin of the people of Thebes) is finished, as Dionysus and his followers sweep off to the next Greek city (presumably to re-enact what we have just seen). The final image we are left with is the scattered parts of Pentheus’ body (the only unburied corpse in Greek tragedy, as Jan Kott reminds us), ... forceful control, his mother ripped him apart and (perhaps) ate some of him. The only one left unshocked by what happens in Dionysus’ version of a deserved “punishment” is Dionysus himself, who throughout the play seems to be enjoying himself immensely (the marked silence of the Chorus near the end suggests that even they may wondering just what their leader has done in the service of the religion they celebrate in his name, although the significant gap in the manuscript near the end may include something to meet this point). Dionysus’ statements justifying his treatment of Cadmus, Pentheus, and Agave are brutally curt and impossible to accept as a satisfactory justification for what has happened.

What makes this brutality all the worse is that Dionysus’ treatment of human beings robs them of their dignity. Greek tragedy is, of course, no stranger to excessively harsh treatment of human beings by malevolent gods (Oedipus being the supreme example), but such treatment does not usually remove from the main characters a sense of their own heroic worth as they try to cope—in fact, confronting that heroic magnificence in the face of a hostile or unpredictable or unknown (but ultimately destructive) divine presence is the most important part of the imaginative wonder we experience in reading a great deal of Greek literature, from the Iliad onwards.

But in The Bacchae such heroic worth is hard to find, simply because so many major characters are either merely silly (like Tiresias and Cadmus) or have no control over what they are doing (like Pentheus or Agave)—lacking power over themselves, they are not free to make the decisions through which the values of heroic self-assertiveness manifest themselves. In that sense, they are very different from earlier heroic figures, who may well live in a fatalistic universe ruled by mysterious and hostile irrational powers but who never abandon the essence of their individual greatness: the freedom to assert their value in the face of such a fate. For such self-assertion (no matter how personally disastrous) to have value (that is, to manifest some human qualities worthy of our admiration and respect), we must see it as something freely willed, something undertaken deliberately in the face of other options. Such freedom Pentheus does not have, because he is in the grip of inner compulsions which do not enable him to make independent choices. If there is a necessary connection between his actions and his fate, that connection stems from his unconscious psychological weakness rather
than from his conscious heroic assertiveness, public-spiritedness, or courage. This, it strikes me, is a crucial point (to which I shall return later on).

Let us now turn to some of the ways interpreters have encouraged us to understand these (and other) matters.

The Bacchae as a Punishment for Impiety

One easy way to shape the events of the play is to see it as a relatively unproblematic morality story whose main trust is divine punishment against Pentheus and Thebes for their refusal to accept the godhead of Dionysus (this, of course, is Dionysus’ view). Taken at the most simplistic level, the brutality in the play might thus be seen as justification for evil behaviour or heresy: Pentheus and Agave act badly, they should have known better than to disrespect the divine (as the chorus repeatedly points out), and they earn their punishment, since people ought to respect and obey and worship the gods (or God).

Such a response is, of course, drastically oversimple, but it is also very reassuring, since it enables us to place any potential difficulties we might have in exploring some disturbing complexities (like the astonishingly brutal and irrational ending--so disproportionately savage) into a comfortably familiar moral rubric. In fact, such easy moralizing is a common feature of many interpretations of Greek works (especially tragedies) offered by those who do not wish to face up to some unsettling possibilities (so Oedipus deservedly suffers because he commits sin or has too quick a temper, the destruction of Troy--as presented in the Iliad--is just, because Paris shouldn’t have run off with Helen, and so on). This tendency, it strikes me, though very common, is essentially a reflex response of, among others, modern liberal rationalists who don’t want to face up to the full ironic complexity of tragic fatalism (but that’s a subject for another lecture).

The notion that we are witnessing some acceptable form of divine justice here is surely staved once we consider the horrific and all-encompassing nature of that punishment—the destruction of an ancient centre of civilization, the degradation, self-abasement, and horrific death of the hero, the killing of a son by his mother, and extreme punishments handed out to all, no matter how they respond to the arrival of the god, combined with the pleasure the god takes in inflicting such destruction on human civilization and the inadequacy of his explanation. All these bring out strongly the irrationality, even the insanity, of Dionysus’ “justice.” So it becomes difficult, I think, to force the play into a comfortably rational shape, if by that we mean that it endorses some easy moral belief that evil is, more or less, punishment for sin.

A more sophisticated (and certainly more interesting) version of this approach to the play looks at Dionysus, not simply as a foreign god, but as the embodiment of certain aspects of human experience, as a symbol for the irrational, communal excitement, bonding, power, joy, intoxication, and excess which all too often get lost in the careful life of the city, governed by habit, rules, laws, and responsibilities. This approach to the play stresses the fact that Thebes has lost touch with those irrational energizing unconscious powers of life and, in Agave’s and Pentheus’ refusal to acknowledge the divinity of Dionysus, created a situation where these powers (which cannot be forever denied) simply break out with disastrous consequences. If that doesn’t carry an explicit moral, at least it serves as a cautionary tale.

This view has a good deal to recommend it, particularly in the figure of Pentheus, who is clearly striving throughout much of the play to repress hidden irrational desires and to deal with a fascination with and horror of those desires. He seeks to cope by encasing everything, including himself, inside metal (chains or armour) and by lashing out with male force (soldiers and commands), trying to impose a sense of external order on something which repels and attracts him, something which is obviously connected to his buried feelings about sexuality, an issue to which he keeps returning obsessively (whether in connection with Dionysus or the Bacchic women). However else we see Pentheus, it is not difficult to observe in him a person who is incapable of uniting his conscious sense of who he is as a king (political leader) with his unconscious repressed awareness of himself as an emotional (and especially a sexual) being with hidden and unfulfilled desires (a point brought out emphatically by the male-female polarity in the conflict).

This aspect of the play is also strongly brought out by the obvious similarities between Pentheus and Dionysus--both young men from the same family. It’s not difficult to make the case that, in a sense, in those central confrontations between the two characters, Pentheus is having to deal with a part of himself, a part that he doesn’t recognize as his (or doesn’t want to). The fact that Dionysus was born in Thebes underscores this point—he may have been long absent, but he is by birth as much a part of Thebes as Pentheus (both are grandsons of Cadmus). So Pentheus’ rejection of Dionysus is a rejection of him as a close family member (part of himself), as well as a rejection of his divinity. And Dionysus’ confident manipulation of Pentheus evokes a strong sense that he is very much at home in Pentheus’ psyche and understands well just how ineffectual all those external controls Pentheus is relying on are going to be once he (Dionysus) starts playing to those repressed desires Pentheus harbours.

The play also links the music central to Dionysian ritual with the very earliest development of the Olympian gods (Zeus’ birth), so there’s a sense here that what Dionysus celebrates is a fixed and divinely ordained part of the scheme of things, no matter how much some people may have forgotten or never known that.

It’s possible, on this view, to argue that Dionysus is initially seeking some synthesis in Thebes, some reinvigoration of the city by the introduction and
acceptance of his rituals (hence to restore life to a more appropriate balance), with initially no particularly destructive intent, but that he changes his mind in the face of Pentheus’ intransigence. Dionysus, after all, volunteers to bring the women back into the city, without violence, an offer which suggests that some compromise may be possible. Only after Pentheus typically rejects the offer (or ignores it), does Dionysus then tempt Pentheus out into the mountains to his death. This moment when Dionysus makes his offer and Pentheus rejects it is a particularly interesting one, suggesting as it does that Pentheus may be unwilling to compromise because he wants to see something illegal, sexual, naughty—he doesn’t want to accommodate himself to it (by having the women back in the city), but to enjoy it all the more because it offends him—the urge to enjoy the frisson of a voyeur overcome any desire to understand and adjust—there would be no delight in seeing the women dance if that was legal, part of everyday life (given this point, just what he might be doing sitting under the trees in silence as he watches the Bacchic women invites some imaginative exploration). So we might see the destruction of Pentheus as the self-immolation of a man too afraid of his inner self to address it maturely and too fascinated with it to repress it successfully.

However, there are some difficulties with this line of interpretation. Apart from the fact that Dionysus gives very little indication of a genuine intent to harmonize his religion with Greek political life (given how well he understands Pentheus, that offer mentioned above may be just one more psychological deception, a preparation for what he has had in mind all along, the total humiliation and meaningless destruction of Pentheus), the play offers us no sense that a harmonious synthesis with what Thebes has become and the new religion of Dionysus is possible. If it offered us that, then it might be easier to see Pentheus’ destruction as a particular instance of one badly fractured personality. But instead the play holds up for ridicule those Thebans who do seek to worship Dionysus (Tiresias and Cadmus) and subjects the women who have gone up into the mountains to the most horrific punishments.

In addition, the play stresses the uncivil and anti-civil actions required and encouraged by Dionysian rituals (especially the abandoning and kidnapping of children, the destruction of domestic animals, and so on—culminating in the most anti-civil action of all, the mother’s destruction of her child, an act which, more than any other, violates the basic reason for the community’s existence). Given what this play shows us, it is difficult to believe that a reconciliation between Dionysian religion and civil life is possible. And if that is not available, then what sort of cautionary tale are we being offered here? What exactly are we, as spectators, supposed to take away from this in the way of closure?

*The Bacchae as an Indictment of Dionysian Religion*

Given this last point, it is not difficult to see why some interpreters have viewed this play as an indictment of religion because of its hostility to the survival of the community, on the ground that religion (as depicted by Dionysus and his followers) is the basis for the irrational destructiveness which threatens and ultimately overthrows the well-ordered city in an orgy of cruel excess. On this view, the play is a cautionary tale about the dangers of religious superstitions.

This approach naturally makes a good deal of the way in which the play always links the benefits of Dionysian religion, its value as a beautiful, creative celebration, with destructiveness, with anti-political or extra-political activities, and, from time to time, with a sense of passive resignation: human life is really not worth much, but at least, thanks to Dionysus, we have wine, which enables us to forget our troubles, so we should worship the god who makes it possible for us to get drunk and not strive to be anything better than we are. And in the Dionysian celebrations we can forget our individual cares, responsibilities, and laws and give free rein to our inhibitions—a sure way to undermine the things most essential to human well being and happiness, namely, the security of a well-governed city and the rational powers of the human mind to make things better (or at least stop them from getting worse).

If we focus exclusively upon these features of the play, then it’s not difficult to sense how many might see it as a scathing attack on popular superstitions, particularly those which generate enthusiasm through mass hysteria and crowd violence in the face of calmer, more traditional controls (and self-control). But there are difficulties in pushing this interpretative possibility too far.

The major obstacle here, of course, is the figure of Pentheus himself. As the political ruler of Thebes, he embodies the nature and value of the civic authority threatened by Dionysian excess. And whatever we might like to say about Pentheus, he is hardly someone in whom we might celebrate the enduring values of civilized and just political life (for reasons mentioned above in the previous section). Quite the reverse—he seems as much a threat to what is valuable in civic life as Dionysus (although, of course, he is unaware of that).

In addition, the traditional values of Thebes are, in the figures of Tiresias and especially Cadmus, exposed as silly, grotesque, and self-serving. They want to dance to the music but travel there in a chariot. Cadmus seems particularly keen that his family’s status will be improved if people think his daughter has given birth to a god (whether it’s true or not). Their combined physical decrepitude (the blind leading the lame) is an eloquent physical symbol of the extent to which the long traditions they represent have become enfeebled (and, as I mentioned earlier, no two mythological
characters in Greek literature carry more solemn weight, from the *Odyssey* onward, than these two, so treating them this way is a bit like making, say, George Washington an anxious, neurotic, and selfish coward in a retelling of Valley Forge).

One would think that, if the main point of the play is to expose the savagery of religious superstition as a danger to civic order or peaceful political life, then the political order would be presented as something more valuable, more worth preserving than it is here. After all, whatever feelings of horror and sympathetic pathos we may feel at Pentheus’ destruction, there is no sense that he carries an inherent dignity and redeeming value which is sacrificed with him (other than his presence as a confused, suffering, inadequate human being). The same applies Tiresias and Cadmus and Agave.

*The Bacchae as a Choice of Nightmares*

A more persuasive and inclusive approach to the play, it strikes me, builds on the strengths of the previously mentioned alternatives, refusing to see it as endorsing one side of the dichotomy against the other (Pentheus and Thebes or Dionysus and the Bacchants) and instead exploring the play as a particularly despairing vision of the destructiveness inherent in the ambiguities of human existence, contradictions which simply cannot be reconciled into some harmonious creative whole. Rather than being a cautionary tale, the play is a passionate vision of total despair.

This approach would stress that, indeed, the vision of political and traditional life of Thebes sees it as hopeless silly, insecure, and shallow, built on no confident sense of justice—something that has run out of a creative energizing faith in itself (hence the reflex reliance on power). Those who embody ancient traditions (Cadmus and Tiresias) have become self-serving caricatures of what they used to be. The traditional source of political leadership and justice (the king, Pentheus) is radically uncertain of his identity, wracked with inner complexities which control his actions, and thus without any confident self-assertiveness or sense of responsibility for the sake of the community. The considerable power he exercises hence comes to be used primarily to protect himself against his own inner insecurities. No wonder he is much more concerned with confinement and slaughter than he is with justice—he’s fighting against his own inner desires which (as mentioned above) attract and repel him.

At the same time, his polar opposite, Dionysus, for all the supreme self-confidence he displays, is a malevolent destroyer. The gifts he brings are considerable, but they are not compatible with civilized human achievement (at least not as this play presents them)—they not merely challenge existing traditions; they also completely obliterate those who stand in their way. And they do this, not in the name of some workable political or communal alternative, but for the sake of mass ecstatic frenzy outside the traditional community and drunken oblivion within it.

If we remember that the central concern of the human community in Greek literature is justice—the best arrangement whereby human beings can live and prosper together as citizens of a political unit, then Pentheus and Dionysus both bring out the extent to which justice has disappeared. Pentheus is concerned only with power in the shoring up of his own inadequate personality; Dionysus is concerned only with ecstatic release in a mass frenzy and the total destruction of those who do not immediately comply—all in order to convert civic life into an irrational manifestation of belief in what he represents.

Incidentally, in considering the importance of this idea of justice, we should not be too quick to accept the Chorus’ frequent invocations of what they call justice as the “message” of the play or as the point of view the author is hoping we’ll accept. It’s true the Chorus frequently sings of justice, but a close view of what they mean by the term stresses their irrational sense of the term: for them justice is a god-given right to oppress one’s enemies or a willed refusal to do anything more than passively accept the given conditions of life. These two options, I would suggest, remove from the term justice any central concern with the difficult struggle to establish fairness in the community and repetitively insist upon the extent to which the worship of Dionysus, as defined here, runs directly counter to the major concern of Greek political life.

The play offers no suggestion that a reconciliation between these two cousins is possible. Human experience is radically split into two diametrically opposed and inherently incomplete possibilities. When they come together, destruction of civilization results—a horror in which there is no room for human beings to manifest the slightest individual dignity and hence assert some human values in their suffering (in fact, their individuality is taken away from them before they die, so that they become objects of mockery or pathos). So it doesn’t matter which side one chooses to align oneself with, Dionysus or Pentheus, the end result is the same. There is no moral lesson to be learned—that’s simply the way the world works.

Jan Kott in a remarkably interesting essay drew a fruitful parallel between *The Bacchae* and Conrad’s famous story *Heart of Darkness*, in which (to simplify a very complex fiction and Kott’s remarks on it) human experience is presented to us as offering two irreconcilable possibilities—the European life on the surface (with its stress on political power, suppression of nature, urban bureaucratic rationality, and ignorance of the inner life) and African life lived from the heart (with its stress on passion, dancing, mass movement, and cannibalism, in the prehistoric wilderness of the jungle). Conrad’s tale explores (among other things) the mutual destruction which occurs when these two ways of life (or aspects of life) collide, and it

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Persian money, the corruption or abandonment of traditional ways, and political incompetence (in short, on the disappearance of justice).

The sense that in this war the Greeks were in the grip of some mass self-destructive insanity which weak traditional political structures and shallow personalities were inadequate to deal with was by no means confined to Euripides (if that is how we read his play)—there is strong corroboration in, among other texts, the apocalyptic ending of the Clouds and, of course, throughout Thucydides.

The Mythological Framework: Some Comments

The above interpretative suggestions are underscored by the remarkably rich treatment of a number of important Greek myths throughout the play. These highlight the tensions between the eastern (barbarian) and Greek responses to life and to the divine and suggest by the end that the Greek way has been overcome and banished. There may well be a sense that whatever it was which made Greece special (in contrast to the barbarians), the Greek “experiment,” if you will, has ended. Without going into great detail, let me suggest some of the ways in which the mythic content of the play and the discussion of how one understands myth help to illuminate this play’s despairing vision.

Central to The Bacchae is the family of Cadmus. The play reminds us early on that Cadmus came from Asia (from Sidon) and created the Greek race by sowing the dragon’s teeth which produced the first Greeks (the Cadmeians)—an event which is referred more than once. Cadmus also married Harmonia, an immortal, in a celebration which (like the similar union of Achilles’ parents, Peleus and Thetis) symbolizes the possibility of a harmonious relationship between the human and the divine as the creative basis for the just community (of the sort we see dramatically symbolized at the end of Aeschylus’ Oresteia).

The play forces us to examine the destruction of this earlier harmony between gods and men and hence of the political and communal ideal which it endorses. Dionysus, an eastern god (or a god bringing with him a different relationship to the divine) is interested in submission, ecstatic revelry, and drink. Those who do not at once celebrate this vision of divinity are subjected to harsh, instant, irrational punishment for disobedience. And the penalty he inflicts here—the killing of a child by his mother and the penalties he inflicts here—does not end with the death of a single child; it goes on to condemn the entire race of Cadmus. The play makes this clear at the end: the penalty he inflicts here—the killing of a child by his mother and the banishment of the royal family into barbarian lands (a significant contrast to the Oresteia, where the killing of a mother by the son helps to establish human justice under divine auspices in the polis)—marks an end to whatever Greek Thebes was all about to begin with. The barbarian East, where Cadmus originally came from, has triumphed.

There may even be a sense here in the Bacchae that the experiment was doomed from the start. That, at any rate, is one construction one can put on ...
the strong emphasis given in this play to an eastern vision of Zeus, a Zeus who, as E. R. Dodds points out (84), seems far more like Dionysus than the traditional Greek notion of Zeus (especially in all those details linking Zeus’ birth to the irrationality of Dionysian revels and in Dionysus’ repeated insistence that he is the son of Zeus). The emphasis on the overwhelming destructiveness of the gods (from Zeus’ lightning bolt which kills Semele to the tearing apart of Actaeon, as well as Dionysus’ conduct in the play) tends constantly to undercut any sense that some sort of harmonious cooperation between humans and the divine, some arrangement which gives human beings a chance to manifest their worth in a traditionally Greek way, is possible.

But if this play is exploring such a despairing vision, it offers us the sense that part of the problem is the loss of human participation in the original arrangement. In the Bacchae, we witness the deterioration of the human capacity to accept the mystery of divine mythology as a vitalizing and creative political presence—and the enduring value of the link between the human and the divine celebrated in the marriage of Cadmus and Harmonia depends upon that more than anything else.

Here, however, Cadmus’ children refuse to enter the world of religious myth. Semele’s sisters see her story as a convenient lie to excuse her sexual promiscuity with some man, and Pentheus is far too concerned with secular power and his own inadequacies to entertain a truly religious thought. Cadmus sees religion primarily as a way of making his family more important (and thus protecting himself). None of them displays any true reverence for the mysteries of life passed down to them (in this respect, one might note the significant differences between them and, say, Oedipus in Oedipus the King).

The most interesting figure in connection with this attitude to mythology is Tiresias, traditionally a mediator between divine wisdom and limited human understanding. Here he seems more concerned to rationalize Dionysus away, rather than to accept him as a particular, immediate, and mysterious religious experience. Hence, he can subject the myth of Dionysus’ birth from the thigh of Zeus to rational analysis (Dodds has some excellent comments on this point on 91). There may well be some satiric intent in this presentation of Tiresias (maybe), but, beyond the most immediate satire, there may also be a sense that this most venerable of religious sensibilities has degenerated (or, if that is too strong, changed) into a new form of thinking which makes religious belief at least difficult and at most ridiculous.

Depending on the construction one puts upon the attitude to mythology in the Bacchae, one might offer a variety of interpretative possibilities concerning Euripides’ final word on Greek traditions, from lament to satire. My own view is that the play is not taking sides, but rather, as I have mentioned, exploring a passionate sense of despair at what has happened and what the future holds. With one eye on the philosophical revolution which, in the figures of Socrates and Plato, is going to attempt to redefine the basis of the good life, we can understand why Nietzsche (in The Birth of Tragedy) sees Euripides and Socrates as soul mates, but we do not have to go that far. The play evokes a terrible sense of something coming to an end (the exile of Cadmus and Harmonia and the end of Greek Thebes)—and it invites speculation about what now happens to the human community in the face of the triumph of Dionysian irrationality and destruction.

Works Cited


BAKXAI

BACCHAE
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DIONYSUS: divine son of Zeus and Semele, also called Bromius or Bacchus.

TIRESIAS: an old blind prophet

CADMUS: grandfather of both Dionysus and Pentheus, an old man

PENTHEUS: young king of Thebes, grandson of Cadmus, cousin of Dionysus

AGAVE: mother of Pentheus, daughter of Cadmus, sister of Semele

FIRST MESSENGER: a cattle herder

SECOND MESSENGER: an attendant on Pentheus

CHORUS OF BACCHAE: worshippers of Dionysus who have followed him from Asia.

SOLDIERS and ATTENDANTS around Pentheus
Βάκχαι

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ήκω Δίως παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα
Διόνυσος, ὄν τύχει ποιῆσαι Ἰκάμου κόρην
Σεμέλη λοχευθείσα στρατηγόφορον πυρί
μορφήν δ᾽ ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν
πάρει μορφὴν δ᾽ ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν
τόδε ἐγγύς οἰκίων καὶ δόμων ἑρείπια
τυφήμενα Δίως πυρὸς ἐτεί κύσαν φλόγα,
ἀθάνατον Ἡρᾶς μητέρ᾽ εἰς ἐμὴν ὕβριν.

ὁρῶ δὲ μητρὸς μνῆμα τῆς κεραυνίας
τόδε ἐγγύς οἰκίων καὶ δόμων ἑρείπια
τυφήμενα Δίως πυρὸς ἐτεί κύσαν φλόγα,
ἀθάνατον Ἡρᾶς μητέρ᾽ εἰς ἐμὴν ὕβριν.

δεῖ σηκόν ἀμπέλου δὲ νιν

λιπὼν δὲ Λυδῶν τοὺς πολυχρύσους γύας
Περσῶν τε, Περσῶν τε ἡλιοβλήτους πλάκας
Μήδων ἐπελθὼν Ἀραβίαν τ᾽ εὐδαίμονα
Ἀσίαν τε πᾶσαν, ἣ παρ᾽ ἁλμυρὰν μιγάσιν Ἕλλησι βαρβάροις θ᾽ ὁμοῦ
πλὴρεις ἔχουσα καλλιπυργώτους πόλεις,
ἐς τήδε πρῶτον Ἑλλήνων πόλιν,
τἀκεῖ χορεύσας καὶ καταστήσας ἐμὰς

τέλεις, ἵν᾽ εἴην ἐμφανὴς δαίμων βροτοῖς.

Dionysus

I've arrived here in the land of Thebes,
I, Dionysus, son of Zeus, born to him
from Semele, Cadmus' daughter, delivered
by a fiery midwife — Zeus' lightning flash.¹

Yes, I've changed my form from god to human,
appearing here at these streams of Dirce,
the waters of Ismarus. I see my mother's tomb —
for she was wiped out by that lightning bolt.

It's there, by the palace, with that rubble,
the remnants of her house, still smoldering
from Zeus' living fire — Hera's undying outrage
against my mother. But I praise Cadmus.

He's made his daughter's shrine a sacred place.
I have myself completely covered it
with leafy shoots of grape-bearing vines.

I've left the fabulously wealthy East,
lands of Lydians and Phrygians,
Persia's sun-drenched plains, walled towns in Bactria.

I've moved across the bleak lands of the Medes,
through rich Arabia, all Asian lands,
along the salt-sea coast, through those towns
with their beautifully constructed towers,
full of barbarians and Greeks all intermingled.

Now I've come to Thebes, city of Greeks,
only after I've set those eastern lands
dancing in the mysteries I established,
making known to men my own divinity.

Thebes is the first city of the Greeks
where I've roused people to shout out my cries,
with this deerskin draped around my body,
this ivy spear, a thyrsus, in my hand.²

For my mother's sisters have acted badly,
something they, of all people, should avoid.
Διόνυσον οὐκ ἐφασκόν ἐκφύναι Διός,
Σεμέλην δὲ νυμφευθείσαν ἐκ θνητοῦ τυνα 
ἔς Ζηῆν ἀναφέρεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν λέχους,
Κάδμου σοφίσμαθ', ὁν νυν οὐκέκα κτανείν 
Ζηῆν ἐξεκαυχώσθ', ὦτ γάμους ἐψεύσατο.

τοιγάρ νυν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ᾤστρησ᾽ ἐგὼ 
μανίας, ὥρος δ᾽ οὐκοίς παράκοποι φρενῶν·
σκενὴν τ᾽ ἔχειν ἣνάγκασ᾽ ὀργίων ἐμῶν,
καὶ πᾶν τὸ θῆλυ στέρμα Καδμείων, ὅσαι 
γυναῖκες ἦσαν, εξέμηνα δωμάτων.

ὁμοῦ δὲ Κάδμου παισὶν ἀναμεμειγμέναι 
χλωραῖς ὑπ᾽ ἐλάταις ἀνορόφοις ἦνται πέτραι.
δεῖ γὰρ πόλιν τήνδ᾽ ἐκμαθεῖν, κεὶ μὴ θέλει,
ὕπερφανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον᾽ ὃν τίκτει Διί.
Κάδμος μὲν οὖν γέρας τε καὶ τυραννίδα
Πενθεῖ δίδωσι θυγατρὸς ἐκπεφυκότι,
ὁς θεομαχεῖ τὰ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ καὶ σπονδῶν ἀπο
ἀθητεῖ μ᾽, ἐν εὐχαῖς τ᾽ οὐδαμοῦ μνείαν ἔχει.
ὁμοῦ οὖν οὖνκ᾽ αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγὼς ἐνδείξαμαι 
πᾶσιν τε Θηβαίοισιν. ἐς δ᾽ ἄλλην χθόνα,
κάθε κράνες θείων εὖ, μεταστήσω πόδα,
ἢν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις
ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις ἐκ τῶν βάκχων ἄγειν ζητῇ,
But you there, you women who've left Timolus, backbone of Lydia, my band of worshippers, whom I've led here from barbarian lands, my comrades on the road and when we rest, take up your drums, those instruments of yours from Phrygian cities, first invented by mother Rhea and myself. Move round here, beat those drums by Pentheus' palace, let Cadmus' city see you, while I go, in person, to the clefts of Mount Cithaeron, to my Bacchae, to join their dancing.

[Exit Dionysus]

CHORUS [singing and dancing]

FIRST VOICE
From Asia, from sacred Timolus
I've come to dance,
to move swiftly in my dance—
for Bromius—
sweet and easy task,
to cry out in celebration,
hailing great god Bacchus.

SECOND VOICE
Who's in the street? Who's there? Who?
Let him stay inside
out of our way.
Let every mouth be pure,
completely holy,
speak no profanities.
In my hymn I celebrate
our old eternal custom,
hailing Dionysus.

THIRD VOICE
O blessed is the man,
the fortunate man who knows
the rituals of the gods,
who leads a pious life,  
whose spirit merges  
with these Bacchic celebrations,  
frenzied dancing in the mountains,  
our purifying rites—  
one who reveres these mysteries  
from Cybele, our great mother,  
who, waving the thyrsus,  
forehead crowned with ivy,  
serves Dionysus.

**Fourth Voice**

On Bacchae! Bacchae, move!  
Bring home Bromius, our god,  
son of god, great Dionysus,  
from Phrygian mountains  
to spacious roads of Greece —  
Hail Bromius!

**Fifth Voice**

His mother dropped him early,  
as her womb, in forceful birth pangs,  
was struck by Zeus' flying lightning bolt,  
a blast which took her life.  
Then Zeus, son of Cronos,  
at once hid him away  
in a secret birthing chamber,  
buried in his thigh,  
shut in with golden clasps,  
concealed from Hera.

**Sixth Voice**

Fates made him perfect.  
Then Zeus gave birth to him,  
the god with ox's horns,  
crowned with wreaths of snakes —  
that's why the Maenads  
twist in their hair  
wild snakes they capture.

**Seventh Voice**

O Thebes, nursemaid of Semele,  
put on your ivy crown,
Euripides

Bacchae

βρύετε βρύετε χλοήρει
μίλακι καλλικάρπω
καὶ καταβακχιούσθε δρυὸς
ἡ ἑλάτας κλάδοις,
στικτῶν τ᾽ ἐνυτὰ νεβρίδων
στέφετε λευκοτρίχων μαλλοῖς
βρόμιος ὅστις ἄγηθι θιάσους—
εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, ἔνθα μένει
θηλυκὴ νεβρίς ὁσιοῦσθ᾽—
αὐτίκα γὰ χορεῦσει_
κλάδοισι, ἐλάτας κλάδοισι,
στικτῶν τ᾽ ἐνυτὰ νεβρίδων
στέφετε λευκοτρίχων μαλλοῖς
βρόμιος ὅστις ἄγηθι θιάσους—
εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, ἔνθα μένει
θηλυκὴ νεβρίς ὁσιοῦσθ᾽—
αὐτίκα γὰ χορεῦσει_

Eighth Voice

O you dark chambers of the Curetes,
you sacred caves in Crete,
birthplace of Zeus,
where the Corybantes in their caves,
men with triple helmets, made for me
this circle of stretched hide.
In their wild ecstatic dancing,
they mixed this drum beat
with the sweet seductive tones
of flutes from Phrygia,
then gave it to mother Rhea
to beat time for the Bacchae,
when they sang in ecstasy.
Nearby, orgiastic satyrs,
in ritual worship of the mother goddess,
took that drum, then brought it
into their biennial dance,
bringing joy to Dionysus.

Ninth Voice

He’s welcome in the mountains,
when he sinks down to the ground,
after the running dance,
wrapped in holy deerskin,
αἷμα τραγοκτόνον, ὀμοφάγον χάριν, ἱέμενος ἐς ὄρεα Φρύγια, Λύδι᾽, ὁ δ’ ἔξαρχος Βρόμιος,  
edoī.

— ῥεῖ δὲ γάλακτι πέδον, ῥεῖ δ᾽ οἴνῳ, ῥεῖ δὲ μελισσᾶν νέκταρι.

Συρίας δ’ ὡς λιβάνου κα-πινὸν ὁ Βακχεὶς ἀνέχων  
πυρσώδη φλόγα πεύκας ἑκ νάρθηκος αἴσσει
δρόμῳ καὶ χοροῖσιν πλανάτας ἑρεθίζων ἰαχαῖς τ᾽ ἀναπάλλων,
τρυφερόν τε πλόκαμον εἰς αἰθέρα ῥίπτων.  
ἕμα δ᾽ εὐάσμασι τοιάδ᾽ ἐπιβρέμει
· Ὤ ἴτε βάκχαι, ὤ ἴτε βάκχαι,
Τμώλου χρυσορόου χλιδᾷ μέλπετε τὸν Διόνυσον
βαρυβρόμων ὑπὸ τυμπάνων,
εὔια τὸν εὔιον ἀγαλλόμεναι θεὸν ἐν Φρυγίαισι βοαῖς ενοπαῖσι τε, λωτὸς ὅταν εὐκέλαδος
ἱερὸς ἱερὰ παίγματα βρέμῃ, σύνοχα φοιτάσιν εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος ἡδομένα
ἐρημός ὅταν εὐκέλαδος
ἰερὸς ἱερὰ παίγματα βρέμῃ, σύνοχα
φοιτάσιν εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος ἡδομένα

hunting the goat’s blood, blood of the slain beast,  
devouring its raw flesh with joy,  
rushing off into the mountains,  
in Phrygia, in Lydia,  
leading the dance—  
Bromius— Evoë!

All

The land flows with milk,  
the land flows with wine,  
the land flows with honey from the bees.  
He holds the torch high,  
our leader, the Bacchic One,  
blazing flame of pine,  
sweet smoke like Syrian incense,  
trailing from his thyrsus.  
As he dances, he runs,  
here and there,  
rousing the stragglers,  
stirring them with his cries,  
thick hair rippling in the breeze.  
Among the Maenads’ shouts  
his voice reverberates:  
“On Bacchants, on!  
With the glitter of Tmolus,  
which flows with gold,  
chant songs to Dionysus,  
to the loud beat of our drums.  
Celebrate the god of joy  
with your own joy,  
with Phrygian cries and shouts!  
When sweet sacred pipes  
play out their rhythmic holy song,  
in time to the dancing wanderers,  
then to the mountains,  
on, on to the mountains.”  
Then the bacchanalian woman  
is filled with total joy—  
like a foal in pasture  
right beside her mother—  
her swift feet skip in playful dance.
ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

τίς ἐν πύλαις; Κάδμον ἐκκάλει δόμων, Ἀγήνορος παῖδ’, ὃς πόλιν Σιδωνίαν λειτάν ἐπίργωσ’ ἀστυ Θηβαίων τοῦ. ἤτω τις, εἰσάγγελλε Τειρεσίας ὅτι ζητεῖ νῦν· οἶδε δ’ αὐτός ἂν ἦκεν πέρι ἡς τε ξυνεθέμην πρέσβυς ὡν γεραιτέρῳ, θύρσους ἀνάπτειν καὶ νεβρῶν δορὰς ἔχειν στεφανοῦν τε κράτα κοσάνων βλαστήμασιν.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὦ φίλταθ᾽, ὡς σὴν γῆρυν ᾐσθόμην κλύων σοφὸν παρ’ ἀνδρός, ἐν δόμοισιν ὄν· ήκω δ’ ἐτοιμὸς τήροδ’ ἔχων σκευὸν θεοῦ· δεὶ γάρ νυν ὡντα παιδα θυγατρός ἐκ ἐμῆς Διόνυσον ὃς πέφηνεν ἀνθρώποις θεὸν ὃσον καθ’ ἡμᾶς δυνατὸν αὔξεσθαι μέγαν. ποι δεὶ χορεύειν, ποι καθαστάναι πόδα καὶ κράτα σεῖσαι πολιόν; ἐξηγοῦ σύ μοι γέρων γέροντι, Τειρεσία· σὺ γὰρ σοφὸς. ὡς οὐ κάμοι ἂν οὔτ᾽ οὔθ ἡμέρα οὔτ᾽ νύκτ᾽ ἡδὲς ἥμεραν θύρσων κροτῶν γῆν· ἐπιλελήμεθ’ ἓδεως γέρουτε διότες.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ταύτ’ ἐμοί πάσχεις ἄρα· κάγω γάρ ἰδίῳ κατ’ ἱππώτας χοροίς.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

οὐκόν οἷσιν εἰς ἄρος περάσομεν;

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡμοίως ἂν ὁ θεὸς τιμῆ ἔχοι.
ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
γέρων γέροντα παιδαγωγήσω σ᾽ ἐγώ.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ
‘ο θεὸς ἀμοχθὶ κεῖσε νῷν ἡγήσεται.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
μόνοι δὲ πόλεως Βακχίῳ χορεύσομεν;

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ
μόνοι γὰρ εὖ φρονοῦμεν, οἱ δ᾽ ἄλλοι κακῶς.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
μακρὸν τὸ μέλλειν· ἀλλ᾽ ἐμῆς ἔχου χερός.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ
ἰδοῖ, ξύναπτε καὶ ξυνωρίζου χέρα.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
οὐ καταφρονῶ ᾽γὼ τῶν θεῶν θνητὸς γεγώς.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ
οὐδὲν σοφιζόμεσθα τοῖσι δαίμοσιν.

 Corpus: 18 19

Cadmus<br>Cadmus<br>Cadmus<br>Cadmus<br>Cadmus

Bacchae

So I'll be your nursemaid — one old man will take charge of another one?

The god himself will get us to the place without our efforts.

Of all the city are we the only ones who'll dance to honour Bacchus?

Yes, indeed, for we're the only ones whose minds are clear. As for the others, well, their thinking's wrong.

There'll be a long wait. Take my hand.

[holding out his hand]<br>Here. Take it — make a pair of it and yours.

I'm a mortal, so I don't mock the gods.

To the gods we mortals are all ignorant. [200]<br>Those old traditions from our ancestors, the ones we've had as long as time itself, no argument will ever overthrow, in spite of subtleties sharp minds invent. Will someone say I disrespect old age, if I intend to dance with ivy on my head? Not so, for the god makes no distinctions — whether the dancing is for young or old. He wants to gather honours from us all, to be praised communally, without division.

Since you're blind to daylight, Tiresias, I'll be your seer, tell you what's going on —
Pentheus, that child of Echion, the one

to whom I handed over power in this land,

he's coming here, to the house. He's in a rush.

He looks so flustered. What news will he bring?

[Enter Pentheus, with some armed attendants. At first he does not notice Cadmus and Tiresias, not until he calls attention to them]

Pentheus

It so happens I've been away from Thebes,

but I hear about disgusting things going on,

here in the city—women leaving home
to go to silly Bacchic rituals,
cavorting there in mountain shadows,

with dances honouring some upstart god,

this Dionysus, whoever he may be. Mixing bowls
in the middle of their meetings are filled with wine.

They creep off one by one to lonely spots
to have sex with men, claiming they're Maenads
busy worshipping. But they rank Aphrodite,

goddess of sexual desire, ahead of Bacchus.

All the ones I've caught, my servants guard
in our public prison, their hands chained up.

All those who're still away, I'll chase down,

hunt them from the mountains—that includes
Agave, who bore me to Echion, Ino,

and Autonoe, Actaeon's mother. 9

Once I've clamped them all in iron fetters,

I'll quickly end this perverse nastiness,

this Bacchic celebration. People say
some stranger has arrived, some wizard,

a conjurer from the land of Lydia—

with sweet-smelling hair in golden ringlets
and Aphrodite's charms in wine-dark eyes.

He hangs around the young girls day and night,
dangling in front of them his joyful mysteries.

If I catch him in this city, I'll stop him.

He'll make no more clatter with his thyrsus,
or wave his hair around. I'll chop off his head,
slice it right from his body. This man claims

that Dionysus is a god, alleging
ἐκεῖνος ἐν μηρῷ ποτ᾽ ἐρράφθαι Διός,
ὃς ἐκπυροῦται λαμπάσιν κεραυνίαις
σὺν μητρί, Δίους ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο.
ταῦτ᾽ οὐχὶ δεινῆς ἀγχόνης ἔστ᾽ ἄξια,
ὔβρεις ὑβρίζειν, ὡστὶς ἔστιν ὁ ξένος;

ἀτὰρ τόδ᾽ ἄλλο θαύμα, τὸν τερασκόπον
ἐν πουκίλαισι νεβρίσι Τειρεσίαν ὄρῳ
πατέρα τε μητρός τῆς ἐμῆς—πολλῶν γέλων—
νάρθηκα βακχεύοντ᾽. ἀναίνομαι, πάτερ,
τὸ γῆρας ὑμῶν εἰσορῶν νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον.
οὐκ ἀποτινάξεις κισσόν; οὐκ ἐλευθέραν
θέρσου μεθήσεις χεῖρ᾽, ἐμῆς μητρὸς πάτερ;

οὐ ταῦτ᾽ ἐπεισα, Τειρεσία—τόνδ᾽ ἂδ βέλεις
τὸν δαίμον᾽ ἀνθρώποισιν ἐσφέρων νέον
σκοπεῖν πτερωτοὺς κἀκρυροὺς μισθοὺς φέρειν.
εἰ μή σε γῆρας πολλῶν ἐξερρύετο,
καθήσ᾽ ἂν ἐν βάκχαισι δέσμιος μέσαις,
τελετὰς πονηρὰς εἰσάγων
ὅπου βότρυος ἐν δαίτι γίγνεται γάνος,
οὐχ ὑγιὲς οὐδὲν ἐτι λέγω τῶν ὀργῶν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τῆς δυσσεβείας, ὁ ξένι, οὐκ αἰδήθεις

Κάδμου τε τῶν σπείραντα γηγενὴ στάχυν,
Ἐχίονος δ᾽ ὁ παῖς κατασχῦνες γένος;

that once upon a time he was sewn up,
that stitched inside Zeus’ thigh—but Dionysus
was burned to death, along with Semele,
in that lightning strike, because she’d lied.
She maintained that she’d had sex with Zeus.
All this surely merits harsh punishment,
death by hanging. Whoever this stranger is,
his insolence is an insult to me.

[noticing Cadmus and Tiresias for the first time]

Well, here’s something totally astounding!
I see Tiresias, our soothsayer, all dressed up
in dappled fawn skins—my mother’s father, too!
This is ridiculous. To take a thyrsus
and jump around like this.

[to Cadmus]

You sir,
I don’t like to see such arrant foolishness
from your old age. Why not throw out that ivy?
And, grandfather, why not let that thyrsus go?

[turning to address Tiresias]

Tiresias, you’re the one who’s put him up to this.
You want to bring in some new god for men,
so you’ll be able to inspect more birds,
and from his sacrifices make more money.
If your gray old age did not protect you,
you’d sit in chains with all the Bacchae
for such a ceremonial perversion.
Whenever women at some banquet
start to take pleasure in the gleaming wine,
I say there’s nothing healthy in their worshipping.

Chorus Leader

That’s impiety! O stranger,
have you no reverence for the gods, for Cadmus,
who sowed that crop of men born from the earth?
You’re a child of Echion—do you wish
to bring your own family into disrepute?
ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ὅταν λάβῃ τις τῶν λόγων ἀνήρ σοφὸς καλὸς ἀφορμᾶς, οὐ μέγ᾽ ἐργον εὐ λέγειν· σὺ δ᾽ ἐπτροχοὺς μὲν γλῶσσαν ἄφωνων ἔχεις, ἐν τοῖς λόγοις δ᾽ οὐκ ἔνεισί σοι φρένες.

θράσει δὲ δυνατός καὶ λέγειν οἶδ᾽ τ᾽ ἀνήρ κακὸς πολλῆς γίγνεται νοῦ οὐκ ἔχων. οὕτως δ᾽ ὁ δαίμων ὁ νέος, ὅν σὺ διαγελάς, οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην μέγεθος ἐξειπεῖν ὅσος καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδ᾽ ἐσται. δύο γάρ, ὦ νεανία, τὰ πρῶτ᾽ ἐν ἀνθρώποις. Δημήτηρ θεά—

γῆ δ᾽ ἐστίν, ὄνομα δ᾽ ὁπότερον βούλῃ κάλει· αὕτη μὲν ἐν ξηροῖσιν ἐκτρέφει βροτούς· ὃς δ᾽ ἦλθ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽, ἀντίπαλον ὁ Σεμέλης γόνος βότρυος ἔργων πώμ᾽ ηὗρε κεἰσηνέγκατο θητοῖς, ὃ παῖει τοὺς ταλαιπώρους βροτοὺς λύπης, ὅταν πληθωσάω ἀμπέλου ῥοῆς, ὃπων τε λήθην τῶν καθ᾽ ἴμεραν κακῶν δίδωσι, οὐδὲ ἔστ᾽ ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων. οὕτως θεώι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς, ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τἀγάθ᾽ ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.

καὶ καταγελάς νιν, ὡς ἐνερράφη Διὸς μηρῷ; διδάξω σ᾽ ὡς καλῶς ἔχει τόδε. ἐπεί νιν ἥρπασ᾽ ἐκ πυρὸς κεραυνίου Ζεῦς, ἐς δ᾽ Ὅλυμπον βρέφος ἀνήγαγεν θεόν, Ἡρα νιν ἤθελ᾽ ἐκβαλεῖν ἀπ᾽ οὐρανοῦ· Ζεὺς δ᾽ ἀντεμηχανήσαθ᾽ οἷα δὴ θεός. Ζεὺς δ᾽ ἀντεμηχανήσαθ᾽ οἷα δὴ θεός, ῥήχας μέρος τῷ χθόνι ἐγκυκλουμένου αἰθέρος, ἐθήκε τόδε ὁμήρου ἐκδιδούς, Διόνυσον Ἡρας νεικέων· χρόνῳ δὲ νω

ΤΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

When a man of wisdom has good occasion to speak out, and takes the opportunity, it's not that hard to give an excellent speech. You've got a quick tongue and seem intelligent, but your words don't make any sense at all. A fluent orator whose power comes from self-assurance and from nothing else makes a bad citizen, for he lacks sense. This man, this new god, whom you ridicule—it's impossible for me to tell you just how great he'll be in all of Greece. Young man, among human beings two things stand out preeminent, of highest rank. Goddess Demeter is one—she's the earth (though you can call her any name you wish), and she feeds mortal people cereal grains. The other one came later, born of Semele—he brought with him liquor from the grape, something to match the bread from Demeter. He introduced it among mortal men. When they can drink up what streams off the vine, unhappy mortals are released from pain. It grants them sleep, allows them to forget their daily troubles. Apart from wine, there is no cure for human hardship. He, being a god, is poured out to the gods, so human beings receive fine benefits as gifts from him. And yet you mock him. Why? Because he was sewn into Zeus thigh? Well, I'll show you how this all makes sense. When Zeus grabbed him from the lightning flame, he brought him to Olympus as a god. But Hera wished to throw him out of heaven. So Zeus, in a manner worthy of a god, came up with a cunning counter plan. From the sky which flows around the earth, Zeus broke off a piece, shaped it like Dionysus, then gave that to Hera, as a hostage. The real child he sent to nymphs to raise, thus saving him from Hera's jealousy. Over time people mixed up “sky” and “thigh.”
Euripides

βροτοὶ ῥαφῆναί φασιν ἐν μηρῷ Διός,
όνομα μεταστήσαντες, ὅτι θεά θεός
"Εφτα ποθ' ἀμήλεσε, συνθέντες λόγον.
μάντις δ' ὁ δαίμων ὀδο. τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσμουν
καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχειν,
ὀνομα μεταστήσαντες, ὅτι θεὰ θεὸς
Ἥρᾳ ποθ᾽ ὡμήρευσε, συνθέντες λόγον.μάντις δ᾽ ὁ δαίμων ὅδε
τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιν
καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχειν.
Ἀρεώς τε μοίραν μεταλαβὼν ἔχει τινά.
στρατόν γὰρ ἐν ὅπλοις ὄντα κατί τάξεων
φάβος διεπτόησε πρὸς λόγχης θιγεῖν.
μανία δὲ καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ Διονύσου πάρα.

305
ἐτ' αὐτὸν ὄψῃ κατὶ Δελφίσιν πέτραις
πηδῶντα σὺν πεύκαισι δικόρυφον πλάκα,
πάλλοντα καὶ σείοντα βακχεῖον κλάδον,
μέγαν τ᾽ ἀν᾽ Ἑλλάδα. ἀλλ᾽ ἐμοί, Πενθεῦ, πιθοῦ.
μηδ᾽, ἢν δοκῇς μέν, ἡ δὲ δόξα σου νοσῇ,
φρονεῖν δόκει τι
τὸν θεὸν δ᾽ ἐς γῆν δέχου
καὶ σπένδε καὶ βάκχευε καὶ στέφου κάρα.

[300]

Bacchae

saying he'd come from Zeus's thigh, changing words,
because he, a god, had once been hostage
to goddess Hera. So they made up the tale.
This god's a prophet, too, for in his rites —
the Bacchic celebrations and the madness —
a huge prophetic power is unleashed.

When the god fully enters human bodies,
he makes those possessed by frenzy prophets.
They speak of what will come in future days
He also shares the work of war god Ares.
For there are times an army all drawn up,
its weapons ready, can shake with terror,
before any man has set hand to his spear.
Such madness comes from Dionysus.

Some day you'll see him on those rocks at Delphi,
leaping with torches on the higher slopes,
way up there between two mountain peaks,
waving and shaking his Bacchic wand,
a great power in Greece. Trust me, Pentheus.

Don't be too confident a sovereign's force
controls men. If something seems right to you,
but your mind's diseased, don't think that's wisdom.
So welcome this god into your country.
Pour libations to him, then celebrate
these Bacchic rites with garlands on your head.

On women, where Aphrodite is concerned,
Dionysus will not enforce restraint —
such modesty you must seek in nature,
where it already dwells. For any woman
whose character is chaste won't be defiled
by Bacchic revelry. Don't you see that?
When there are many people at your gates,
you're happy. The city shouts your praise.

It celebrates the name of Pentheus.
The god, too, I think, derives great pleasure
from being honoured. And so Cadmus,
whom you mock, and I will crown our heads
with ivy and will join the ritual,
an old gray team, but still we have to dance.
Your words will not turn me against the god,
Euripides

μαίνῃ γὰρ ὡς ἄλγιστα, καυτέ φαρμάκοις ἀκή λάβοις ἂν οὔτε ἂνεν τούτων νοσεῖς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ πρέσβυ, Φοῖβόν τ᾽ οὐ κατασχύνεις λόγοις, τιμῶν τε Βρόμιον σωφρονεῖς, μέγαν θεόν.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὦ παῖ, καλῶς σοι Τειρεσίας παρῄνεσεν. οἴκει μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν, μὴ θύραζε τῶν νόμων.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ὀ προσοίσεις ἄθλιον μόρον, ὃν ὠμόσιτοι σκύλακες ἃς ἐθρέψατο διεσπάσαντο, κρείσσον᾽ ἐν κυναγίαις Ἀρτέμιδος εἶναι κομπάσαν᾽ ἐν ὀργάσιν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

οὐ μὴ προσοίσεις χεῖρα, βακχεύσεις δ᾽ ἰών, μὴ δ᾽ ἐξαρέσκης μορίαν τὴν σὴν ἐμοί; τῆς σῆς δ᾽ ἀνοίας τόνδε τῶν διδάσκαλων δόσιν μέτεμψ. στειχέτω τις ὡς τάξεος, ἐλθὼν δὲ θάκους τοῦδ᾽ ὑν᾽ οἰωνοσκοπεῖ μαχλοῖς τριαίνου κανάτρεψων ἐμπαλαί, ἂνω κάτω τὰ πάντα συγχέας ὁμοῦ, καὶ στέμματ᾽ ἀνέμοις καὶ θυέλλαισιν μέθες.

for you are mad — under a cruel delusion.

No drug can heal that ailment — in fact, some drug has caused it.

CHORUS LEADER

you've not disgraced Apollo with your words, and by honouring this Dionysus, a great god, you show your moderation.

Cadmus

Old man,

My child, Tiresias has given you some good advice. You should live among us, not outside traditions. At this point, you're flying around — thinking, but not clearly. For if, as you claim, this man is not a god, why not call him one? Why not tell a lie, a really good one? Then it will seem that some god has been born to Semele. We—and all our family—will win honour. Remember the dismal fate of Actaeon—torn to pieces in some mountain forest by blood-thirsty dogs he'd raised himself. He'd boasted he was better in the hunt than Artemis. Don't suffer the same fate. Come here. Let me crown your head with ivy. Join us in giving honour to this god.

Pentheus

Keep your hands off me! Be off with you—go to these Bacchic rituals of yours. But don't infect me with your madness.

As for the one who in this foolishness has been your teacher, I'll bring him to justice.

[to his attendants]

One of you, go quickly to where this man, Tiresias, has that seat of his, the place where he inspects his birds. Take some levers, knock it down. Demolish it completely. Turn the whole place upside down—all of it. Let his holy ribbons fly off in the winds. That way I'll really do him damage.
Euripides

You others — go to the city, scour it to capture this effeminate stranger, who corrupts our women with a new disease, and thus infects our beds. If you get him, tie him up and bring him here for judgment, a death by stoning. That way he'll see his rites in Thebes come to a bitter end.

[Exit Pentheus into the palace]

Tiresias

You unhappy man, you've no idea just what it is you're saying. You've gone mad! Even before now you weren't in your right mind. Let's be off, Cadmus. We'll pray to the god on Pentheus' behalf, though he's a savage, and for the city, too, so he won't harm it. Come with me — bring the ivy-covered staff. See if you can help support my body. I'll do the same for you. It would be shameful if two old men collapsed. No matter for we must serve Bacchus, son of Zeus. But you, Cadmus, you should be more careful, or Pentheus will bring trouble in your home. I'm not saying this as a prophecy, but on the basis of what's going on. A man who's mad tends to utter madness.

[Exit Tiresias and Cadmus together on their way to the mountains]

Chorus

Holiness, queen of the gods, Holiness, sweeping over earth on wings of gold, do you hear what Pentheus says? Do you hear the profanities he utters, the insults against Bromius, child of Semele, chief god among all blessed gods, for those who wear their lovely garlands in a spirit of harmonious joy? This is his special office, to lead men together in the dance, to make them laugh as the flute plays,
to bring all sorrows to an end,
at the god's sacrificial feast,
when the gleaming liquid grapes arrive,
when the wine bowl casts its sleep
on ivy-covered feasting men.

Unbridled tongues and lawless folly
come to an end only in disaster.
A peaceful life of wisdom
maintains tranquility.
It keeps the home united.
Though gods live in the sky,
from far away in heaven
they gaze upon the deeds of men.
But being clever isn't wisdom.
And thinking deeply about things
isn't suitable for mortal men.
Our life is brief—that's why
the man who chases greatness
fails to grasp what's near at hand.
That's what madmen do,
mens who've lost their wits.
That's what I believe.

Would I might go to Cyprus,
island of Aphrodite,
where the Erotes,
bewitching goddesses of love,
soothe the hearts of humankind,
or to Paphos, rich and fertile,
not with rain, but with the waters
of a hundred flowing mouths
of a strange and foreign river.
O Bromius, Bromius,
inspired god who leads the Bacchae,
lead me away to lovely Peira,
where Muses dwell,
or to Olympus' sacred slopes,
where Graces live, Desire, too, 
where it’s lawful and appropriate 
to celebrate our rites with Bacchus. 
This god, son of Zeus, 
rejoices in our banquets. 
He adores the goddess Peace, 
and she brings riches with her 
and nourishes the young. 
The god gives his wine equally, 
sharing with rich and poor alike. 
It takes away all sorrow. 
But he hates the man who doesn’t care 
to live his life in happiness, 
by day and through the friendly nights. 
From those who deny such common things 
he removes intelligence, 
their knowledge of true wisdom. 
So I take this as my rule— 
follow what common people think— 
do what most men do.

[Enter a group of soldiers, bringing Dionysus with his arms tied up. Pentheus enters from the palace]

Soldier

Pentheus, we’re here because we’ve caught the prey you sent us out to catch. Yes, our attempts have proved successful. The beast you see here was tame with us. He didn’t try to run. No, he surrendered willingly enough, without turning pale or changing colour on those wine dark cheeks. He even laughed at us, inviting us to tie him up and lead him off. He stood still, making it easier for me to take him in. It was awkward, so I said, “Stranger, I don’t want to lead you off, but I’m under orders here from Pentheus, who sent me.” And there’s something else—those Bacchic women you locked up, the ones you took in chains into the public prison—they’ve all escaped. They’re gone—playing around in some meadow, calling out to Bromius,
Ευριπίδης

Bacchae

αὐτόματα δ᾽ αὐταῖς δεσμὰ διελύθη ποδῶν κληθὲς τ᾽ ἄνηκαι θύρετρ᾽ ἄνευ θηνητῆς χερός. πολλῶν δ᾽ οὗ ἀνήρ θεαμάτων ὤκει πλέως ἐς τάσδε Θήβας. σοὶ δὲ τάλλα χρή μέλειν. 450

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

μεθέσθε χειρᾶν τούτες ἐν ἄρκυσιν γὰρ ὄν καὶ ἐστιν οὕτως ὕπο ἐστε ἀκοφυγεῖν.

ἀτὰρ τὸ μὲν σῶμα οὐκ ἀμορφὸς εἶ, ξένε, ὡς ἐς γυναίκας, ἐφ᾽ ὅπερ ἐς Θήβας πάρειν πλούκαμος τε γὰρ σοι ταναισὶ, οὐ πάλης ὑπὸ, γένειν παρ᾽ αὐτῶν κεχυμένος, πόθου πλέως-λευκῆν δὲ χροιῶν ἐκ παρασκευῆς ἔχεις, οὐκ ἠλίου βολαῖσιν, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ σκιᾶς, τὴν Ἀφροδίτιν καλλονῇ θηρώμενος.

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν σοὶ μοι λέξον ὅστις εἶ γένος. 460

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

οὐ κόμπος οὐδεὶς ῥᾴδιον δ᾽ εἰπὲν τόδε. τὸν ἀνθεμώδῃ Τμῶλον οἶσθά που κλύων.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

οἶδ᾽, ὃς τὸ Σάρδεων ἄστυ περιβάλλει κύκλῳ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐντεῦθέν εἰμι, Λυδία δέ μοι πατρίς. 465

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πόθεν δὲ τελετὰς τάσδε ἄγεις ἐς Ἑλλάδα;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς εἰσέβησ᾽ ὁ τοῦ Διός.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

Ζεὺς δ᾽ ἔστ᾽ ἐκεῖ τις, ὃς νέους τίκτει θεούς; 470

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

οὐκ, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ Σεμέλην ἐνθάδε ζεύξας γάμους.
Ευριπίδης

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
πότερα δὲ νύκτωρ α' ἡ κατ' ὁμι' ἤνάγκασεν;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ὁρὼν ὥρωντα, καὶ δίδωσιν ὁργία.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
τὰ δ᾽ ὄργι᾽ ἐστὶ τίν᾽ ἰδέαν ἐξοντά σοι;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἀρρητ᾽ ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἐξει δ᾽ ὄνησιν τοῖσι θύουσιν τίνα;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
οὐθέμις ἀκούσαι α', ἐστι δ᾽ ἀξεί εἰδέναι.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
εὖ τοῦτ᾽ ἐκιβδήλευσας, ἵν᾽ ἀκούσαι θέλω.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἀσέβειαν ἀσκοῦντ᾽ ὄργί᾽ ἐχθαίρει θεοῦ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
τὸν θεόν γὰρ φῂς σαφῶς, ποῖός τις ἦν;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ὁποῖος ἠθελ᾽· οὐκ ἐγὼ ᾽τασσον τόδε.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
τοῦτ᾽ αὖ παρωχέτευσας εὖ κοὐδὲν λέγων.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
δόξει τις ἀμαθεὶς σοφὰ λέγων οὐκ εὖ φρονεῖν.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ήλθες δὲ πρῶτα δεύρ᾽ ἄγων τὸν δαίμονα;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

πᾶς ἄναχορεύει βαρβάρων τάδ᾽ ὄργια.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

φρονοῦσι γὰρ κάκιον Ἑλλήνων πολύ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

τάδ᾽ εὖ γε μάλλον· οἱ νόμοι δὲ διάφοροι.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τὰ δ᾽ ἱερά νύκτωρ ἢ μεθ᾽ ἡμέραν τελεῖς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

νύκτωρ τὰ πολλά· σεμνότητι ἐχει σκότος.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τοῦτ᾽ ἐστὶ γυναικῶν δώλιον ἐστὶ καὶ σαθρόν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

κἀν ἡμέρα τὸ γ᾽ αἰσχρὸν ἐξεύροι τις ἄν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

δίκην σε δοῦναι δεῖ σοφισμάτων κακῶν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

κἀν ἡμέρα τὸ γ᾽ αἰσχρὸν ἐξεύροι τις ἄν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ὡς θρασὺς ὁ βάκχος κοὐκ ἀγύμναστος λόγων.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

εἴφ᾽ ὅ τι παθεῖν δεῖ· τί με τὸ δεινὸν ἐργάσῃ;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πρῶτον μὲν ἂριστον βόστρυχον τεμῶ σέθεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἰερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος· τῷ θεῷ δ᾽ αὐτὸν τρέφω.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἔπειτα θύρσον τόνδε παράδος ἐκ χεροῖν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
αὐτός μ᾽ ἀφαιροῦ τόνδε Διονύσου φορῶ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
eἰρκταῖσί τ᾽ ἔνδον σῶμα σὸν φυλάξομεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
λύσει μ᾽ ὁ δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ὅταν γε καλέσῃς αὐτὸν ἐν βάκχαις σταθείς.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
καὶ νῦν ἂ πάσχω πλησίον παρὼν ὥρᾳ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
καὶ ποῦ ὅστις οὐ γὰρ φανερὸς ὄμμασίν γ᾽ ἐμοῖς.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
παρ᾽ ἐμοί· σὺ δ᾽ ἀσεβὴς αὐτὸς οὐκ εἰσορᾷς.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
λάζυσθε καταφρονεῖ με καὶ Θῆβας ὅδε.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
αὐτῶ με μη δείν σωφρονῶν οὔ σώφροσν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἐγὼ δὲ δείν γε, κυριώτερος σέθεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
οὐκ οἴσθ᾽ ὃ τι ζῇς, οὐδ᾽ ὃ δρᾷς, οὐδ᾽ ὃστις εἶ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
Πενθεύς, Ἀγαύης παῖς, πατρὸς δ᾽ Ἔχιονος.

Pentheus
And give me that thyrsus in your hand.

Dionysus
This wand I carry is the god’s, not mine.
You’ll have to seize it from me for yourself.

Pentheus
We’ll lock your body up inside, in prison.

Dionysus
The god will personally set me free,
whenever I so choose.

Pentheus
That only works
if you call him while among the Bacchae.

Dionysus
He sees my suffering now—and from near by.

Pentheus
Where is he then? My eyes don’t see him.

Dionysus
He’s where I am. You can’t see him,
because you don’t believe.

Pentheus [to his attendants]
Seize him!
He’s insulting Thebes and me.

Dionysus
I warn you—you shouldn’t tie me up.
I’ve got my wits about me. You’ve lost yours.

Pentheus
But I’m more powerful than you,
so I’ll have you put in chains.

Dionysus
You’re quite ignorant
of why you live, what you do, and who you are.

Pentheus
I am Pentheus, son of Agave and Echion.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐνδυστυχῆσαι τούνοι' ἐπιτήδειος εἶ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

χώρει· καθείρξατ' αὐτὸν ἱππικαῖς πέλας
φάντασαν, ὡς ἂν σκότιον εἰσορᾷ κνέφας.

ἐκεῖ χώρει· τάσδε δ' ὃς ἄγων πάρει
κακῶν συνεργοὺς ἢ διεμπολήσομεν
ἡ χείρα δοῦν τοῦδε καὶ βόρος κτύπου
παῖσας, ἐφ' ἱστοῖς δμωίδας κεκτήσομαι.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

στείχοιμ᾽ ἄν· ὅ τι γὰρ μὴ χρεών, οὔτοι χρεὼν
παθεῖν. ἀτάρ τοι τῶν δ' ἄποι᾽ ὑβρισμάτων
μέτεισι Διόνυσός σ', ὅν οὐκ εἶναι λέγεις.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

Ἄχελώου θύγατερ,
πότιν' εὔπαρθενε Δίρκα,
σὺ γὰρ ἐν σαῖς ποτὲ παγαῖς
τὸ Διὸς βρέφος ἔλαβες,
ὡς μηρῷ πυρὸς ἔστειλεν Ἐνάβλην ἀναφαίνω σε τόδ᾽, ὦ Βάκ-χει, Θήβαις ὀνομάζειν.σὺ δέ μ᾽, ὦ μάκαιρα Δίρκα,
στεφανηφόρους ἀπωθῇθι αἰσθάσουσιν ἐν σοὶ.
Why push me away?
Why seek to flee from me?
I tell you, you'll find joy
in grape-filled vines from Dionysus.
They'll make you love him.

What rage, what rage
shows up in that earth-bound race
of Pentheus, born to Echion,
an earth-bound mortal.
He's descended from a snake,
that Pentheus, a savage beast,
not a normal mortal man,
but some bloody monster
who fights against the gods.¹¹

He'll soon bind me in chains,
as a worshipper of Bacchus.
Already he holds in his house
my fellow Bacchic revelers,
hidden there in some dark cell.
Do you see, Dionysus,
child of Zeus, your followers
fighting their oppression?
Come down, my lord,
down from Olympus,
wave your golden thyrsus,
to cut short the profanities
of this blood-thirsty man.

Where on Mount Nysa,
which nourishes wild beasts,
where on the Corcyrean heights,
where do you wave your thyrsus
over your worshippers,
O Dionysus?
Perhaps in those thick woods
of Mount Olympus,
where Orpheus once played his lyre,
brought trees together with his songs,
collecting wild beasts round him.
O blessed Peiria,
whom Dionysus loves—
τε χορεύσων ἂμα βακχεύμασι, τὸν τ’ ὀκυρόναν
διαβὰς Ἀξίων εἶλας-
σομένας Μαινάδας ἄξει,
Λυδίαν πατέρα τε, τὸν
τᾶς εὐδαιμονίας βροτοῖς ὕλβοδόταν, τὸν ἔκλυον
εὐππον χώραν ἱδασσαν
καλλίστοισι λιπαίνειν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἰὼ, κλύετ᾽ ἐμᾶς κλύετ᾽ αὐδᾶς, ἰὼ βάκχαι, ἰὼ βάκχαι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίς ὅδε, τίς ὅδε πόθεν ὁ κέλαδος ἀνὰ μ’ ἐκάλεσεν Εὐίου;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἰὼ ἰὼ, πάλω αὐδᾶ, ὁ Σεμέλας, ὁ Διὸς παῖς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἰὼ ἰὼ δέσποτα δέσποτα, μόλε νυν ἡμέτερον ἐςθίασον, ὦ Βρόμιε Βρόμιε.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

σεῖε πέδον χθονὸς Ἑννοσὶ πότνια.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀ ἄ, τάχα τὰ Πενθέως μέλαθρα διατι-
νάξεται πεσήμασιν.

— ὁ Διόνυσος ἄνα μέλαθρα-
σέβετε νῦν.

— σέβομεν ὅ. ὁ

— he’ll come to set you dancing
in the Bacchic celebrations.
He’ll cross the foaming Axios,
lead his whirling Maenads on,
leaving behind the river Lydia.
which enriches mortal men,
and which, they say, acts as a father,
nourishing with many lovely streams
a land where horses flourish.

[The soldiers move in to round up the chorus of Bacchae. As they do so, the ground begins to shake, thunder sounds, lightning flashes, and the entire palace starts to break apart]

DIONYSUS [shouting from within the palace]

Io! Hear me, hear me as I call you.
Io! Bacchae! Io Bacchae!

CHORUS [a confusion of different voices in the following speeches]

Who’s that? Who is it? It’s Dionysus’ voice!
It’s calling me. But from what direction?

DIONYSUS [from inside the palace]

Io! Io! I’m calling out again — the son of Semele, a child of Zeus!

CHORUS

Io! Io! Lord and master!
Come join our company,
Bromius, oh Bromius!

DIONYSUS [from inside]

Sacred lord of earthquakes, shake this ground.

[The earthquake tremors resume]

CHORUS VOICE 1

Αἴ! Soon Pentheus’ palace
will be shaken into rubble.

CHORUS VOICE 2

Dionysus is in the house — revere him.

CHORUS VOICE 3

We revere him, we revere him.
Euripides

— εἶδετε λάινα κίοσιν ἐμβολα
διάδρομα τάδε; Βρόμιος ὁδ᾽ ἀλα- λάζεται στέγας ἕσω.

Διόνυσος

ἀπεκεραίνον άθωπα λαμπάδα-
ςύμφλεγε σύμφλεγε δώματα Πενθέως.

Χορὸς

ἄ, τυρ οὐ λεύσσεις, οὐδ᾽ αὐγάζῃ.
Σέμελας ἰερὸν ἀμφί τάφον, ἀν
ποτε κεραυνόβολος ἐλπὶς φλόγα
Δίου βροντᾶς;
δώκετε πεδόσε τρομερὰ σώματα
δώκετε, Μαινάδες. ὃ γὰρ ἄναξ
ἀνω κάτω τεῖες ἔπεισι
μέλαθρα τάδε Δίος γόνος.

Διόνυσος

βάρβαροι γυναίκες, οὕτως ἐκπεπληγμέναι φόβῳ
πρὸς πέδων πεπτώκατ᾽; ἔθησαθ᾽, ὡς ἐουκε, Βακχίον
διατινάξαντος ‘ δώμα Πενθέως· ἀλλ᾽ εξανιστατε’
σώμα καὶ χαρακτείσα σαρκὸς ἐξαιρεῖται τρόμοι.

Χορὸς

ὦ φάος μέγιστον ἡμῖν εὐίου βακχεύματος,
ὡς ἐσεῖδον ἀσμένη σε; μονάδ᾽ ἐχουσ᾽ ἐρημίαν.

Διόνυσος

eἰς ἀθυμίαν ἀφίκεσθ᾽, ἡνίκ᾽ εἰσεπεμπόμην,
Πενθέως ὡς ἐς σκοτεινὰς ὠρκάνας πεσοῦμενος;

Χορὸς

πῶς γὰρ οὗ; τίς μοι φίλαξ ἦν, ἐι σὺ 
συμφορᾶς τύχοις;
ἀλλὰ πῶς ἥλευθερώθης ἄνδρός ἀνοσίου τυχῶν;

Chorus Voice 4
You see those stone lintels on the pillars—
they're splitting up. It's Bromius calling,
shouting to us from inside the walls.

Dionysus [from inside the palace]
Let fiery lightning strike right now—
burn Pentheus' palace—consume it all!

Chorus Voice 5
Look! Don't you see the fire—
there by the sacred tomb of Semele!
The flame left by that thunderbolt from Zeus,
when the lightning flash destroyed her,
all that time ago. Oh Maenads—
throw your bodies on the ground, down, down,
for our master, Zeus' son, moves now
against the palace—to demolish it.

[Enter Dionysus, bursting through the palace front doors, free of all chains,
smiling and supremely confident.]

Dionysus
Ah, my barbarian Asian women,
Do you lie there on the ground prostrate with fear?
It seems you feel Dionysus' power,
as he rattles Pentheus' palace.
Get up now. Be brave. And stop your trembling.

Chorus Leader
How happy I am to see you—
Our greatest light in all the joyful dancing.
We felt alone and totally abandoned.

Dionysus
Did you feel despair when I was sent away,
cast down in Pentheus' gloomy dungeon?

Chorus Leader
How could I not? Who'll protect me
if you run into trouble? But tell me,
how did you escape that ungodly man?
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

αὐτὸς ἐξέσωρ᾽ ἐμαυτὸν ῥᾳδίως ἄνευ πόνου.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐδὲ σου συνήψε χείρε δεσμίωσιν ἐν βρόχοις; 615

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ταῦτα καὶ καθύβρια αὐτὸν, ὅτι με δεσμεύειν δοκόν

οὐτ᾽ ἔθηγεν οὐθ᾽ ἦμαθ᾽ ἡμῶν, ἑλπίζων δ᾽ ἐβόσκετο.

πρὸς φάτναις δὲ ταῦρον εὐρόσ. οὐ καθείρξ᾽ ἡμῶς ἔγων,

τάρδε περὶ βρόχους ἐβαλλε γόνασι καὶ χηλαῖσι ποδῶν,

θυμὸν ἐκπνέων, ἱδρῶτα σώματος στάζων ἄπο,

χείλεσιν δοδὸις ἄδικαν—πλησίον δ᾽ ἐγὼ παρὼν

ἥσυχος θάσσων ἔλευσον. ἐν δὲ τόδε τῷ βρόχῳ

ἀνετίναξ᾽ ἐλθὼν ὁ Βάκχος δώμα καὶ μητρὸς τάφου

πῦρ ἀνῆψ᾽

ὃ δ᾽ ὡς ἐσεῖδε, δώματ᾽ αἴθεσθαι δοκῶν,

ἔκακές κατ᾽ ἐκεῖσε, δμωσὶν Ἀχελῷον φέρειν

ἐννέπων, ἅπας δ᾽ ἐν ἔργῳ δοῦλος ἦν, μάτην πονῶν.

diaμεθεὶς δὲ τόδε μόχθον, ὡς ἐμοῦ πεφευγότος,

ἵεται ξίφος κελαινὸν ἁρπάσας δόμων ἔσω.

καθ᾽ ὁ Βράμιος, ὥσ ἐμογεία φαίνεται, δόξαν λέγω,

φάσμ᾽ ἐποίησεν κατ᾽ αὐλήν—δ᾽ ἐπὶ τοὐθ᾽ ἀφριμμένος

ὃς δοκεῖ κὰκέντεις φαινόντας ἄθροις ἐμέ.

πρὸς τόδε τοῦτο αὐτὸ τἀδ᾽ ἄλλα Βάκχος λυμαίνεται—

δωμὰτ᾽ ἔρρηξεν χαμᾶζε

συντεθράνωται δ᾽ ἅπας

πικροτάτους ἰδόντι δεσμοὺς τοὺς ἐμοὺς

κόπου δ᾽ ὅπο

diaμεθεῖς ἔξος παρεῖται—πρὸς θεῶν γὰρ ὡς ἀνήρ

ἐς μάχην ἐλθεῖν ἐτύλημεν. ἰσμος δ᾽ ἐκβάς ἔγω

δομάτων ῥῆμα καὶ μητρὸς ἡμῶν, Πενθέως ὁ φροντίσας,

ὡς δὲ μοι δοκεῖ—ψοφεῖ γοῦν ἀρβύλη δόμων ἔσω—

ἐς προκάπη αὐτόχ᾽ ἥξει, τι ποτ᾽ ἀρ᾽ ἐκ τοῦτων ἔρει; 635

Bacchae

DIONYSUS

No trouble. I saved myself with ease.

CHORUS LEADER

But didn't he bind up your hands up in chains?

DIONYSUS

In this business I was playing with him —

he thought he was tying me up, the fool!

He didn't even touch or handle me,

he was so busy feeding his desires.

In that stable where he went to tie me up,

he found a bull. He threw the iron fetters

around its knees and hooves. As he did so,

he kept panting in his rage, dripping sweat

from his whole body — his teeth gnawed his lip.

I watched him, sitting quietly nearby.

After a while, Bacchus came and shook the place,

setting his mother Semele's tomb on fire.

Seeing that, Pentheus thought his palace

was burning down. He ran round, here and there,

yelling to his slaves to bring more water.

His servants set to work — and all for nothing!

Once I’d escaped, he ended all that work.

Seizing a dark sword, he rushed inside the house.

Then, it seems to me, but I’m guessing now,

Bromius set up out there in the courtyard

some phantom image. Pentheus charged it,

slashing away at nothing but bright air,

thinking he was butchering me. There’s more—

Bacchus kept hurting him in still more ways.

He knocked his house down, right to the ground,

all shattered, so Pentheus has witnessed

a bitter end to my imprisonment.

He's dropped his sword, worn out, exhausted,

a mere mortal daring to fight a god.

So now I’ve strolled out calmly to you,

leaving the house, ignoring Pentheus.

Wait! It seems to me I hear marching feet—

no doubt he’ll come out front here soon enough.

What will he say, I wonder, after this?
Well, I'll deal with him quite gently, even if he comes out breathing up a storm. After all, a wise man ought to keep his temper.

[Pentheus comes hurriedly out of the palace, accompanied by armed soldiers]

Pentheus
What's happening to me — total disaster! The stranger's escaped, and we'd just chained him up.

[Dionysus]
Ah ha! Here is the man — right here. What's going on? How did you get out? How come you're here, outside my palace?

Dionysus
Hold on. Calm down. Don't be so angry.

Pentheus
How did you escape your chains and get here?

Dionysus
Didn't I say someone would release me — or did you miss that part?

Pentheus
Who was it? You're always explaining things in riddles.

Dionysus
It was the one who cultivates for men the richly clustering vine.

Pentheus
Ah, this Dionysus. Your words are a lovely insult to your god.

Dionysus
He came to Thebes with nothing but good things.

Pentheus [to soldiers]
Seal off all the towers on my orders — all of them around the city.

Dionysus
What for? Surely a god can make it over any wall?
Pentheus, ruler of this land of Thebes, 
I’ve just left Cithaeron, that mountain 
where the sparkling snow never melts away.

Pentheus
What this important news you’ve come with?

Messenger
I saw those women in their Bacchic revels, those sacred screamers, all driven crazy, the ones who run barefoot from their homes. I came, my lord, to tell you and the city the dreadful things they’re doing, their actions are beyond all wonder. But, my lord, first I wish to know if I should tell you, openly report what’s going on up there, or whether I should hold my tongue. Your mood changes so fast I get afraid—your sharp spirit, your all-too-royal temper.

Pentheus
Speak on. Whatever you have to report, you’ll get no punishment at all from me. It’s not right to vent one’s anger on the just.
The more terrible the things you tell me about those Bacchic women, the worse I’ll move against the one who taught them all their devious tricks.
Messenger

The grazing cattle were just moving into upland pastures, at the hour the sun sends out its beams to warm the earth. Right then I saw them—three groups of dancing women. One of them, Autonoe led. Your mother, Agave, led the second group, and Ino led the third. They were all asleep, bodies quite relaxed, some leaning back on leafy boughs of pine, others cradling heads on oak-leaf pillows, resting on the ground—in all modesty. They weren't as you described—all drunk on wine or on the music of their flutes, hunting for Aphrodite in the woods alone.

Once she heard my horned cattle lowing, your mother stood up amid those Bacchae, then called them to stir their limbs from sleep. They rubbed refreshing sleep out of their eyes, and stood up straight there—a marvelous sight, to see such an orderly arrangement, women young and old and still unmarried girls. First, they let their hair loose down their shoulders, tied up the fawn skins (some had untied the knots to loosen up the chords). Then around those skins they looped some snakes, who licked the women's cheeks. Some held young gazelles or wild wolf cubs and fed them on their own white milk, the ones who'd left behind at home a new-born child whose breasts were still swollen full of milk. They draped themselves with garlands from oak trees, ivy and flowering yew. Then one of them, taking a thyrsus, struck a rock with it, and water gushed out, fresh as dew. Another, using her thyrsus, scraped the ground. At once, the god sent fountains of wine up from the spot. All those who craved white milk to drink just scratched the earth with their fingertips—it came out in streams. From their ivy wands thick sweet honey dripped. Oh, if you'd been there,
ὥστ᾽, εἰ παρῆσθα, τὸν θεόν τὸν νῦν ψέγεις εὐχαῖσιν ἂν μετῆλθες εἰσιδὼν τάδε. ξυνήλθομεν δὲ βουκόλοι καὶ ποιμένες, κοινῶν λόγων διόσποντες ἄλληλοις ἔρν ὡς δεινὰ δρόησα βακχεύματον τῇ ἐπάξεια. καὶ τις πλάνης κατ᾽ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ὤλεξεν εἰς ἀπαντας: ὶμεν ἂν πλάκας ναιότες ὀρέων, θέλετε θηράσωμεθα Πενθέως Ἀγαύη μητέρ’ ἐκ βακχεύματων χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θάμαθα; εἰ δ᾽ ἦμαν λέγειν ἐδοξή, θάμαυν δ᾽ ἐκκλησίζομεν φόβας κρυψάντες αὐτούς· αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην ἄραν ἐκάνον θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα, Ἰακχοῦν ἀθρόῳ στάματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατ᾽ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Ὦ σεμνὰς πλάκας ναίοντες ὀρέων, θέλετε θηρασώμεθα. Πενθέως Ἀγαύη μητέρ’ ἐκ βακχεύματων χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θάμαθα; εἰ δ᾽ ἦμαν λέγειν ἐδοξή, θάμαυν δ᾽ ἐκκλησίζομεν φόβας κρυψάντες αὐτούς· αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην ἄραν ἐκάνον θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα, Ἰακχοῦν ἀθρόῳ στάματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατ᾽ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Ὦ σεμνὰς πλάκας ναίοντες ὀρέων, θέλετε θηρασώμεθα Πενθέως Ἀγαύη μητέρ’ ἐκ βακχεύματων χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θάμαθα; εἰ δ᾽ ἦμαν λέγειν ἐδοξή, θάμαυν δ᾽ ἐκκλησίζομεν φόβας κρυψάντες αὐτούς· αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην ἄραν ἐκάνον θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα, Ἰακχοῦν ἀθρόῳ στάματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατ᾽ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Ὦ σεμνὰς πλάκας ναίοντες ὀρέων, θέλετε θηρασώμεθα Πενθέως Ἀγαύη μητέρ’ ἐκ βακχεύματων χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θάμαθα; εἰ δ᾽ ἦμαν λέγειν ἐδοξή, θάμαυν δ᾽ ἐκκλησίζομεν φόβας κρυψάντες αὐτούς· αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην ἄραν ἐκάνον θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα, Ἰακχοῦν ἀθρόῳ στάματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατʻ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Ὦ σεμνὰς πλάκας ναίοντες ὀρέων, θέλετε θηρασώμεθα Πενθέως Ἀγαύη μητέρ’ ἐκ βακχεύματων χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θάμαθα; εἰ δ᾽ ἦμαν λέγειν ἐδοξή, θάμαυν δ᾽ ἐκκλησίζομεν φόβας κρυψάντες αὐτούς· αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην ἄραν ἐκάνον θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα, Ἰακχοῦν ἀθρόῳ στάματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατʻ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Ὦ σεμνὰς πλάκας ναίοντες ὀρέων, θέλετε θηρασώμεθα Πενθέως Ἀγαύη μητέρ’ ἐκ βακχεύματων χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θάμαθα; εἰ δ᾽ ἦμαν λέγειν ἐδοξή, θάμαυν δ᾽ ἐκκλησίζομεν φόβας κρυψάντες αὐτούς· αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην ἄραν ἐκάνον θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα, Ἰακχοῦν ἀθρόῳ στάματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατʻ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θώμεθα; εὖ δ᾽ ἡμῖν λέγειν ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατ᾽ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θώμεθα; εὖ δ᾽ ἡμῖν λέγειν ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατʻ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θώμεθα; εὖ δ᾽ ἡμῖν λέγειν ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατʻ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα. Χάριν τ᾽ ἄνακτι θώμεθα; εὖ δ᾽ ἡμῖν λέγειν ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ᾽ ἐλλοχίζομεν φόβαις κατʻ ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντα.
Then, like birds carried up by their own speed,
they rushed along the lower level ground,
beside Asopus’ streams, that fertile land
which yields its crops to Thebes. Like fighting troops,
they raided Hysiai and Erythrae,
below rocky Cithaeron, smashing
everything, snatching children from their homes.
Whatever they carried their shoulders,
even bronze or iron, never tumbled off
onto the dark earth, though nothing was tied down.
They carried fire in their hair, but those flames
never singed them. Some of the villagers,
enraged at being plundered by the Bacchae,
seized weapons. The sight of what happened next,
my lord, was dreadful. For their pointed spears
did not draw blood. But when those women
threw the thyrois in their hands, they wounded them
drove them back in flight. The women did this
to men, but not without some god’s assistance.
Then they went back to where they’d started from,
those fountains which the god had made for them.
They washed off the blood. Snakes licked their cheeks,
cleansing their skin of every drop. My lord,
you must welcome this god into our city,
whoever he is. He’s a mighty god
in many other ways. The people say,
so I’ve heard, he gives to mortal human beings
that vine which puts an end to human grief.
Without wine, there’s no more Aphrodite—
or any other pleasure left for men.

Chorus Leader
I’m afraid to talk freely before the king,
but nonetheless I’ll speak—this Dionysus
is not inferior to any god.

Pentheus
This Dionysian arrogance, like fire,
keeps flaring up close by—a great insult
to all the Greeks. We must not hesitate.
ἀλλ’ οὐκ ὀκνεῖν δεῖ· στεῖχ᾽ ἐπ᾽ Ἠλέκτρας ἰὼν πύλας· κέλευε πάντας ἀσπιδηφόρους ὑπ’ τ’ ἀπαντᾶν ταχυπόδων ἑπεμβάτας πέλτας θ’ ὅσοι πάλλουσι καὶ τάξιν χερὶ ψάλλουσι νευράς, ὡς ἐπιστατεύσαμεν βάκχαισιν· οὗ γὰρ ἀλλ’ υπερβάλλει τάδε, εἰ πρὸς γυναικῶν πεισόμεθ’ ἃ πάσχομεν.

**Dionysos**

πείθῃ μὲν οὐδὲν, τῶν ἐμῶν λόγων κλῶν. Πενθεῦς· κακῶς δὲ πρὸς σέθεν πάσχοιν ὅμως οὗ φημι χρῆναί σ’ ὅπλ᾽ ἐπαίρεσθαι θεῷ, ἀλλ’ ἰασμαχέων. Βρόμιος οὐκ ἀνέξεται κυνοῦντα βάκχας σ’ εὐίων ὀρῶν ἀπό.

**Pentheus**

οὐ μὴ φρενώσεις μ’, ἀλλὰ δέσμιος φυγὼν σῴζῃ τόδ᾽; ἢ σοὶ πάλιν ἀναστρέψω δίκην;

**Dionysos**

θύοιμ᾽ ἂν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἢ θυμούμενος πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζοιμι θνητὸς ὡν θεῷ.

**Pentheus**

θύσω, φόνον γε θῆλυν, ὥσπερ ἄξιαι, πολὺν ταράξας ἐν Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχαῖς.

**Dionysos**

τύχοι· ἄν αὐτῷ μάλλον ἢ θυμούμενος πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζοιμι θνητὸς ὡν θεῷ.

**Pentheus**

θύσω, φόνον γε θῆλυν, ὥσπερ ἄξιαι, πολὺν ταράξας ἐν Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχαῖς.

**Dionysos**

φεύξεσθε πάντες· καὶ τόδ’ αἰσχρόν, ἀσπίδας θύρσοι βακχῶν ἐκτρέπειν χαλκηλάτους

**Pentheus**

ἀπόρῳ γε τόδε συμπεπλέγμεθα ξένῳ, ὡς οὔτε πάσχων οὔτε δρῶν σεγήσεται.

**Dionysos**

ὁ τάν, ἔτ’ ἐστιν εἶναὶ καταστήσαι τάδε.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
   τί δρώντα; δουλεύοντα δουλείαις ἐμαῖς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
   ἐγὼ γυναῖκας δεῦρ' ὅπλων ἄξω δίχα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
   οἴμοι· τόδ᾽ ἤδη δόλιον ἔς μηχανᾷ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
   ποίόν τι, σῶσαι σ᾽ εἰ θέλω τέχναις ἐμαῖς;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
   ξυνέθεσθε κοινῇ τάδ᾽, ἵνα βακχεύητ᾽ ἀεί.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
   καὶ μὴν ξυνεθέμην—τοῦτό γ᾽ ἔστι—τῷ θεῷ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
   ἔκφερετέ μοι δεῦρ᾽ ὅπλα, σὺ δὲ παῦσαι λέγων.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
   ᾖ. 810
   βούλῃ σφ᾽ ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
   μάλιστα, μυρίον γε δοὺς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
   τί δ᾽ εἰς ἔρωτα τοῦδε πέπτωκας μέγαν;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
   λυπρῶς νυ εἰσίδοιμ᾽ ἂν ἐξῳνωμένας.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ὅμως δ᾽ ἴδοις ἂν ἰδέως ἂ σοι πικρά; 815
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
σάφ᾽ ἵσθι, σιγῇ γ´ υπ´ ἐλάταις καθήμενος.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἀλλ᾽ ἐξεχειρήσουσιν σε, κἂν ἔλθῃς λάθρα.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἀλλ᾽ ἐμφανῶς· καλῶς γὰρ ἐξεῖπας τάδε.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἀγωμεν οὖν σε κἀπιχειρήσεις ὁδῷ;
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἀγ᾽ ὡς τάχιστα, τὸν χρόνον δὲ σοι φθονῶ. 820
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
στεῖλαί νυν ἀμφὶ χρωτὶ βυσσίνους πέπλους.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
τί δὴ τόδ᾽; ἐς γυναῖκας ἐξ ἀνδρὸς τελῶ;
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
μή σε κτάνωσιν, ἢν ἀνὴρ ὀφθῇς ἐκεῖ.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἐδ γ´ εἶπας αὖ τόδ᾽· ὡς τις εἰ πάλαι σοφός.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
Διόνυσος ἦμας ἐξεμούσωσεν τάδε. 825
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
πῶς οὖν γένοιτ᾽ ἂν ἂ σύ με νουθετεῖς καλῶς;
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἐγὼ στελῶ σε δωμάτων ἐσω μολὼν.
Pentheus: What? Dress up in a female outfit?
I can't do that — I'd be ashamed to.

Dionysus: You're still keen to see the Maenads, aren't you?

Pentheus: What sort of clothing do you recommend?
How should I cover up my body?

Dionysus: I'll fix up a long hair piece for your head.

Pentheus: All right.
What's the next piece of my outfit?

Dionysus: A dress down to your feet — then a headband,
to fit just here, around your forehead.

Pentheus: What else? What other things will you provide?

Dionysus: A thyrsus to hold and a dappled fawn skin.

Pentheus: No. I can't dress up in women's clothes!

Dionysus: But if you go fighting with these Bacchae,
you'll cause bloodshed.

Pentheus: Yes, that's true.
So first, we must go up and spy on them.

Dionysus: Hunt down evil by committing evil —
that sounds like a wise way to proceed.

Pentheus: But how will I make it through the city
without the Thebans noticing me?

Pentheus: τίνα στολήν; ἢ θήλυν; ἀλλ᾽ αἰδώς μ᾽ ἔχει.

Dionysus: οὐκέτι θεατής μανάδων πρόθυμος εἰ.

Pentheus: στολήν δὲ τίνα φῆς ἄμφετρ χρῶτ᾽ ἐμὸν βαλεῖν;

Dionysus: κόμην μὲν ἐπὶ σῷ κρατὶ ταναῦν ἐκτενῶ.

Pentheus: τὸ δεύτερον δὲ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τί μοι;

Dionysus: πέπλοι ποδήρεις· ἐπὶ κάρᾳ δ᾽ ἔσται μίτρα.

Pentheus: ἢ καὶ τι πρὸς τοῖσδ᾽ ἄλλο προσθῆσεις ἐμοῖ;

Dionysus: θήρσον γε χειρὶ καὶ νεβροῦ στικτὸ δέρας.

Pentheus: οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν.

Dionysus: ἀλλ᾽ αἷμα θήσεις συμβαλὼν βάκχαις μάχην.

Pentheus: οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην ἔνδυναι στολήν.

Dionysus: άλλ᾽ αἴμα θήσεις συμβαλὼν βάκχαις μάχην.

Pentheus: ὀρθῶς· μολεῖν χρὴ πρῶτον εἰς κατασκοπήν.

Dionysus: πεφυτηρον γαὖν ἢ κακοῖς θηρᾶν κακά.

Pentheus: καὶ πῶς δὲ ἀστεως εἶμι Καδμείους λαθών;
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

οὔτε ἔρημοι ἤμεν ὑμεν. ἐγὼ δ᾽ ἡγήσομαι.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πάν κρείσσων ὡστε μὴ ἡγεῖσθαι βάκχας ἐμοῖ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐξετα- πάντη τό γ᾽ ἐμὸν ἐὑρεπές πάρα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

στείχοιμ᾽ ἂν. ἢ γὰρ ὁπλ᾽ ἔχων πορεύσωμαι

ἡ τοσί σοῖς πείσομαι βουλεύμασιν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

gυναικεῖς, ἀνὴρ ἐς βόλον καθίσταται,

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

στείχοιμ᾽ ἂν. ἢ γὰρ ὁπλ᾽ ἔχων πορεύσωμαι

ἡ τοσί σοῖς πείσομαι βουλεύμασιν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

γνωστικαίοι, ἀνὴρ ἐς βόλον καθίσταται,

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

στείχοιμ᾽ ἂν. ἢ γὰρ ὁπλ᾽ ἔχων πορεύσωμαι

ἡ τοσί σοῖς πείσομαι βουλεύμασιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀρ′ ἐν παννυχίοις χοροῖς

θήσω ποτὲ λευκὸν

πάς ἀναβαίκχειώσα, δέραν

eis aithéra drosferón ríptousa',

ΒΑΣΣΑΙΟΣ

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

We go by deserted streets. I’ll take you.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

Well, anything is easier to accept

than being made a fool by Bacchic women.

Let’s go into the house. I’ll think about what’s best.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

As you wish. Whatever you do, I’m ready.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

I think I’ll go in now. It’s a choice

of going with weapons or taking your advice.

[Exit Pentheus into the palace. Dionysus turns to face the chorus]

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

My women! that man’s now entangled in our net.

He’ll go to those Bacchae, and there he’ll die.

That will be his punishment. Dionysus,

you’re not far away. Now it’s up to you.

Punish him. First, make sure he goes insane

with some crazed fantasy. If his mind is strong,

he’ll not agree to put on women’s clothes.

But he’ll do it, if you make him mad.

I want him made the laughing stock of Thebes,

while I lead him through the city, mincing

as he moves along in women’s clothing,

after he made himself so terrifying

with all those earlier threats. Now I’ll be off,

to fit Pentheus into the costume

he’ll wear when he goes down to Hades,

once he’s butchered by his mother’s hands.

He’ll come to acknowledge Dionysus,

son of Zeus, born in full divinity,

most fearful and yet most kind to men.

[Exit Dionysus]

CHORUS

O when will I be dancing,

leaping barefoot through the night,

flinging back my head in ecstasy,

in the clear, cold, dew-fresh air —
What is wisdom? What is finer than the rights men get from gods—

like a playful fawn

celebrating its green joy

crossing the meadows—

joy that it’s escaped the fearful hunt—
as she runs beyond the hunters,

leaping past their woven nets—
they call out to their hounds
to chase her with still more speed,
but she strains every limb,

racing like a wind storm,
rejoicing by the river plain,
in places where no hunters lurk,
in the green living world

beneath the shady branches,

the foliage of the trees.

What is wisdom? What is finer than the rights men get from gods—
to hold their powerful hands
over the heads of their enemies?

Ah yes, what’s good is always loved.

The power of the gods
is difficult to stir—
but it’s a power we can count on.

It punishes all mortal men
who honour their own ruthless wills,
who, in their fits of madness,
fail to reverence the gods.

Gods track down every man
who scorns their worship,
using their cunning to conceal
the enduring steady pace of time.

For there’s no righteousness
in those who recognize or practice
what’s beyond our customary laws.

The truth is easy to acknowledge:
whatever is divine is mighty,
whatever has been long-established law
is an eternal natural truth.

What is wisdom? What is finer than the rights men get from gods—
Euripides

Bacchae

900 ἢ χεῖρ᾽ ὑπὲρ κορυφᾶς
tῶν ἐχθρῶν κρείσσω κατέχειν;
ό τι καλὸν φίλον ἀεί.

eὐδαίμων μὲν ὃς ἐκ θαλάσσας
ἐφυγε χεῖμα, λιμένα δ᾽ ἐκιχεῦν.
εὐδαίμων δ᾽ ὃς ὑπερθε μόχθων
ἐγένεθ᾽. ἐτέρα δ᾽ ἔτερος ἔτερον
ἀλβῷ καὶ δυνάμει παρῆλθεν.

905 μυρίαι δ᾽ ἐτι μυρίοις
eἰσίν ἐλπίδες. αἳ μὲν
tελευτῶσιν ἐν ὄλβῳ
βροτοῖς, αἳ δ᾽ ἀπέβησαν-
τὸ δὲ κατ᾽ ἦμαρ ὅτῳ βίοτος
εὐδαίμων, μακαρίζω.

DIONYSUS

910 σὲ τὸν πρόθυμον ὄνθ᾽ ἃ μὴ χρεὼν ὁρᾶν
σπεύδοτα τ᾽ ἀστούδαστα. Πενθέα λέγω,
ἐξίθι πάροδε δωμάτων, ὅφθητί μοι,
σκευὴν γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκχης ἔχων,
μητρός τε τῆς σῆς καὶ λόχου κατάσκοπος
πρέπεις δὲ Κάδμου θυγατέρων μιᾷ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

915 καὶ μὴν ὄραν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ,
διασάς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πόλιμακ᾽ ἐπτάστομον-
καὶ ταῦρος ἡμῖν πρόσθεν ἤγείσθαι δοκεῖς
καὶ σῷ κέρατα κρατὶ προσπεφυκέναι.

920 ἂλλ᾽ ἢ ποτ᾽ ἡσθα θῆρ᾽; τεταύρωσαι γὰρ οὖν.

[Enter Dionysus from the palace. He calls back through the open doors]

Dionysus

You who are so desperately eager
to see those things you should not look upon,
so keen to chase what you should not pursue —
I mean you, Pentheus, come out here now,
outside the palace, where I can see you
dressed up as a raving Bacchic female,
to spy upon your mother’s company.

[Enter Pentheus dressed in women’s clothing. He moves in a deliberately over-stated female way, enjoying the role]

Dionysus [admiringly, as he escorts Pentheus from the doors]

You look just like one of Cadmus’ daughters.

Pentheus

Fancy that! I seem to see two suns,
two images of seven-gated Thebes.
And you look like a bull leading me out here,
with those horns growing from your head.
Were you once upon a time a beast?
It’s certain now you’ve changed into a bull.
Dionysus

The god walks here. He’s made a pact with us. Before his attitude was not so kind. Now you’re seeing just what you ought to see.

Pentheus

How do I look? Am I holding myself just like Ino or my mother, Agave?

Dionysus

When I look at you, I think I see them. But here, this strand of hair is out of place. It’s not under the headband where I fixed it.

Pentheus [demonstrating his dancing steps]

I must have worked it loose inside the house, shaking my head when I moved here and there, practising my Bacchanalian dance.

Dionysus

I’ll rearrange it for you. It’s only right that I should serve you. Straighten up your head.

[Dionysus begins adjusting Pentheus’ hair and clothing]

Pentheus

All right then. You can be my dresser, now that I’ve transformed myself for you.

Dionysus

Your girdle’s loose. And these pleats in your dress are crooked, too, down at your ankle here.

Pentheus [examining the back of his legs]

Yes, that seems to be true for my right leg, but on this side the dress hangs perfectly, down the full length of my limb.

Dionysus

Once you see those Bacchic women acting modestly, once you confront something you don’t expect, you’ll consider me your dearest friend.
Pentheus
This thyrsus—should I hold it in my right hand, or in my left? Which is more suitable in Bacchic celebrations?

Dionysus
In your right.

You must lift your right foot in time with it.

[Dionysus observes Pentheus trying out the dance step]

Pentheus
Will I be powerful enough to carry the forests of Cithaeron on my shoulders, along with all those Bacchic females?

Dionysus
If you have desire, you’ll have the power. Before this your mind was not well adjusted. But now it’s working in you as it should.

Pentheus
Are we going to take some levers with us? Or shall I rip the forests up by hand, putting arm and shoulder under mountain peaks? [950]

Dionysus
As long as you don’t do away with those places where the nymphs all congregate, where Pan plays his music on his pipes.

Pentheus
You mention a good point. I’ll use no force to get the better of these women. I’ll conceal myself there in the pine trees.

Dionysus
You’ll find just the sort of hiding place a spy should find who wants to hide himself, so he can gaze upon the Maenads.

Pentheus
That’s good. I can picture them right now, in the woods, going at it like rutting birds, clutching each other as they make sweet love.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
οὐκοῦν ἐπὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτ᾽ ἀποστέλλῃ φύλαξ.
lήψῃ δ᾽ ἴσως σφᾶς, ἤν σὺ μὴ ληφθῆς πάρος. 960
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
κόμιζε διὰ μέσης με Θηβαίας χθονός.
mόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμὶ ἀνήρ τολμῶν τόδε.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
μόνος σὺ πάλεως τής ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος·
tοιγάρ σ᾽ ἀγώνες ἀναμένουσιν οὐς ἔχρην.
ἐπον δὲ πομπῶς δ᾽ εἴμ᾽ ἐγὼ σωτήριος,
κείθεν δ᾽ ἀπάξει σ᾽ ἄλλοις. 965
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἡ τεκοῦσά γε.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἐπίσημον ὄντα πᾶσιν.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἐπὶ τόδ᾽ ἔρχομαι.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
φερόμενος ἥξεις . . .
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἀβρότητι ἐμὴν λέγεις.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἐν χερσὶ μητρός.
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
καὶ τρυφᾶς μὲν ἀναγκάσει.
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
τρυφᾶς γε τοιάσδε. 970
ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἀξίων μὲν ἀπτομαί.
Euripides

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

dεινὸς σὺ δεινὸς κατὶ δεϊν’ ἔρχη πάθη,
ὦστ’ οὐρανῷ στηρίζον εὑρήσεις κλέος.
ἐκτεν’, Ἀγαύη, χεῖρας αἰ’ θ’ ὀμόσποροι
Κάδμου θυγατέρες· τὸν νεανίαν ἄγω
τόνδ’ εἰς ἁγώνα μέγαν, ὁ νικήσων δ᾽ ἐγὼ
καὶ Βρόμιος ἔσται. τάλλα δ’ αὐτῷ σημανεῖ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐτεθαλ Λύσσας κόνες ὑ’ εἰς ὄρος,
θίσασον ἐνθ’ ἔχουσα Κάδμου κόραι,
ἀνοιατρήσατε νῦν
ἐπὶ τὸν ἐν γυνακομίῳ στολά
λυσσώδη κατάσκοπον μαινάδων.
μάτηρ πρῶτά νῦν λευρᾶς ἀπὸ πέτρας
ἡ σκάλοπος ὀψεῖται
δοκείοντα, μαινάσιν δ᾽ ἀπύσει.
Τίς δ’ ὀρειδρόμων
μοστήρ Καδμείων ἐς ὄρος ἐς ὄρος ἐμοί
ἐμολ’ ἐμολεν, ὁ βάκχαι; τίς ἀρα νῦν ἔτεκεν;
οὐ γὰρ εξ αἴματος
γυναικών ἄμφω, λειάνας δὲ τίνος
ὁδ’ ἠ Γοργόνων Διβυσσῶν γένος.

— ἵτω δικὰ φανερός, ἵτω ξεφηφόρος
φονεύουσα λαμμῶν διαμπᾶξ
τὸν ἄθεον ἄδικον ἄθεον Ἐχίονος
γάνον γηγενή.

Dionysus [speaking in the direction Pentheus has gone, but not speaking to him]

You fearful, terrifying man — on your way
to horrific suffering. Well, you’ll win
a towering fame, as high as heaven.
Hold out your hand to him, Agave,
you, too, her sisters, Cadmus’ daughters.
I’m leading this young man in your direction,
for the great confrontation, where I’ll triumph —
I and Bromius. What else will happen
events will show, as they occur.

[Exit Dionysus]

Chorus 1

Up now, you hounds of madness,
go up now into the mountains,
go where Cadmus’ daughters
keep their company of worshippers,
[980]
goad them into furious revenge
against that man, that raving spy,
all dressed up in his women’s clothes,
so keen to glimpse the Maenads.
His mother will see him first,
as he spies on them in secret
from some level rock or crag.
She’ll scream out to her Maenads,
"Who’s the man who’s come here,
to the mountains, to these mountains,
tracking Cadmean mountain dancers?
O my Bacchae, who has come?
From whom was this man born?
He’s not born of woman’s blood —
he must be some lioness’ whelp
or spawned from Libyan gorgons.”

Chorus

Let justice manifest itself —
let justice march, sword in hand,
to stab him in the throat,
that godless, lawless man,
unjust earthborn seed of Echion.
— ὃς ἀδίκω γνώμα παρανόμῳ τ᾽ ὀργὰ
περὶ σὰ βάκχι᾽, ὄργια ματρός τε σᾶς
μανείσα πραπιδί
παρακόπω τε λήματι στέλλεται,
τάνίκατον ὥς κρατήσων βία,
γνωμὰν σωφρόνα βάκχιος ἄροφάσι-
στος ἐς τὰ θεῶν ἐφυν.
βροτείως τ᾽ ἐχειν ὄλυποσ βίος.
τὸ σοφὸν οὐ φθονῶ·
χαῖρω θηρεύουσα· τὰ δ᾽ ἐτερα μεγάλα
φανερά τ᾽· ὡ, νάειν ἐπὶ τὰ καλά βίον,
ἥμαρ ἐς νύκτα τ᾽ εὐ-
αγούντες εὐθεῖαν, τὰ δ᾽ ἐξω νόμιμα
dίκας ἐκβαλόντα τιμάνθεος.

Chorus 2
Any man intent on wickedness,
turning his unlawful rage
against your rites, O Bacchus,
against the worship of your mother,
a man who sets out with an insane mind,
his courage founded on a falsehood,
who seeks to overcome by force
what simply can’t be overcome—
let death set his intentions straight.
For a life devoid of grief is one
which receives without complaint
whatever comes down from the gods—
that’s how mortals ought to live.
Wisdom is something I don’t envy.
My joy comes hunting other things
lofty and plain to everyone.
They lead man’s life to good
in purity and reverence,
honouring gods day and night,
eradicating from our lives
customs lying beyond what’s right.

Chorus
Let justice manifest itself—
Let justice march, sword in hand,
to stab him in the throat,
that godless, lawless man,
unjust earthborn seed of Echion.

Chorus 3
Appear now to our sight, O Bacchus—
come as a bull or many-headed serpent
or else some fire-breathing lion.
Go now, Bacchus, with your smiling face
cast your deadly noose upon
that hunter of the Bacchae,
as the group of Maenads brings him down.

Second Messenger
How I grieve for this house, in earlier days
so happy throughout Greece, home of that old man,
Euripides

δράκοντος ἔσπειρ᾽ Ὅφεος ἐν γαίᾳ θέρος,
ῶς σε στενάζω, δοῦλος ὃν μέν, ἀλλ᾽ ὃμος
χρηστοίσι δοῦλοις συμφορὰ τὰ δεσποτῶν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί δ᾽ ἔστων; ἐκ βακχῶν τι μηνύεις νέον;

"ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ

Πενθεὺς ἄλωλεν, παῖς Ἐχῖωνος πατρός.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὀναξ Βρόμιε, θεὸς φαίνῃ μέγας.

"ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ

πῶς φῆς; τί τούτ᾽ ἔλεξας; ἦ ὧπὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς
χαίρεις κακῶς πράσσουσι δεσπόταις, γυναι;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εὐάζω ξένα μέλεσι βαρβάροις.

"ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ

Θήβας δ᾽ ἀνάνδρους ὧδ᾽ ἄγεις . . .

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὁ Διόνυσος ὁ Διόνυσος, οὐ Θῆβαι
κράτος ἐμόν.

"ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ

συγγνωστὰ μέν σοι, πλὴν ἐπ᾽ ἐξειργασμένους
κακώς χαίρεις, ὃ γυναῖκες, οὐ καλῶν.

Euripides

Cadmus from Sidon, who sowed the fields
to harvest the earth-born crop produced
from serpent Ophis. How I now lament—
I know I’m just a slave, but nonetheless . . .

CHORUS

Do you bring us news?
Has something happened,
something about the Bacchae?

SECOND MESSENGER

Pentheus, child of Echion, is dead.

CHORUS

O my lord Bromius,
Now your divine greatness
is here made manifest!

SECOND MESSENGER

What are you saying? Why that song?
Women, how can you now rejoice like this
for the death of one who was my master?

CHORUS LEADER

We’re strangers here in Thebes,
so we sing out our joy
in chants from foreign lands.
No longer need we cower here
in fear of prisoner’s chains.

SECOND MESSENGER

Do you think Thebes lacks sufficient men
to take care of your punishment?

CHORUS

Dionysus, oh Dionysus,
he’s the one with power over me—
not Thebes.

SECOND MESSENGER

That you may be forgiven, but to cry
aloud with joy when such disasters come,
women, that’s not something you should so.
ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐνεπέ μοι, φράσον, τίνι μόρῳ θνῄσκει ἄδικος ἄδικά τ᾽ ἐκπορίζων ἀνήρ;

ΑΤΤΕΛΟΣ

ἐπεὶ θεράπνας τήσδε Θηβαίας χθονὸς λυπόντες ἔξεβημεν Ἀσωποῦ ῥοᾶς,

Lambda Κυθαρώνειοιν εἰσεβάλλομεν

Πενθεύς τε καγώ—δεσπότη γάρ εἰπόμην—ἔξειον τ᾽ ο法律规定 ποιμόν ἢν θεωρίας,

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ποιητον ἦσαμεν νάπος,

τά τ᾽ ἐκ ποδῶν συγηλὰ καὶ γλώσσης ἀπὸ σώζοντες, ἠς ὀρέγομεν αὐξ ὀράμενοι.

ἤν δ᾽ ἄγκον ἀφαίρησομεν, ἰδασι διαβροχοι, πεύκαισι συσκιάζον, ἐνθα μαναύδες καθήνει ἔχουσαι χείρας ἐν τερπνοῖς πόνοις,

αἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν θύρσον ἐκλελοιπότακι κομήτην αὖθις ἐξανέστεφον,

αἱ δ᾽, ἐκλιπούσαι ποικίλ᾽ ὡς πῶλοι ζυγὰ, βακχεῖον ἀλληλαία μέλος. Πενθεύς δ᾽ ὁ τλήμων θῆλυν οὐχ ὁρῶν ὄχλον ἔλεξε τοιάδ᾽

· Ω ξέν᾽, οὗ μὲν ἕσταμεν, οὐκ ἐξικνοῦμαι μαινάδων νόθων

· ὄχθων δ᾽ ἔπ᾽, ἀμβὰς ἐς ἐλάτην ὑψαύχενα,

ἴδοιμ᾽ ἂν ὀρθῶν αἰσχρουργίαν. τοὐντεῦθεν ἤδη τοῦ ξένου τὸ θαῦμ᾽ ὁρῶ

λαβὼν γὰρ ἐλάτης οὐράνιον ἄκρον κατῆγεν, ἦγεν, ἦγεν ἐς μέλαν πέδον

κυκλοῦτο δ᾽ ὥστε τόξον ἢ κυρτὸς τροχὸς τόρνῳ γραφόμενος περιφορὰν ἕλκει δρόμον

κατῇγεν ἂν χεῖραμ οὐχὶ θνητὰ δρῶν. Πενθέα δ᾽ ἱδρύσας ἐλατίνων ὄζων ἔπι,

ὀρθὸν μεθίει διὰ χερῶν βλάστημ᾽ ἄνω

CHORUS

Speak to me, tell all—
How did death strike him down,
that unrighteous man,
that man who acted so unjustly?

SECOND MESSENGER

Once we’d left the settlements of Thebes, we went across the river Asopus, then started the climb up Mount Cithaeron — Pentheus and myself, I following the king. The stranger was our guide, scouting the way. First, we sat down in a grassy meadow, keeping our feet and tongues quite silent, so we could see without being noticed.

There was a valley there shut in by cliffs. Through it refreshing waters flowed, with pines providing shade. The Maenads sat there, their hands all busy with delightful work — some of them with ivy strands repairing damaged thyrsoi, while others sang, chanting Bacchic songs to one another, carefree as fillies freed from harness. Then Pentheus, that unhappy man, not seeing the crowd of women, spoke up, “Stranger, I can’t see from where we’re standing. My eyes can’t glimpse those crafty Maenads. But up there, on that hill, a pine tree stands. If I climbed that, I might see those women, and witness the disgraceful things they do.” Then I saw that stranger work a marvel. He seized that pine tree’s topmost branch — it stretched up to heaven — and brought it down, pulling it to the dark earth, bending it as if it were a bow or some curved wheel forced into a circle while staked out with pegs — that’s how the stranger made that tree bend down, forcing the mountain pine to earth by hand, something no mortal man could ever do. He set Pentheus in that pine tree’s branches. Then his hands released the tree, but slowly, so it stood up straight, being very careful
not to shake Pentheus loose. So that pine towered straight up to heaven, with my king perched on its back. Maenads could see him there more easily than he could spy on them. As he was just becoming visible—the stranger had completely disappeared—some voice—I guess it was Dionysus—cried out from the sky, “Young women, I’ve brought you the man who laughed at you, who ridiculed my rites. Now punish him!” As he shouted this, a dreadful fire arose, blazing between the earth and heaven. The air was still. In the wooded valley no sound came from the leaves, and all the beasts were silent, too. The women stood up at once. They’d heard the voice, but not distinctly. They gazed around them. Then again the voice shouted his commands. When Cadmus’ daughters clearly heard what Dionysus ordered, they rushed out, running as fast as doves, moving their feet at an amazing speed. His mother Agave with both her sisters and all the Bacchae charged straight through the valley, the torrents, the mountain cliffs, pushed to a god-inspired frenzy. They saw the king there sitting in that pine. First, they scaled a cliff face looming up opposite the tree and started throwing rocks, trying to hurt him. Others threw branches, or hurled their thyrsoi through the air at him, sad, miserable Pentheus, their target. But they didn’t hit him. The poor man sat high beyond their frenzied cruelty, trapped up there, no way to save his skin. Then, like lightning, they struck oak branches down, trying them as levers to uproot the tree. When these attempts all failed, Agave said, “Come now, make a circle round the tree. Then, Maenads, each of you must seize a branch,
Euripides

Bacchae

θῆρ᾽ ὡς ἐλωμεν, μηδ᾽ ἀπαγγέλῃ θεοῦ χοροῖς κρυφαίοις. αἶ δὲ μυρίαν χέρα
προσέθεσαν ἐλάτη κάζανέσπασαν χθονὸς. υψὸι δὲ θάσσων υψώθην χαμαρφής
πίπτει πρὸς οὐδας μυρίους οἴμώγμασιν Πενθεύς. κακοῦ γὰρ ἐγγύς ὥς ὄν ἐμάνθανεν.
πρῶτη δὲ μήτηρ ἦρξεν ἱερέα φόνου και προσπέπτει νυν. δὲ μέτραν κόμης ἀπο ἐρρωμεν, ὡς νῦν γνωρίσασα μή κτάοι
πλῆμων Αγανή, και λέγει, παρηήδος ψαίων. Ἐγώ τοι, μήτηρ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος.

1110

ἔρριψεν, ὥς νῦν γνωρίσασα μὴ κτάοι
τλήμων Ἀγανή, καὶ λέγει, παρηήδος ψαίων. Ἐγώ τοι, μήτηρ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος.

1115

οἴκτιρε δ᾽ οὐ μῆτερ με, μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς
ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνῃς. ηὐ δὲ αφρὸν ἐξιεῖσα καὶ διαστρώφους
κόρας ἐλισσοῦτ' οὐ φρονοῦτ' αρχή φρονεῖν,

1120

ἐκ Βακχίου κατείχετ', οὐδ' ἐπειθεῖ νῦν.

λαβοῦσα δ' ἀλήνης ἀριστερὰν χέραν,
πλευραῖσιν ἀντιβᾶσα τοῦ δυσδαίμονος ἀπεσπάραξεν ὦμον, οὐχ ὑπὸ σθένους,

1125

ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς εὐμάρειαν ἐπεδίδου χεροῖς.

Ἰνό δὲ τἀπὶ θάτερ᾽ ἐξειργάζετο, ῥηγνῦσα σάρκας, Αὐτονόη τ' ὅχλος τε πᾶς
ἐπεῖχε βακχῶν.

1130

 MAV: οἴκτιρε δ᾽ οὐ μῆτερ με, μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς
ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνῃς.

δὲ μήτηρ ἦρξεν ἱερέα φόνου και προσπέπτει νυν. δὲ μέτραν κόμης ἀπο ἐρρωμεν, ὡς νῦν γνωρίσασα μή κτάοι

1135

πλῆμων Αγανή, και λέγει, παρηήδος ψαίων. Ἐγώ τοι, μήτηρ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος.

1140

κεῖται δὲ χωρὶς σῶμα, τὸ μὲν ὑπὸ στύφλοις
πετραις, τὸ δ᾽ ὕλης ἐν βαθυξύλῳ φόβῃ,

so we can catch the climbing beast up there,
stop him making our god's secret dances known.”

Thousands of hands grabbed the tree and pulled.

They yanked it from the ground. Pentheus fell,
screaming in distress. He knew well enough
something dreadful was about to happen.

His priestess mother first began the slaughter.

She hurled herself at him. Pentheus tore off
his headband, untying it from his head,
so wretched Agave would recognize him,
so she wouldn't kill him. Touching her cheek,
he cried out, “It’s me, mother, Pentheus,
your child. You gave birth to me at home,
in Echion’s house. Pity me, mother —
don’t kill your child because I’ve made mistakes.”

But Agave was foaming at the mouth,
eyes rolling in their sockets, her mind not set
on what she ought to think — she didn’t listen —
she was possessed, in a Bacchic frenzy.

She seized his left arm, below the elbow,
pushed her foot against the poor man’s ribs,
thens tore his shoulder out. The strength she had —
it was not her own. The god put power
into those hands of hers. Meanwhile Ino,
sister, went at the other side,
ripping off chunks of Pentheus’ flesh,
while Autonoe and all the Bacchae,
the whole crowd of them, attacked as well,
all of them howling out together.

As long as Pentheus was still alive,
he kept on screaming. The women cried in triumph—
one brandished an arm, another held a foot—
complete with hunting boot — the women’s nails
tore his ribs apart. Their hands grew bloody,
tossing bits of his flesh back and forth, for fun.

His body parts lie scattered everywhere—
some under rough rocks, some in the forest,
deep in the trees. They’re difficult to find.

As for the poor victim’s head, his mother
stumbled on it. Her hands picked it up,
then stuck it on a thyrsus, at the tip.
Now she carries it around Cithaeron, as though it were some wild lion's head. She's left her sisters dancing with the Maenads. She's coming here, inside these very walls, showing off with pride her ill-fated prey, calling out to her fellow hunter, Bacchus, her companion in the chase, the winner, the glorious victor. By serving him, in her great triumph she wins only tears. As for me, I'm leaving this disaster, before Agave gets back home again.

The best thing is to keep one's mind controlled, and worship all that comes down from the gods. That, in my view, is the wisest custom, for those who can conduct their lives that way.

Chorus
Let's dance to honour Bacchus, Let's shout to celebrate what's happened here, happened to Pentheus, child of the serpent, who put on women's clothes, who took up the beautiful and blessed thyrsus — his certain death, disaster brought on by the bull. You Bacchic women descended from old Cadmus, you've won glorious victory, one which ends in tears, which ends in lamentation. A noble undertaking this, to drench one's hands in blood, life blood dripping from one's only son.

Chorus Leader
Wait! I see Agave, Pentheus' mother, on her way home, her eyes transfixed. Let's now welcome her, the happy revels of our god of joy!
ἈΓΑΥΗ

Ἀσιάδες βάκχαι—

ΧΟΡΟΣ
tί μ᾽ ὀροθύνεις, ὦ;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

φέρομεν ἐξ ὦρέων
ἐλκα νέοτομον ἐπὶ μέλαθρα,
μακάριον θήραν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦρῳ καὶ σε δέξομαι σύγκωμον.

ἈΓΑΥΗ

ἔμαρψα τόδ᾽ ἄνευ βροχών
λέοντος ἀγροτέρου νέων ἱνώ.
ὡς ὁρᾶν πάρα.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πόθεν ἐρημίας;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

Κιθαιρών . . .

ΧΟΡΟΣ

Κιθαιρών;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

κατεφόνευσέ νιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίς ἀ βαλοῦσα;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

πρῶτον ἐμὸν τὸ γέρας.

μάκαιρ᾽ Ἀγαύη κλῃζόμεθ᾽ ἐν θιάσοις.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίς ἄλλα;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

τὰ Κάδμου . . .

[Enter Agave, cradling the head of Pentheus]

Agave

Asian Bacchae . .

Chorus

Why do you appeal to me?

Agave [displaying the head]

From the mountains I've brought home
this ivy tendril freshly cut.
We've had a blessed hunt.

Chorus

I see it.
As your fellow dancer, I'll accept it.

Agave

I caught this young lion without a trap,
as you can see.

Chorus

What desert was he in?

Agave

Cithaeron.

Chorus

On Cithaeron?

Agave

Cithaeron killed him.

Chorus

Who struck him down?

Agave

The honour of the first blow goes to me.
In the dancing I'm called blessed Agave.

Chorus

Who else?

Agave

Well, from Cadmus . .
Χορός
τί Κάδμου;

Αγαυή
γένεθλα
μετ᾽ ἐμὲ μετ᾽ ἐμὲ τοῦδ᾽
ἐδυγιε θηρός· εὐτυχής γ᾽ ἀδικρα.

Χορός
<...>

Αγαυή
μετέχε νυν θόινας.

Χορός
τί, μετέχω, τλάμον;

Αγαυή
νέος ὁ μόσχος ἀρ-
τι γένεν ὑπὸ κόρυθ᾽ ἀπαλότριχα
κατάκομον θάλλει.

Χορός
πρέπει γ᾽ ὁστε θηρ ἀγραυλος φόβη.

Αγαυή
ὁ Βάκχιος κυναγέτας
σοφὸς σοφὸς ἀνέπηλ᾽ ἐπὶ θήρα
tόνδε μαινάδας.

Χορός
ὁ γὰρ ἀναξ ἀγρεύς.

Αγαυή
ἐπαινεῖς;

Χορός
ἐπαινῶ.

Αγαυή
τάχα δὲ Καδμείοι . . .

CHORUS
From Cadmus what?

AGAVE
His other children laid hands on the beast,
but after me — only after I did first.
We’ve had good hunting. So come, share our feast.

CHORUS
What? You want me to eat that with you?
Oh you unhappy woman.

AGAVE
This is a young bull. Look at this cheek
It’s just growing downy under the crop
of his soft hair.

CHORUS
His hair makes him resemble
some wild beast.

AGAVE
Bacchus is a clever huntsman —
he wisely set his Maenads on this beast.

CHORUS
Yes, our master is indeed a hunter.

AGAVE
Have you any praise for me?

CHORUS
I praise you.

AGAVE
Soon all Cadmus’ people. . .
ΧΟΡΟΣ  
καὶ παῖς γε Πενθεύς . . .  

ἈΓΑΥΗ  
ματέρ᾿ ἐπαινέσεται,  
λαβοῦσαν ἄγραν τάνδε λεοντοφυῆ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
περισσάν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ  
περισσῶς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
ἀγάλλη;  

ἈΓΑΥΗ  
γέγηθα,  
μεγάλα μεγάλα καὶ  
φανερὰ ταῦτα ἁγάρα κατειργασμένα.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
δειξόν νῦν, ὁ τάλαινα, σήμερον νικηφόρον  
ἀστοίσιν ἄγραν ἤν φέρουσ᾽ ἐλήλυθαν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ  
ὦ καλλίπυργον ἄστυ Θηβαίας χθονὸς ναίοντες, ἔλθεθ᾽ ὡς ἴδητε τήδε ἄγραν,  
Κάδμου θηρὸς ἠγρεύσαμεν,  
οὐκ ἀρχαῖοι Θεσσαλῶν στοχάσμασιν,  
οὐ δικτύοισιν, ἀλλὰ λευκοπήχεις χειρῶν ἀκμαῖσι  
κᾆτα κομπάζειν χρεὼν καὶ λογχοποιῶν ὄργανα κτᾶσθαι μάτην;  
ἡμεῖς δὲ γ᾽ αὐτῇ χειρὶ τόνδε θ᾽ εἵλομεν,  
ποῦ μοι πατὴρ ὁ πρέσβυς; ἐλθέτω πέλας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
. . . and Pentheus, your son, as well.

ἈΓΑΥΗ  
. . . will celebrate his mother, who caught the beast,  
just like a lion.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
It's a strange trophy.

ἈΓΑΥΗ  
And strangely captured, too.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
You're proud of what you've done?

ἈΓΑΥΗ  
Yes, I'm delighted. Great things I've done —  
great things on this hunt, clear for all to see.

ΧΟΡΟΣ  
Well then, you most unfortunate woman,  
show off your hunting prize, your sign of victory,  
to all the citizens.

ἈΓΑΥΗ [addressing everyone]  
All of you here,  
all you living in the land of Thebes,  
in this city with its splendid walls,  
come see this wild beast we hunted down —  
daughters of Cadmus — not with thonged spears,  
Thessalian javelins, or by using nets,  
but with our own white hands, our finger tips.  
After this, why should huntsmen boast aloud,  
when no one needs the implements they use?

We caught this beast by hand, tore it apart —  
with our own hands. But where's my father?  
He should come here. And where's Pentheus?  
Where is my son? He should take a ladder,  
set it against the house, fix this lion's head  
way up there, high on the palace front.  
I've captured it and brought it home with me.
ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἐπεσθὲ μοι φέροντες άθλιον βάρος
Πενθέως, ἐπεσθὲ, πρόσπολοι, δόμων πάρος,
οὐ σῶμα μοχθῶν μυρίως ξητήμασιν
φέρω τοῦ, εἰρήν ἐν Κιθαιρόνος πτυχαῖς
diastaparaktón, κοῦδέν ἐν ταύτῳ πέδῳ
λαβών, ἐν ύλῃ κείμενον δυσευρέτῳ.

Ἡκουσα γάρ του θυγατέρων τολμήματα,
ὅτη κατ᾽ ἀστείον ἔσω βεβώς
σὺν τῷ σῶμα τείρεσία Βακχῶν πάρα
πάλιν ἐφεσάνεσα εἰς ὄρος κομίζομαι
τὸν κατθανόντα παῖδα Μαινάδων ὕπο.

καὶ τὴν μὲν Ἀκτέων Ἀρισταίῳ ποτὲ
τεκοῖς, ἠστάτατοι ἐστὶν ἠστάτατοι

ἈΓΑΥΗ

πάτερ, μέγιστον κομπάσαι πάρεστί σοι,
pánτων ἄριστας θυγατέρας σπεῖραι μακρῷ
θυντῶν- ἀπάθειας εἴπον, ἐξοχως δ᾿ ἐμέ.

ἡ τὰς παρ᾽ ἱστοῖς ἐκλιποῦσα κερκίδας
ἐς μείζον ἡμᾶς, θῆρας ἀγρεύειν χεροῖν.

φέρω δ᾿ ἐν ᾠλέναισιν, ὡς ὁρᾶς, οὐκ
tάδε

[Enter Cadmus and attendants, carrying parts of Pentheus' body]

Cadmus

Follow me, all those of you who carry
some part of wretched Pentheus. You slaves,
come here, right by the house.

[They place the bits of Pentheus' body together in a chest front of the palace]

I'm worn out.

So many searches—but I picked up the body.
I came across it in the rocky clefts
on Mount Cithaeron, ripped to pieces,
no parts lying together in one place.
It was in the woods—difficult to search.
Someone told me what my daughter’d done,
those horrific acts, once I’d come back,
returning here with old Tiresias,
inside the city walls, back from the Bacchae.
So I climbed the mountains once again.
Now I bring home this child the Maenads killed.
I saw Autonoe, who once bore
Actaeon to Aristeius—and Ino,
she was with her there, in the forest,
both still possessed, quite mad, poor creatures.
Someone said Agave was coming here,
still doing her Bacchic dance. He spoke the truth,
for I see her there—what a wretched sight!

Agave

Father, now you can be truly proud.
Among all living men you’ve produced
by far the finest daughters. I’m talking
of all of us, but especially of myself.
I’ve left behind my shuttle and my loom,
and risen to great things, catching wild beasts
with my bare hands. Now I’ve captured him,
I’m holding in my arms the finest trophy,
as you can see, bringing it back home to you,
so it may hang here.

I offering him Pentheus' head

Take this, father
let your hands welcome it. Be proud of it,
γαυροίμενος δὲ τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀγρεύμασιν
cάλει φίλους ἐς δαίτα. μακάριος γάρ ἐλ, μακάριος, ἡμῶν τοιαύτ᾿ ἐξειργασμένων.

Καδμός

ὠ τένθος οὐ μετρητῶν οὐδ᾿ οἶον τ᾿ ἰδεῖν,
φόνον ταλαίνας χερῶν ἐξειργασμένων.
καλὸν τὸ θύμα καταβαλοῦσα δαίμοσιν
ἐπὶ δαίτα Θήβας τάσδε κάμε παρακαλεῖς.
οἵμοι κακῶν μὲν πρῶτα σῶν, ἐπετί ἐμῶν
ὡς ἦσθε ἡμᾶς ἐνδίκους μὲν, ἀλλ᾿ ἄγαν.

Ἀγαύη

ὡς δύσκολον τὸ γῆρας ἀνθρώποις ἔφυ
ἔν τ᾿ ὀμμασι σκυθρωπόν, εἰδε παῖς ἐμὸς
ἐδήρθησιν εἰς μήτρᾳ εἰκασθεὶς τρόποις.
οἵ τ᾿ ἐν νεανίας Θηβαίους ἄμα
θηρῶν ὄμματι, ἄλλα θεομαχεῖαν μᾶλιν
οἴοσ τ᾿ ἐκείνοι, νουθητέος, πάτερ.

Καδμός

φεῦ φεῦ· φρονήσας μὲν οἵ ἐδράσατε
ἀλγήσετ᾿ ἄλγον δεινόν
ἐὰν δὲ διὰ τέλους
ἐν τῷ δὲ μενεῖτ᾿ ἐν ᾧ καθέστατε,
οὐκ εὐτυχοῦσαι δόξετ᾿ οὐχὶ δυστυχεῖν.

Ἀγαύη

τί δ᾿ οὐ καλῶς τῶνδ᾿ ἢ τί λυπηρῶς ἔχει;

Καδμός

πρῶτον μὲν ἐς τόνδ᾿ αἰθέρ᾿ ὀμμα σὸν μέθες.

Ἀγαύη

ἰδοῦ· τί μοι τῶνδ᾿ ἐξπέπτας εἰσορᾶν;
ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἐδ’ αὐτὸς ἢ σοι μεταβολὰς ἔχειν δοκεῖ;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

λαμπρότερος ἢ πρὶν καὶ διειπέτεστερος.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

τὸ δὲ πτοηθὲν τὸδ᾽ ἐτι σὴν ψυχὴν πάρα;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

οὐκ ὁδὸν τοῦτον τοῦτο. γένομαι δὲ πως ἔννοιας, μετασταθεὶσα τῶν πάρος φρενῶν.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

κλύοις ἂν οὖν τι κἀποκρίναι᾽ ἂν σαφῶς;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

ὡς ἐκλέλησμα γ᾽ ἃ πάρος εἴπομεν, πάτερ.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἐς ποῖον ἦλθες οἶκον ὑμεναίων μέτα;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

Σπαρτῷ μ᾽ ἔδωκας, ὡς λέγουσ᾽, Ἐχίονι.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

τίς οὖν ἐν οίκοις παῖς ἐγένετο σῷ πόσει;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

Πενθεύς, ἐμῇ τε καὶ πατρὸς κοινωνίᾳ.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

τίνος πρόσωπον δῆτ᾽ ἐν ἀγκάλαις ἐχεῖς;

ἈΓΑΥΗ

λέοντος, ὡς γ᾽ ἔφασκον αἱ θηρώμεναι.

108 109
ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
σκέψαι νυν ὀρθῶς· βραχὺς ὁ μόχθος εἰσιδεῖν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ἔα, τί λεύσσω; τί φέρομαι τόδ᾽ ἐν χερῶν;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ἀθρησον αὐτὸ καὶ σαφέστερον μάθε.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ὁρῶ μέγιστον ἄλγος ἡ τάλαιν᾽ ἐγώ.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
μῶν σοι λέοντι φαίνεται προσεικέναι;

ἈΓΑΥΗ
οὐκ, ἀλλὰ Πενθέως ἡ τάλαιν᾽ ἔχω κάρα.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ὄμωγμένον γε πρόσθεν ἢ σὲ γνωρίσαι.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
τίς ἔκτανέν νιν; —πῶς ἐμὰς ἦλθεν χέρας;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
δύστην᾽ ἀλήθει᾽, ὡς ἐν οὐ καιρῷ πάρει.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
λέγ᾽, ὡς τὸ μέλλον καρδία πήδημ᾽ ἔχει.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
σύ νιν κατέκτας καὶ κασίγνηται σέθεν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ποῦ δ᾽ ἀλλεὶ; ἢ κατ᾽ ὠίκον; ἢ ποίος τόποις;

Cadmus
Inspect it carefully. You can do that
without much effort.

Agave [inspecting the head]
What is this?
What am I looking at? What am I holding? [1280]

Cadmus
Look at it. You’ll understand more clearly.

Agave
What I see fills me with horrific pain . . .
such agony . . .

Cadmus
Does it still seem to you
to be a lion’s head?

Agave
No. It’s appalling —
this head I’m holding belongs to Pentheus.

Cadmus
Yes, that’s right. I was lamenting his fate
before you recognized him.

Agave
Who killed him?
How did he come into my hands?

Cadmus
Harsh truth —
how you come to light at the wrong moment.

Agave
Tell me. My heart is pounding in me
to hear what you’re about to say.

Cadmus
You killed him —
you and your sisters.

Agave
Where was he killed?
At home? In what sort of place? [1290]
ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
οὗπερ πρὶν Ἀκτέωνα διέλαχον κύνες.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
τί δ' ἐσ' Κιθαιρῶν' ἦλθε δυσδαίμων ὀδε;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ἐκερτόμει θεόν σάς τε βακχείας μολὼν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ἡμεῖς δ' ἐκείσε τίνι τρόπῳ κατήραμεν;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ἐμάνητε, πᾶσα τ' ἐξεβακχεύθη πόλις.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς ἄλεσ', ἀρτί μανθάνω.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ὦβριν γ' ὑβρισθείς· θεόν γὰρ οὐχ ἡγεῖσθέ νιν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
τὸ φίλτατον δὲ σῶμα ποῦ παιδός, πάτερ;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ἐγὼ μόλις τόδ' ἐξερευνήσας φέρω.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ἕι πᾶν ἐν ἀρθροῖς συγκεκλῃμένον καλῶς;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
Πενθεῖ δὲ τί μέρος ἀφροσύνης προσῆκ' ἐμῆς;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ὑμῶν ἐγένεθ' ὄμοιος, οὐ σέβων θεόν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
τοιγάρ συνήψε πάντας ἐς μίαν βλάβην,

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
τοιγαρ συνήψε πάντας ἐς μίαν βλάβην,

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ἡμῖς τε τὸν θ', ὡστε διολέσαι δόμους
καμ', ὡστε ἀτεκνός ἀρσέων παιδών γεγός

CF

He was killed
where dogs once made a common meal of Actaeon.

Why did this poor man go to Cithaeron?

He went there to ridicule the god
and you for celebrating Dionysus.

But how did we happen to be up there?

You were insane — the entire city
was in a Bacchic madness.

Now I see.
Dionysus has destroyed us all.

He took offense at being insulted.
You did not consider him a god.

Father, where's the body of my dearest son?

I had trouble tracking the body down.
I brought back what I found.

Are all his limbs laid out
just as they should be? And Pentheus,
what part did he play in my madness?

Like you, he was irreverent to the god.
That's why the god linked you and him together
in the same disaster — thus destroying
the house and me, for I've no children left,
Euripides

τῆς σῆς τὸν ἐρνοὺς, ὦ τάλανα, νηδύος
αἰσχυστὰ καὶ κάκιστα καθημανόν' ὀρώ,
ὡ δομὶ ἀνέβλεψ᾽—ὅς συνεῖχε, ὦ τέκνον,
τούμιον μέλαθρον. παιδὸς ἐξ ἐμῆς γεγώ, 114 115
πάλει τε τὰρβος ἦσθα. τὸν γέροντα δὲ
οὐδεὶς ὃβριζεν ἥθελεν εἰσοφόν τὸ σὸν
κάρα. δίκην γὰρ ἀξίαν ἔλαμβανεν.

νῦν δ᾽ ἐκ δόμων ἄτιμον ἐκβεβλήσομαι
ὁ Κάδμος ὁ μέγας, ὃς τὸ Θηβαίων γένος
ἐσπείρα καζήμησα κάλλιστον θέρος.

ὡ φιλτατ᾽ ἀνδρῶν—καὶ γὰρ οὐκέτ᾽ ὃν ὄμοι
τῶν φιλτάτων ἐκοικείοις ἁρμημήσθη, τέκνον—
οὐκέτι γενεῖον τοὐθεὶς θυγαγάνων χερί.

τὸν γέροντα δὲ οὐδεὶς ὑβρίζειν θὰ εἰσορῶν τὸ σὸν
κάρα. δίκην γὰρ ἀξίαν ἔλαμβανεν.

νῦν δ᾽ ἐκ δόμων ἄτιμον ἐκβεβλήσομαι
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ὡ φιλτατ᾽ ἀνδρῶν—καὶ γὰρ οὐκέτ᾽ ὃν ὄμοι
τῶν φιλτάτων ἐκοικείοις ἁρμημήσθη, τέκνον—
οὐκέτι γενεῖον τοὐθεὶς θυγαγάνων χερί.

τὸν γέροντα δὲ οὐδεὶς ὑβρίζειν θὰ εἰσορῶν τὸ σὸν
κάρα. δίκην γὰρ ἀξίαν ἔλαμβανεν.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ὦ πάτερ, ὃς σου ἀλγῆ, ὁ τέκνον
παῖς παιδὸς ἀξίαν μὲν, ἀλγευνὴ δὲ σοὶ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ
τὸ μὲν σὸν ἀλγῆ, Κάδμε. σὺς δ᾽ ἔχει δίκην
παῖς παιδὸς ἀξίαν μὲν, ἀλγευνὴ δὲ σοὶ.

now I see this offspring of your womb,
now I see this offspring of your womb,
you unhappy woman, cruelly butchered
you unhappy woman, cruelly butchered
in the most shameful way. He was the one
in the most shameful way. He was the one
who brought new vision to our family.
who brought new vision to our family.

[addressing the remains of Pentheus]
My child, you upheld the honour of our house,
My child, you upheld the honour of our house,
your daughter's son. You were feared in Thebes.
your daughter's son. You were feared in Thebes.

No one who saw you ever would insult me,
No one who saw you ever would insult me,
though I was old, for you would then inflict
though I was old, for you would then inflict
fit punishment. Now the mighty Cadmus,
fit punishment. Now the mighty Cadmus,
the man who sowed and later harvested
the man who sowed and later harvested
the most splendid crop — the Theban people —
the most splendid crop — the Theban people —
will be an exile, banished from his home,
will be an exile, banished from his home,
a dishonoured man. Dearest of men,
a dishonoured man. Dearest of men,
even though, my child, you're alive no more,
even though, my child, you're alive no more,
I count you among those closest to me.
I count you among those closest to me.
You won't be touching my cheek any more,
You won't be touching my cheek any more,
holding me in your arms, and calling me
holding me in your arms, and calling me
"grandfather," as you ask me, "Old man,
"grandfather," as you ask me, "Old man,
who's injuring or dishonouring you?
who's injuring or dishonouring you?
Who upsets your heart with any pain?
Who upsets your heart with any pain?
Tell me, father, so I can punish him —
Tell me, father, so I can punish him —
anyone who treats you in an unjust way.
anyone who treats you in an unjust way.
Now you're in this horrifying state,
Now you're in this horrifying state,
I'm in misery, your mother's pitiful,
I'm in misery, your mother's pitiful,
and all your relatives are in despair.
and all your relatives are in despair.
If there's a man who disrespects the gods,
If there's a man who disrespects the gods,
let him think about how this man perished —
let him think about how this man perished —
them he should develop faith in them.
them he should develop faith in them.

Chorus Leader
I'm sorry for you Cadmus — you're in pain.
I'm sorry for you Cadmus — you're in pain.
But your grandson deserved his punishment.
But your grandson deserved his punishment.

Agave
Father, you see how all has changed for me. 12
Father, you see how all has changed for me. 12
[From being your royal and honoured daughter,
[From being your royal and honoured daughter,
the mother of a king, I'm now transformed —
the mother of a king, I'm now transformed —
an abomination, something to fill
an abomination, something to fill
all people's hearts with horror, with disgust —
all people's hearts with horror, with disgust —
the mother who slaughtered her only son,
who tore him apart, ripping out the heart from the child who filled her own heart with joy— all to honour this god Dionysus. But, father, give me your permission now to lay out here the body of my son, prepare his corpse for proper burial.

Cadmus

That’s no easy task to undertake. His body, all the parts I could collect, lies here, in this chest, not a pretty sight. My own eyes can hardly bear to see him. But if you think you can endure the work, then, my child, begin the appropriate rites.

Agave [removing Pentheus’ limbs and placing them on the ground in front of her]

Alas, for my poor son, my only child, destroyed by his mother’s Bacchic madness. How could these hands of mine, which loved him so, have torn these limbs apart, ripped out his flesh. Here’s an arm which has held me all these years, growing stronger as he grew into a man, his feet . . . O how he used to run to me, seeking assurance of his mother’s love. His face was handsome, on the verge of manhood. See the soft down still resting on these lips, which have kissed me thousands of times or more. All this, and all the rest, set here before us. Oh Zeus and all you Olympian gods . . .

[She cannot complete the ritual and collapses in grief]

It makes no sense—it’s unendurable. How could the god have wished such things on me?

Chorus Leader [helping Agave get up]

Lady, you must bear what cannot be borne. Your suffering is intense, but the god is just. You insulted him in Thebes, showed no respect—you’ve brought the punishment upon yourself.

Chorus

What is wisdom? What is finer than the rights men get from gods—
to hold their powerful hands
der over the heads of their enemies?
Ah yes, what’s good is always loved.
So all praise Dionysus,
praise the dancing god,
god of our revelry,
god whose justice is divine,
whose justice now reveals itself.

[Enter Dionysus]

DIONYSUS

Yes, I am Dionysus, son of Zeus.
You see me now before you as a god.
You Thebans learned about my powers too late.
Dishonouring me, you earn the penalty.
You refused my rites. Now you must leave—
abandon your city for barbarian lands.
Agave, too, that polluted creature,
must go into perpetual banishment.
And Cadmus, you too must endure your lot.13
Your form will change, so you become a dragon.
Your wife, Harmonia, Ares’ daughter,
whom you, though mortal, took in marriage,
will be transformed, changing to a snake.
As Zeus’ oracle declares, you and she
will drive a chariot drawn by heifers.
You’ll rule barbarians. With your armies,
too large to count, you’ll raze many cities.
Once they despoil Apollo’s oracle,
they’ll have a painful journey back again.
But Ares will guard you and Harmonia.
In lands of the blessed he’ll transform your lives.
That’s what I proclaim — I, Dionysus,
born from no mortal father, but from Zeus.
If you had understood how to behave
as you should have when you were unwilling,
you’d now be fortunate, with Zeus’ child
among your allies.
ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
Διόνυσε, λισσόμεσθά σ’, ἠδικήκαμεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ὁδί έμαθεν’ ἡμᾶς, ὅτε δὲ χρῆν, οὐκ ἤδετε.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ἔγνώκαμεν ταῦτ’, ἀλλ’ ἐπεξέρχη λίαν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
καὶ γὰρ πρὸς ύμῶν θεὸς γεγόνει οὐκ ᾔδετε.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ὁργὰς πρέπει θεοὺς οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοίς.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
πάλαι τάδε Ζεὺς οὑμὸς ἐπένευσεν πατήρ.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
αἰαῖ, δέδοκται, πρέσβυ, τλήμονες φυγαί.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
τί δῆτα μέλλεθ’ ἅπερ ἀναγκαίως ἔχει;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ὁ τέκνον, ὡς ἐς δεινὸν ἥλθομεν κακὸν
πάντες, σο’ ἡ τάλανα σύγχενοι τε σαί,
ἐγώ θ’ ὁ τλήμων. βαρβάρους ἄφηδοι
γέρων μέτοικοι. ἔτι δὲ μοι τὸ θέσφατον
ἐς Ἑλλάδ’ ἀγαγεῖν μιγάδα βάρβαρον στρατόν.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
ὦ τέκνον, ὡς ἐς δεινὸν ἥλθομεν κακὸν
πάντες, σο’ ἡ τάλανα σύγχενοι τε σαί,
ἐγώ θ’ ὁ τλήμων. βαρβάρους ἄφηδοι
γέρων μέτοικοι. ἔτι δὲ μοι τὸ θέσφατον
ἐς Ἑλλάδ’ ἀγαγεῖν μιγάδα βάρβαρον στρατόν.
καὶ τὴν Ἀρεως παῖδ’ Ἀρμονίαν, δάμαρτ’ ἐμήν,
δράκων δρακαίνης φυσὶν ἔχουσαν ἀγρίαν
ἄξων τ’ ἂν τοιοῦτοι καὶ ἀγαθοὶ Ἐλληναίσι,
ἔτι δὲ τὸν καταβάτην
Ἀχέροντα πλεύσας ἰαμήκορος γενήσομαι.

Euripides

Bacchae

CADMUS
O Dionysus, we implore you—we’ve not acted justly.

DIONYSUS
You learn too late. You were ignorant when you should have known.

CADMUS
Now we understand. Your actions against us are too severe.

DIONYSUS
I was born a god, and you insulted me.

CADMUS
Angry gods should not act just like humans.

DIONYSUS
My father Zeus willed all this long ago.

AGAVE
Alas, old man, then this must be our fate, a miserable exile.

[1350]

DIONYSUS
Why then delay? Why postpone what necessity requires?

CADMUS
Child, we’ve stumbled into this disaster, this terrible calamity—you and me, both in agony—your sisters, too. So I’ll go out to the barbarians, a foreign resident in my old age. And then for me there’s that oracle which says I’ll lead a mixed barbarian force back into Greece. And I’ll bring here with me Harmonia, Ares’ daughter, my wife. I’ll have the savage nature of a snake, as I lead my soldiers to the altars, to the tombs, in Greece. But even then, there’ll be no end to my wretched sorrows.

[1360]

I’ll never sail the downward plunging Acheron and reach some final peace.
ἈΓΑΥΗ ὦ πάτερ, ἐγὼ δὲ σοῦ στερεῖσα φεύξομαι.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ τί μ᾽ ἀμφιβάλλεις χερσίν, ὦ τάλαινα παῖ, ὀρνις ὅπως κηφῆνα πολιόχρων κύκνος;

ἈΓΑΥΗ ποῖ γὰρ τράπωμαι πατρίδος ἐκβεβλημένη;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ οὐκ οἴδα, τέκνον, μικρὸς ἐπίκουρος πατήρ.

ἈΓΑΥΗ χαῖρ᾽, ὦ μέλαθρον, χαῖρ᾽, ὦ πατρίαπόλις · ἐκλείπω σ᾽ ἐπὶ δυστυχία φυγὰς ἐκ θαλάμων.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ στεῖχέ νυν, ὦ παῖ, τὸν Ἀρισταίου ...

ἈΓΑΥΗ στένομαι σε, πάτερ.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ καγὼ σέ, τέκνον, καὶ σὰς ἐδάκρυσα κασιγνήτας.

ἈΓΑΥΗ δεινῶς γὰρ τάνδ᾽ αἰκείαν Διόνυσος ἄναξ τοὺς σοὺς εἰς οἶκους ἐφερεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ καὶ γὰρ ἔπασχον δεινὰ πρὸς υμῶν, ἀγέραστον ἔχων ὄνομ᾽ ἐν Θήβαις.

ἈΓΑΥΗ χαῖρε, πάτερ, μοι.

Agave [embracing Cadmus]
Father, I must be exiled without you.

Cadmus
Why do you throw your arms about me, my unhappy child, just like some young swan protecting an old one — gray and helpless.

Agave
Because I’ve no idea where to go, once I’m banished from my father’s land.

Cadmus
Child, I don’t know. Your father’s not much help.

Agave
Farewell, then, to my home. Farewell to my native city. In my misfortune I abandon you, an exile from spaces once my own.  

[1370]

Cadmus
Go now to Aristeus' house, my child.  

Agave
How I grieve for you, my father.

Cadmus
And I grieve for you, my child, as I weep for your sisters.

Agave
Lord Dionysus has inflicted such brutal terror on your house.

Dionysus:
Yes. For at your hands I suffered, too — and dreadfully. For here in Thebes my name received no recognition.

Agave
Farewell, father.
ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
χαῖρ’, ὦ μελέα
θύγατερ. χαλεπῶς δ’ ἐς τὸ δ’ ἂν ἥκοις.

ἈΓΑΥΗ
ἄγετ’, ὦ πομποί, μὲ κασιγνήτας
 ὲνα συμφωνύδασ ληψόμεθ’ οἷκτράς.
ἔλθομε δ’ ὅπου
μήτε Κιθαιρών’ ἔμ’ ἰδοι μαράς
μήτε Κιθαιρών’ ὕσσοσιν ἐγώ,
μήθ’ ὅθι θύρσου μνῆμ’ ἀνάκειται
Βάκχαις δ’ ἄλλαισι μέλοιεν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ
πολλαὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων,
pολλὰ δ’ ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοὶ·
καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ’ οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,
τῶν δ’ ἀδοκήτων πόρον ηὔρεθε θεός.
τοιόνδ’ ἀπέβη τὸδε πράγμα.

CADMUS
My most unhappy daughter,
may you fare well. That will be hard for you.

AGAVE
Lead on, friends, so I may take my sisters,
those pitiful women, into exile with me.
May I go somewhere where cursed Cithaeron
will never see me, nor my eyes glimpse
that dreadful mountain, a place far away
from any sacred thyrsus. Let others
make Bacchic celebrations their concern.

CHORUS
The gods appear in many forms,
carrying with them unwelcome things.
What people thought would happen never did.
What they did not expect, the gods made happen.
That’s what this story has revealed.

[Exeunt Chorus and Cadmus, leaving on stage the remains of Pentheus’ body]
NOTES

1. Semele, Cadmus’ daughter and Dionysus’ mother, had an affair with Zeus. Hera, Zeus’ wife, tricked Zeus into destroying Semele with a lightning bolt. Zeus took the infant Dionysus from his mother’s womb as she was dying and sewed him into his thigh, where Dionysus continued to grow until he was delivered as a new-born infant.

2. A *thyrsus* (pl. *thyrsoi*) is a hollow plant stalk, usually decorated with ivy, and carried as a symbol of Dionysus in the dancing celebrations (where it can acquire magical powers).

3. The Maenads, who make up the Chorus of the play, are the female followers of Dionysus, who have followed him from Phrygia in Asia Minor to Thebes.

4. Rhea is Zeus’ mother. The drums are tambourines. Tmolus is a mountain in Asia Minor. Mount Cithaeron is a sacred mountain near Thebes.

5. Bromius and Bacchus are alternate names for Dionysus.

6. Cybele is an eastern mother goddess. The Curetes and Corybantes are attendants on the goddess Cybele. They banged their drums to drown out the cries of the infant Zeus, whose mother, Rhea, was trying to protect him from his father, Cronos.

7. Evoë is a cry of celebration in the Dionysian rituals.

8. Sidon, in Asia Minor, as these lines inform was, was the place where the royal family of Thebes originated. Cadmus had come from Asia Minor, sent out from home by his father, and founded Thebes.

9. Agave (Pentheus’ mother), Ino, and Autonoe were sisters, all daughters of Cadmus. Actaeon, son of Autonoe, offended the goddess Artemis, who turned him into a stag and had him torn apart by his own hunting dogs (see line 429 below).

10. The term *barbarian* refers to non-Greek-speaking people.

11. Pentheus’ father Echion was one of the warriors born when Cadmus, on instructions from the gods, killed a serpent-dragon and sowed its teeth in the earth. The teeth germinated as warriors rising from the ground.

12. At this point, there is a major gap in the manuscript. The text here is reconstructed from what we know about the content of the missing portion.

13. The Greek text resumes here at the end of the gap in the manuscript.

14. Aristeus is the husband of Autonoe and father of Actaeon.