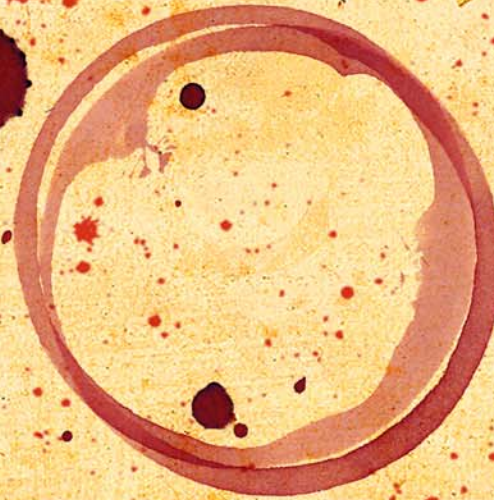


EURIPIDES



BACCHAE

A Dual Language Edition
translated by Ian Johnston

Fænum
Publishing

ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΟΥ EURIPIDES'
Βάκχαι *Bacchae*

A Dual Language Edition

Greek Text Edited by
Gilbert Murray

English Translation and Notes by
Ian Johnston

Edited by
Evan Hayes and Stephen Nimis

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First Edition

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οἷη περ φύλλων γενεὴ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη
τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὄρη:
ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἣ μὲν φύει ἣ δ' ἀπολήγει.

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 exist 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.

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

by Ian Johnston

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

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), and the memory of the fact that, under the god's 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 wonder 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 thrust 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 stained 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 overcomes 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 Bacchantes) 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

offers us no hope for some harmonious reconciliation (either politically or psychologically). The experience of these possibilities leaves Marlowe with the cryptic final comment that life is, in effect, a “choice of nightmares”—one can stay on the surface or move into the darkness, but either way life is inherently unfulfilled. Someone who, like Kurtz, tries to experience both as fully as possible is left in self-destructive despair (“The horror! The horror!”).

Kott’s parallel, it strikes me, is very illuminating, because it does justice to the full power of Euripides’ play—especially the savage vision of despair at the end, which we might like to mute by imposing on it some more comfortable moral “lesson,” but which is much too powerful to be contained by such a confining and neat interpretative scheme.

Thinking about the parallels between these two stories, I am struck by how much more despairing Euripides’ tale is than Conrad’s. For in Conrad’s story, the two ways of life are widely separated geographically, and there’s a sense that so long as that separation remains, the European civilization will continue, content on the surface and economically prosperous in its ignorant idealism (although Marlowe senses it is slowly dying). And in that story we also have the figure of Marlowe as someone who, if he has not reconciled the white and the black, has adopted a meditative stance towards the paradoxes of his experience and finds some purpose in sailing back and forth between them and in telling his story. But in Euripides’ play there is no similar sense—the worlds of Dionysus and Pentheus are inevitably colliding, with more examples to follow, and we have no final consolation in a Marlowe-like figure. Instead we have the scattered bits of Pentheus, all that remains of Thebes and its royal family.

A Note on the Historical Context

Those who like to anchor their interpretations on details of historical context (not a procedure I personally recommend for reasons there is not time to go into here, but a popular method of proceeding nonetheless) will find plenty of potentially useful supporting detail for the final suggestions given above. Let me briefly mention a few.

The Bacchae is one of Euripides’ very last works (unperformed in his life, with the manuscript discovered at his death), written when the aging writer had turned his back on Greece and moved to Macedon (around 408 BC) shortly before his death, perhaps bitter because he had never achieved the highest success as a tragedian in Athens or in his frustration at Athenian political life. At this time the long drawn-out insanity of the Peloponnesian War was in its final stages, and its destructive effects on the highest Greek (especially Athenian) achievements were plain for all to see, as the possibilities for a just communal political life among the Greek city-states and within particular states had foundered on greed, self-interest, mass killings,

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 to 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 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.

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BAKXAI

BACCHAE

ΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΔΡΑΜΑΤΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑ

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ΑΓΑΥΗ

ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ

ΕΤΕΡΟΣ ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ΘΕΡΑΠΩΝ

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

ἦκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα
Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη
Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί·
μορφὴν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν
πάρειμι Δίρκης νάματ' Ἰσμηνοῦ θ' ὕδωρ. 5
ὄρω δὲ μητρὸς μνήμα τῆς κεραυνίας
τόδ' ἐγγὺς οἴκων καὶ δόμων ἐρείπια
τυφόμενα Δίου πυρὸς ἔτι ζῶσαν φλόγα,
ἀθάνατον Ἥρας μητέρ' εἰς ἐμὴν ὕβριν.
αἰνῶ δὲ Κάδμον, ἄβατον ὃς πέδον τόδε 10
τίθησι, θυγατρὸς σηκόν· ἀμπέλου δέ νιν
πέριξ ἐγὼ ἄκαλυψα βοτρυνώδει χλόη.
λιπὼν δὲ Λυδῶν τοὺς πολυχρύσους γύας
Φρυγῶν τε, Περσῶν θ' ἡλιοβλήτους πλάκας
Βάκτριά τε τείχη τήν τε δύσχιμον χθόνα 15
Μήδων ἐπελθὼν Ἀραβίαν τ' εὐδαίμονα
Ἀσίαν τε πᾶσαν, ἢ παρ' ἄλμυρὰν ἅλα
κεῖται μιγάσιν Ἑλλησι βαρβάροις θ' ὁμοῦ
πλήρεις ἔχουσα καλλιπυργώτους πόλεις,
ἐς τήνδε πρῶτον ἦλθον Ἑλλήνων πόλιν, 20
τάκεῖ χορεύσας καὶ καταστήσας ἐμὰς
τελετάς, ἵν' εἶην ἐμφανῆς δαίμων βροτοῖς.
πρώτας δὲ Θήβας τῆσδε γῆς Ἑλληνίδος
ἀνωλόλυξα, νεβρίδ' ἐξάψας χρὸς
θύρσον τε δοὺς ἐς χεῖρα, κίσσινον βέλος· 25
ἐπεὶ μ' ἀδελφαὶ μητρός, ἃς ἦκιστα χρῆν,

Bacchae

SCENE: The Greek city of Thebes, outside the royal palace. Dionysus, appearing as young man, is alone, with the palace behind him, its main doors facing the audience. He speaks directly to the audience

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. [10]
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, [20]
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 ἔφασκον ἐκφῦναι Διός,
 Σεμέλην δὲ νυμφευθεῖσαν ἐκ θνητοῦ τινος
 ἐς Ζῆν' ἀναφέρειν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν λέχους,
 Κάδμου σοφίσμαθ', ὧν νιν οὔνεκα κτανεῖν 30
 Ζῆν' ἐξεκαυχῶνθ', ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο.
 τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ὄστρησ' ἐγὼ
 μανίαις, ὄρος δ' οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν·
 σκευήν τ' ἔχειν ἠνάγκασ' ὀργίων ἐμῶν,
 καὶ πᾶν τὸ θῆλυ σπέρμα Καδμείων, ὅσαι 35
 γυναιῖκες ἦσαν, ἐξέμηνα δωμάτων·
 ὁμοῦ δὲ Κάδμου παισὶν ἀναμεμειγμένοι
 χλωραῖς ὑπ' ἐλάταις ἀνορόφοις ἦνται πέτραις.
 δεῖ γὰρ πόλιν τήνδ' ἐκμαθεῖν, κεῖ μὴ θέλει,
 ἀτέλεστον οὔσαν τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων, 40
 Σεμέλης τε μητρὸς ἀπολογήσασθαί μ' ὑπερ
 φανέντα θνητοῖς δαίμον' ὃν τίκτει Δί.
 Κάδμος μὲν οὖν γέρας τε καὶ τυραννίδα
 Πενθεὶ δίδωσι θυγατρὸς ἐκπεφυκότι,
 ὃς θεομαχεῖ τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ καὶ σπονδῶν ἄπο 45
 ὠθεῖ μ', ἐν εὐχαῖς τ' οὐδαμοῦ μνείαν ἔχει.
 ὧν οὔνεκ' αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγῶς ἐνδείξομαι
 πᾶσιν τε Θηβαίοισιν. ἐς δ' ἄλλην χθόνα,
 τὰνθένδε θέμενος εὖ, μεταστήσω πόδα,
 δεικνὺς ἐμαντόν· ἦν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις 50
 ὀργῇ σὺν ὄπλοις ἐξ ὄρους βάκχας ἄγειν
 ζητῆ, ξυνάψω μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν.
 ὧν οὔνεκ' εἶδος θνητὸν ἀλλάξας ἔχω
 μορφὴν τ' ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν.

They boasted aloud that I, Dionysus,
 was no child of Zeus, claiming Semele,
 once she was pregnant by some mortal man,
 attributed her bad luck in bed to Zeus,
 a story made up (they said) to trick Cadmus. [30]
 Those sisters state that's why Zeus killed her,
 because she lied about the man she'd slept with.
 So I've driven those women from their homes
 in a frenzy—they now live in the mountains,
 out of their minds. I've made them put on costumes,
 outfits appropriate for my mysteries.
 All Theban offspring—or, at least, all women—
 I've driven in a crazed fit from their homes.
 Now they sit out there among the rocks,
 underneath green pine trees, no roof overhead,
 Cadmus' daughters in their company as well.
 For this city has to learn, though against its will,
 that it has yet to be initiated
 into my Dionysian rites. Here I plead [40]
 the cause of my own mother, Semele,
 appearing as a god to mortal men,
 the one she bore to Zeus. Now Cadmus,
 the old king, has just transferred his power,
 his royal authority, to Pentheus,
 his daughter's son, who, in my case at least,
 fights against the gods, prohibiting me
 all sacrificial offerings. When he prays,
 he chooses to ignore me. For this neglect
 I'll demonstrate to him, to all in Thebes,
 that I was born a god. Once these things here
 have been made right, I'll move on somewhere else,
 to some other land, revealing who I am.
 But if Thebans in this city, in their anger, [50]
 try to make those Bacchic women leave,
 to drive them from the mountains forcibly,
 then I, commander of these Maenads,
 will fight them.³ That's why I've transformed myself,
 assumed a mortal shape, altered my looks,
 so I resemble any human being.

ἀλλ', ὦ λιποῦσαι Τμῶλον ἔρυμα Λυδίας, 55
 θίασος ἐμός, γυναῖκες, ἄς ἐκ βαρβάρων
 ἐκόμισα παρέδρους καὶ ξυνεμπόρους ἐμοί,
 αἴρεσθε τὰπιχώρι' ἐν πόλει Φρυγῶν
 τύμπανα, ῥέας τε μητρὸς ἐμά θ' εὐρήματα, 60
 βασιλεία τ' ἀμφὶ δώματ' ἐλθοῦσαι τάδε
 κτυπεῖτε Πενθέως, ὡς ὄρᾳ Κάδμου πόλις.
 ἐγὼ δὲ βάκχαις, ἐς Κιθαιῶνος πτυχὰς
 ἐλθὼν ἴν' εἰσί, συμμετασχῆσω χορῶν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

Ἀσίας ἀπὸ γᾶς
 ἱερὸν Τμῶλον ἀμείψασα θαάζω 65
 Βρομίῳ πόνον ἠδὺν
 κάματόν τ' εὐκάματον, Βάκ-
 χιον εὐαζομένα.

— τίς ὀδῶ τίς ὀδῶ; τίς;
 μελάθροις ἔκτοπος ἔστω, στόμα τ' εὐφη-
 μον ἅπας ἐξοσιούσθω· 70
 τὰ νομισθέντα γὰρ ἀεὶ
 Διόνυσον ὑμνήσω.

— ὦ
 μάκαρ, ὅστις εὐδαίμων
 τελετὰς θεῶν εἰδὼς

[Enter the Chorus of Bacchae, dressed in ritual deerskin, carrying small drums like tambourines]

But you there, you women who've left Tmolus,
 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, [60]
 let Cadmus' city see you, while I go,
 in person, to the clefts of Mount Cithaeron,
 to my Bacchae, to join their dancing.⁴

[Exit Dionysus]

CHORUS [singing and dancing]

FIRST VOICE

From Asia, from sacred Tmolus
 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.⁵

SECOND VOICE

Who's in the street? Who's there? Who?
 Let him stay inside
 out of our way.
 Let every mouth be pure, [70]
 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,

- βιοτὰν ἀγιστεύει καὶ
θιασεύεται ψυχὰν
ἐν ὄρεσσι βακχεύων
ὄσιοις καθαρμοῖσιν,
τά τε ματρὸς μεγάλας ὄρ-
για Κυβέλας θεμιτεύων,
ἀνὰ θύρσον τε τινάσσων,
κισσῶ τε στεφανωθεῖς
Διόνυσον θεραπεύει.
75
- ἴτε βάκχαι, ἴτε βάκχαι,
Βρόμιον παῖδα θεὸν θεοῦ
Διόνυσον κατάγουσαι
Φρυγίων ἐξ ὀρέων Ἑλ-
λάδος εἰς εὐρυχόρους ἀ-
γυιάς, τὸν Βρόμιον.
85
- ὄν
ποτ' ἔχουσ' ἐν ὠδίνων
λοχίαις ἀνάγκαισι
πταμένας Διὸς βροντᾶς νη-
δύος ἔκβολον μάτηρ
ἔτεκεν, λιποῦσ' ἀῤῷ-
να κεραυνίῳ πληγᾷ·
λοχίοις δ' αὐτίκα νιν δέ-
ξατο θαλάμῃς Κρονίδας Ζεύς,
κατὰ μηρῶ δὲ καλύψας
χρυσέαισιν συνερείδει
περόναις κρυπτὸν ἀφ' Ἥρας.
90
- ἔτεκεν δ', ἀνίκα Μοῖραι
τέλεσαν, ταυρόκερων θεὸν
στεφάνωσέν τε δρακόντων
στεφάνοις, ἐνθεν ἄγραν θη-
ροτρόφον μαινάδες ἀμφι-
βάλλονται πλοκάμοις.
100
- ὦ Σεμέλας τροφοὶ Θῆ-
βαι, στεφανοῦσθε κισσῶ·
105

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. [80]

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. [90]
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. [100]

SEVENTH VOICE

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

βρύετε βρύετε χλοήρει
 μίλακι καλλικάρπω
καὶ καταβακχιούσθε δρυὸς
ἢ ἐλάτας κλάδοισι, 110
σικτῶν τ' ἐνδυτὰ νεβρίδων
στέφετε λευκοτρίχων πλοκάμων
μαλλοῖς· ἀμφὶ δὲ νάρθηκας ὑβριστὰς
όσιούσθ'· αὐτίκα γὰ πᾶσα χορεύσει—
Βρόμιος ὅστις ἄγῃ θιάσους— 115
εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, ἔνθα μένει
θηλυγενῆς ὄχλος
ἀφ' ἰστῶν παρὰ κερκίδων τ'
οἰστρηθεῖς Διονύσω.

— ὦ θαλάμευμα Κουρή- 120
των ζάθεοί τε Κρήτας
Διογενέτορες ἔναυλοι,
ἔνθα τρικόρυθες ἄντροις
βυρσότονον κύκλωμα τόδε
μοι Κορύβαντες ἠῦρον· 125
βακχεία δ' ἀνὰ συντόνω
κέρασαν ἀδυβόα Φρυγίων
αὐλῶν πνεύματι ματρός τε Ῥέας ἐς
χέρα θήκαν, κτύπον εὐάσμασι Βακχᾶν·
παρὰ δὲ μαινόμενοι Σάτυροι 130
ματέρος ἐξανύσαντο θεᾶς,
ἐς δὲ χορεύματα
συνῆψαν τριετηρίδων,
αἷς χαίρει Διόνυσος.

— ἠδὺς ἐν ὄρεσιν, ὅταν ἐκ θιάσων δρομαί- 135
ων πέση πεδόσε, νε-
βρίδος ἔχων ἱερὸν ἐνδυτόν, ἀγρεύων

flaunt your green yew,
flaunt its sweet fruit!
Consecrate yourselves to Bacchus,
with stems of oak or fir, [110]
Dress yourselves in spotted fawn skins,
trimmed with white sheep's wool.
As you wave your thyrsus,
revere the violence it contains.
All the earth will dance at once.
Whoever leads our dancing—
that one is Bromius!
To the mountain, to the mountain,
where the pack of women waits,
all stung to frenzied madness
to leave their weaving shuttles,
goaded on by Dionysus.

EIGHTH VOICE

O you dark chambers of the Curetes, [120]
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.⁶
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, [130]
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,

αἶμα τραγοκτόνον, ὤμοφάγον χάριν, ἰέμε-
 νος ἐς ὄρεα Φρύγια, Λύδι, ὁ δ' ἔξαρχος Βρόμιος, 140
 εὐοῖ.

— ῥεῖ δὲ γάλακτι πέδον, ῥεῖ δ' οἴνω, ῥεῖ δὲ μελισσῶν
 νέκταρι.
 Συρίας δ' ὡς λιβάνου κα-
 πνὸν ὁ Βακχεὺς ἀνέχων 145
 πυρσώδη φλόγα πεύκας
 ἐκ νάρθηκος αἴσσει
 δρόμῳ καὶ χοροῖσιν
 πλανάτας ἐρεθίζων
 ἰαχαῖς τ' ἀναπάλλων,
 τρυφερόν τε πλόκαμον εἰς αἰθέρα ῥίπτων. 150
 ἅμα δ' εὐάσμασι τοιάδ' ἐπιβρέμει.
 ὦ ἴτε βάκχαι,
 ὦ ἴτε βάκχαι,
 Τιμώλου χρυσορόου χλιδᾶ
 μέλπετε τὸν Διόνυσον 155
 βαρυβρόμων ὑπὸ τυμπάνων,
 157
 εὔια τὸν εὔιον ἀγαλλόμεναι θεὸν
 ἐν Φρυγίαισι βοαῖς ἐνοπαῖσί τε,
 λωτὸς ὅταν εὐκέλαδος 160
 ἱερὸς ἱερὰ παίγματα βρέμη, σύνοχα 164
 φοιτάσιν εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος· ἠδομέ- 165
 να δ' ἄρα, πῶλος ὅπως ἅμα ματέρι
 φορβάδι, κῶλον ἄγει ταχύπουν σκιρτήμασι βάκχα. 169

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, [140]
 leading the dance—
 Bromius—Evoë!⁷

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. [150]
 Among the Maenads' shouts
 his voice reverberates:
 "On Bacchant, 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 [160]
 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 πύλαισι; Κάδμον ἐκκάλει δόμων,
 Ἀγήνορος παιδ', ὃς πόλιν Σιδωνίαν
 λιπῶν ἐπύργωσ' ἄστνυ Θεβαίων τόδε.
 ἴτω τις, εἰσάγγελε Τειρεσίας ὅτι
 ζητεῖ νιν· οἶδε δ' αὐτὸς ὧν ἦκω πέρι
 ἅ τε ξυνεθέμην πρέσβυς ὧν γεραιτέρω,
 θύρσους ἀνάπτειν καὶ νεβρῶν δορὰς ἔχειν
 στεφανοῦν τε κρᾶτα κισσίνοις βλαστήμασιν.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὦ φίλταθ', ὡς σὴν γῆρυν ἡσθόμην κλύων
 σοφὴν σοφοῦ παρ' ἀνδρός, ἐν δόμοισιν ἄν·
 ἦκω δ' ἔτοιμος τήνδ' ἔχων σκευὴν θεοῦ·
 δεῖ γάρ νιν ὄντα παῖδα θυγατρὸς ἐξ ἐμῆς
 Διόνυσον ὃς πέφηγεν ἀνθρώποις θεὸς
 ὅσον καθ' ἡμᾶς δυνατὸν αὔξεσθαι μέγαν.
 ποῖ δεῖ χορεύειν, ποῖ καθιστάναί ποδα
 καὶ κρᾶτα σείσαι πολίων; ἐξηγοῦ σύ μοι
 γέρων γέροντι, Τειρεσία· σὺ γὰρ σοφός.
 ὡς οὐ κάμοιμ' ἂν οὔτε νύκτ' οὔθ' ἡμέραν
 θύρσῳ κροτῶν γῆν· ἐπιελήσμεθ' ἠδέως
 γέροντες ὄντες.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ταῦτ' ἐμοὶ πάσχεις ἄρα·
 κάγω γὰρ ἠβῶ κάπιχειρήσω χοροῖς.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

οὐκοῦν ὄχοισιν εἰς ὄρος περάσομεν;

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁμοίως ἂν ὁ θεὸς τιμὴν ἔχοι.

[Enter Tiresias, a very old blind man, dressed in clothing appropriate for the Dionysian ritual. He goes up to the palace door and knocks very aggressively]

TIRESIAS [shouting]

Where's the servant on the door? You in there, [170]
 tell Cadmus to get himself out of the house,
 Agenor's lad, who came here from Sidon,
 then put up the towers of this Theban town.⁸
 Go tell him Tiresias is waiting for him.
 He knows well enough why I've come for him.
 I'm an old man, and he's even older,
 but we've agreed make ourselves a thyrsus,
 to put on fawn skins and crown our heads
 with garlands of these ivy branches.

[Enter Cadmus from the palace, a very old man, also dressed in clothing appropriate for the Dionysian ritual]

CADMUS

My dearest friend,
 I was inside the house. I heard your voice.
 I recognized it—the voice of a man truly wise.
 So I've come equipped with all this god stuff. [180]
 We must sing his praise, as much as we can,
 for this Dionysus, well, he's my daughter's child.
 Now he's revealed himself a god to men.
 Where must I go and dance? Where do I get
 to move my feet and shake my old gray head?
 You must guide me, Tiresias, one old man
 leading another, for you're the expert here.
 O I'll never tire of waving this thyrsus,
 day and night, striking the ground. What rapture!
 Now we can forget that we're old men.

TIRESIAS

You feel the same way I do, then.
 For I'm young and going to try the dancing. [190]

CADMUS

Shall we go up the mountain in a chariot?

TIRESIAS

The god would not then get complete respect.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

γέρων γέροντα παιδαγωγήσω σ' ἐγώ.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ὁ θεὸς ἀμοχθὶ κείσε νῶν ἡγήσεται.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

μόνοι δὲ πόλεως Βακχίῳ χορεύσομεν; 195

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

μόνοι γὰρ εἶ φρονοῦμεν, οἱ δ' ἄλλοι κακῶς.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

μακρὸν τὸ μέλλειν· ἀλλ' ἐμῆς ἔχου χερός.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ἰδοῦ, ξύναπτε καὶ ξυνωρίζου χέρα.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

οὐ καταφρονῶ γὰρ τῶν θεῶν θνητὸς γεγώς.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

οὐδὲν σοφιζόμεσθα τοῖσι δαίμοσιν. 200

πατρίους παραδοχάς, ἅς θ' ὀμήλικας χρόνῳ

κεκτήμεθ', οὐδεὶς αὐτὰ καταβαλεῖ λόγος,

οὐδ' εἰ δι' ἄκρων τὸ σοφὸν ἠϋρηται φρενῶν.

ἔρει τις ὡς τὸ γῆρας οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι,

μέλλων χορεύειν κρᾶτα κισσώσας ἐμόν; 205

οὐ γὰρ διήρηχ' ὁ θεός, οὔτε τὸν νέον

εἰ χρῆ χορεύειν οὔτε τὸν γεραίτερον,

ἀλλ' ἐξ ἀπάντων βούλεται τιμὰς ἔχειν

κοινάς, διαριθμῶν δ' οὐδέν' αὔξεσθαι θέλει.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἐπεὶ σὺ φέγγος, Τειρεσία, τόδ' οὐχ ὄρας, 210

ἐγὼ προφήτης σοι λόγων γενήσομαι.

CADMUS

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

TIRESIAS

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

CADMUS

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

TIRESIAS

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

CADMUS

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

TIRESIAS [*holding out his hand*]

Here. Take it—make a pair of it and yours.

CADMUS

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

TIRESIAS

To the gods we mortals are all ignorant. [200]
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.

CADMUS

Since you're blind to daylight, Tiresias, [210]
I'll be your seer, tell you what's going on—

Πενθεὺς πρὸς οἴκους ὄδε διὰ σπουδῆς περᾶ,
Ἐχίονος παῖς, ᾧ κράτος δίδωμι γῆς.
ὡς ἐπτόηται· τί ποτ' ἐρεῖ νεώτερον;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἔκδημος ὦν μὲν τῆσδ' ἐτύγχανον χθονός, 215
κλύω δὲ νεοχμὰ τήνδ' ἀνὰ πτόλιν κακά,
γυναῖκας ἡμῖν δώματ' ἐκλελοιπέναι
πλασταῖσι βακχεῖαισι, ἐν δὲ δασκίοις
ὄρεσι θαάζειν, τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα
Διόνυσον, ὅστις ἔστι, τιμώσας χοροῖς· 220
πλήρεις δὲ θιάσοις ἐν μέσοισιν ἐστάναι
κρατῆρας, ἄλλην δ' ἄλλοσ' εἰς ἐρημίαν
πτώσσουσαν εὐναῖς ἀρσένων ὑπηρετεῖν,
πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δὴ μαινάδας θυσοκόους,
τὴν δ' Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ' ἄγειν τοῦ Βακχίου. 225
ὄσας μὲν οὖν εἴληφα, δεσμίους χέρας
σώζουσι πανδήμοισι πρόσπολοι στέγαις·
ὄσαι δ' ἄπεισι, ἐξ ὄρους θηράσομαι,
Ἴνώ τ' Ἀγαύην θ', ἣ μ' ἔτικτ' Ἐχίονι,
Ἄκταίονός τε μητέρ', Αὐτονόην λέγω. 230
καὶ σφᾶς σιδηραῖς ἀρμόσας ἐν ἄρκυσι
παύσω κακούργου τῆσδε βακχείας τάχα.
λέγουσι δ' ὡς τις εἰσελήλυθε ξένος,
γόης ἐπωδὸς Λυδίας ἀπὸ χθονός,
ξανθοῖσι βοστρύχοισιν εὐοσμῶν κόμην, 235
οἰνώπας ὄσσοις χάριτας Ἀφροδίτης ἔχων,
ὃς ἡμέρας τε κεῦφρόνας συγγίγνεται
τελετὰς προτείνων εὐίους νεάνισιν.
εἰ δ' αὐτὸν εἶσω τῆσδε λήψομαι στέγης,
παύσω κτυποῦντα θύρσον ἀνασειόντά τε 240
κόμας, τράχηλον σώματος χωρὶς τεμῶν.
ἐκείνος εἶναι φησι Διόνυσον θεόν,

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 [220]
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 [230]
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, [240]
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

ἐκείνος ἐν μηρῷ ποτ' ἐρράφθαι Διός,
 ὃς ἐκπυροῦται λαμπάσιν κεραυνίαις
 σὺν μητρὶ, Δίους ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο. 245
 ταῦτ' οὐχὶ δευῆς ἀγχόνῃς ἔστ' ἄξια,
 ὕβρεις ὑβρίζειν, ὅστις ἔστιν ὁ ξένος;

ἀτὰρ τόδ' ἄλλο θαῦμα, τὸν τερασκόπον
 ἐν ποικίλαισι νεβρίσι Τειρεσίαν ὀρώ
 πατέρα τε μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς—πολὺν γέλων— 250
 νάρθηκι βακχεύοντ'. ἀναίνομαι, πάτερ,
 τὸ γῆρας ὑμῶν εἰσορῶν νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον.
 οὐκ ἀποτινάξεις κισσόν; οὐκ ἐλευθέραν
 θύρσου μεθήσεις χεῖρ', ἐμῆς μητρὸς πάτερ;

σὺ ταῦτ' ἔπεισας, Τειρεσία. τόνδ' αὖ θέλεις 255
 τὸν δαίμον' ἀνθρώποισιν ἐσφέρων νέον
 σκοπεῖν πτερωτοὺς κάμπύρων μισθοὺς φέρειν.
 εἰ μὴ σε γῆρας πολὺν ἐξερρύετο,
 καθῆσ' ἂν ἐν βάκχαισι δέσμιος μέσαις,
 τελετὰς ποιηρὰς εἰσάγων· γυναιξὶ γὰρ 260
 ὅπου βότρυος ἐν δαιτὶ γίγνεται γάνος,
 οὐχ ὑγιὲς οὐδὲν ἔτι λέγω τῶν ὀργίων.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τῆς δυσσεβείας. ὦ ξέν', οὐκ αἰδῆ θεοὺς
 Κάδμον τε τὸν σπείραντα γηγενῆ στάχυν,
 Ἐχίονος δ' ὦν παῖς καταισχύνεις γένος; 265

that once upon a time he was sewn up,
 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! [250]
 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. [260]
 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 ἀνὴρ σοφὸς
 καλὰς ἀφορμάς, οὐ μέγ' ἔργον εὖ λέγειν·
 σὺ δ' εὐτροχὸν μὲν γλῶσσαν ὡς φρονῶν ἔχεις,
 ἐν τοῖς λόγοισι δ' οὐκ ἔνεισί σοι φρένες.
 θράσει δὲ δυνατὸς καὶ λέγειν οἶός τ' ἀνὴρ
 270 κακὸς πολίτης γίγνεται νοῦν οὐκ ἔχων.
 οὗτος δ' ὁ δαίμων ὁ νέος, ὃν σὺ διαγελᾶς,
 οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην μέγεθος ἐξεπιεῖν ὅσος
 καθ' Ἑλλάδ' ἔσται. δύο γάρ, ᾧ νεανία,
 275 τὰ πρῶτ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισι. Δημήτηρ θεά—
 γῆ δ' ἐστίν, ὄνομα δ' ὀπότερον βούλη κάλει.
 αὕτη μὲν ἐν ξηροῖσιν ἐκτρέφει βροτούς·
 ὃς δ' ἦλθ' ἔπειτ', ἀντίπαλον ὁ Σεμέλης γόνος
 βότρυος ὑγρὸν πᾶμ' ἡῦρε κείσηνέγκατο
 280 θνητοῖς, ὃ παύει τοὺς ταλαιπώρους βροτούς
 λύπης, ὅταν πλησθῶσιν ἀμπέλου ρόης,
 ὕπνον τε λήθην τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν κακῶν
 δίδωσιν, οὐδ' ἔστ' ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων.
 οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς,
 285 ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.
 καὶ καταγελᾶς νιν, ὡς ἐνερράφη Διὸς
 μηρῶ; διδάξω σ' ὡς καλῶς ἔχει τόδε.
 ἐπεὶ νιν ἦρπασ' ἐκ πυρὸς κεραυνίου
 Ζεὺς, ἐς δ' Ὀλυμπον βρέφος ἀνήγαγεν θεόν,
 290 Ἥρα νιν ἦθελ' ἐκβαλεῖν ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ·
 Ζεὺς δ' ἀντεμηχανήσαθ' οἶα δὴ θεός.
 ῥήξας μέρος τι τοῦ χθόν' ἐγκυκλουμένου
 αἰθέρος, ἔθηκε τόνδ' ὄμηρον ἐκδιδούς,
 Διόνυσον Ἥρας νεικέων· χρόνῳ δέ νιν

TIRESIAS

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. [270]
 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. [280]
 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. [290]
 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,"

βροτοὶ ῥαφήναι φασιν ἐν μηρῷ Διός, 295
 ὄνομα μεταστήσαντες, ὅτι θεᾶ θεὸς
 Ἴηρα ποθ' ὠμήρευσε, συνθέντες λόγον.
 μάντις δ' ὁ δαίμων ὅδε· τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον
 καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει·
 ὅταν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἐς τὸ σῶμ' ἔλθῃ πολὺς, 300
 λέγει τὸ μέλλον τοὺς μεμνηότας ποιεῖ.
 Ἄρεώς τε μοῖραν μεταλαβὼν ἔχει τινά·
 στρατὸν γὰρ ἐν ὅπλοις ὄντα κἀπὶ τάξεσιν
 φόβος διεπτόησε πρὶν λόγχης θιγεῖν.
 μανία δὲ καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ Διονύσου πάρα. 305
 ἔτ' αὐτὸν ὄψῃ κἀπὶ Δελφίσι πετραῖς
 πηδῶντα σὺν πεύκαισι δικόρυφον πλάκα,
 πάλλοντα καὶ σείοντα βακχεῖον κλάδον,
 μέγαν τ' ἀν' Ἑλλάδα. ἀλλ' ἐμοί, Πενθεῦ, πιθοῦ·
 μὴ τὸ κράτος αὔχει δύναμιν ἀνθρώποις ἔχειν, 310
 μηδ', ἣν δοκῆς μὲν, ἣ δὲ δόξα σου νοσῆ,
 φρονεῖν δόκει τι· τὸν θεὸν δ' ἐς γῆν δέχου
 καὶ σπένδε καὶ βάκχευε καὶ στέφου κἀρα.
 οὐχ ὁ Διόνυσος σωφρονεῖν ἀναγκάσει
 γυναικάς ἐς τὴν Κύπρην, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ φύσει 315
 τὸ σωφρονεῖν ἔνεστιν εἰς τὰ πάντ' αἰεὶ
 τοῦτο σκοπεῖν χρή· καὶ γὰρ ἐν βακχεύμασιν
 οὐδ' ἢ γε σώφρων οὐ διαφθαρήσεται.
 ὄρᾳς, σὺ χαίρεις, ὅταν ἐφεστῶσιν πύλαις
 πολλοί, τὸ Πενθέως δ' ὄνομα μεγαλήνη πόλις· 320
 κἀκεῖνος, οἶμαι, τέρπεται τιμώμενος.
 ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν καὶ Κάδμος, ὃν σὺ διαγελάς,
 κισσῶ τ' ἐρεψόμεσθα καὶ χορεύσομεν,
 πολιά ξυνωρίς, ἀλλ' ὅμως χορευτέον,
 κοῦ θεομαχίσω σῶν λόγων πεισθεῖς ὕπο. 325

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, [300]
 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, [310]
 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. [320]
 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,

μαίνη γὰρ ὡς ἄλγιστα, κοῦτε φαρμάκοις
ἄκη λάβοις ἂν οὔτ' ἄνευ τούτων νοσεῖς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ πρέσβυ, Φοῖβόν τ' οὐ καταισχύνεις λόγοις,
τιμῶν τε Βρόμιον σωφρονεῖς, μέγαν θεόν.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὦ παῖ, καλῶς σοι Τειρεσίας παρήνεσεν. 330
οἴκει μεθ' ἡμῶν, μὴ θύραζε τῶν νόμων.
νῦν γὰρ πέτη τε καὶ φρονῶν οὐδὲν φρονεῖς.
κεῖ μὴ γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ θεὸς οὗτος, ὡς σὺ φήης,
παρὰ σοὶ λεγέσθω· καὶ καταψεύδου καλῶς
ὡς ἔστι, Σεμέλη θ' ἵνα δοκῇ θεὸν τεκεῖν, 335
ἡμῖν τε τιμὴ παντὶ τῷ γένει προσῆ.
ὄρας τὸν Ἀκτέωνος ἄθλιον μόρον,
ὄν ἀμόσιτοι σκύλακες ἄς ἐθρέψατο
διεσπάσαντο, κρεῖσσον' ἐν κυναγίαις
Ἄρτεμιδος εἶναι κομπάσαντ', ἐν ὀργάσιν. 340
ὃ μὴ πάθης σύ· δεῦρό σου στέψω κάρα
κισσῶ· μεθ' ἡμῶν τῷ θεῷ τιμὴν δίδου.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

οὐ μὴ προσοίσεις χεῖρα, βακχεύσεις δ' ἰών,
μηδ' ἐξομόρξῃ μωρίαν τὴν σὴν ἐμοί;
τῆς σῆς δ' ἀνοίας τόνδε τὸν διδάσκαλον 345
δίκτην μέτειμι. στειχέτω τις ὡς τάχος,
ἐλθὼν δὲ θάκουσ τοῦδ' ἵν' οἰωνοσκοπεῖ
μοχλοῖς τριαίνου κἀνάτρεψον ἔμπαλιν,
ἄνω κάτω τὰ πάντα συγχέας ὁμοῦ,
καὶ στέμματ' ἀνέμοις καὶ θυέλλαισιν μέθες. 350
μάλιστα γὰρ νιν δῆξομαι δράσας τάδε.

for you are mad—under a cruel delusion.
No drug can heal that ailment—in fact,
some drug has caused it.

CHORUS LEADER

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

CADMUS

My child, Tiresias has given you [330]
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. [340]
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. [350]
That way I'll really do him damage.

οἱ δ' ἀνὰ πόλιν στείχοντες ἐξιχνεύσατε
 τὸν θηλύμορφον ξένον, ὃς ἐσφέρει νόσον
 καινὴν γυναιξὶ καὶ λέχη λυμαίνεται.
 κᾶνπερ λάβητε, δέσμιον πορεύσατε 355
 δεῦρ' αὐτόν, ὡς ἂν λευσίμου δίκης τυχῶν
 θάνῃ, πικρὰν βάκχευσιν ἐν Θήβαις ἰδῶν.

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ

ὦ σχέτλι', ὡς οὐκ οἶσθα ποῦ ποτ' εἰ λόγων.
 μέμηνας ἤδη· καὶ πρὶν ἐξέστης φρενῶν.
 στείχωμεν ἡμεῖς, Κάδμε, κάξαιτώμεθα 360
 ὑπέρ τε τούτου καίπερ ὄντος ἀγρίου
 ὑπέρ τε πόλεως τὸν θεὸν μηδὲν νέον
 δρᾶν. ἀλλ' ἔπου μοι κισσίνου βάκτρον μέτα,
 πειρῶ δ' ἀνορθοῦν σώμ' ἐμόν, κἀγὼ τὸ σόν·
 γέροντε δ' αἰσχρὸν δύο πεσεῖν· ἴτω δ' ὅμως, 365
 τῷ Βακχίῳ γὰρ τῷ Διὸς δουλευτέον.
 Πενθεὺς δ' ὅπως μὴ πένθος εἰσοίσει δόμοις
 τοῖς σοῖσι, Κάδμε· μαντικῇ μὲν οὐ λέγω,
 τοῖς πράγμασιν δέ· μῶρα γὰρ μῶρος λέγει.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

Ἄσῖα πότνα θεῶν, 370
 Ἄσῖα δ' ἂ κατὰ γᾶν
 χρυσέαν πτέρυγα φέρεις,
 τάδε Πενθέως αἰεῖς;
 αἰεῖς οὐχ ὅσῖαν
 ὕβριν ἐς τὸν Βρόμιον, τὸν 375
 Σεμέλας, τὸν παρὰ καλλι-
 στεφάνοις εὐφροσύναις δαι-
 μονα πρῶτον μακάρων; ὃς τὰδ' ἔχει,
 θιασεύειν τε χοροῖς
 μετὰ τ' αὐλοῦ γελάσαι 380

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 360
 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.

[360]

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

CHORUS

Holiness, queen of the gods, 370
 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, 380

[370]

[380]

ἀποπαῦσαι τε μερίμνας,
 ὅποταν βότρυος ἔλθῃ
 γάνος ἐν δαιτὶ θεῶν, κισ-
 σοφόροις δ' ἐν θαλίαις ἀν-
 δράσι κρατῆρ ὕπνου ἀμ-
 φιβάλλη. 385

ἀχαλίῳν στομάτων
 ἀνόμου τ' ἀφροσύνας
 τὸ τέλος δυστυχία·
 ὁ δὲ τᾶς ἡσυχίας
 βίωτος καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν 390
 ἀσάλευτόν τε μένει καὶ
 συνέχει δώματα· πόρσω
 γὰρ ὅμως αἰθέρα ναίων-
 τες ὀρώσιν τὰ βροτῶν οὐρανίδαί.
 τὸ σοφὸν δ' οὐ σοφία 395
 τό τε μὴ θνητὰ φρονεῖν.
 βραχὺς αἰών· ἐπὶ τούτῳ
 δέ τις ἂν μεγάλα διώκων
 τὰ παρόντ' οὐχὶ φέροι. μαι-
 νομένων οἶδε τρόποι καὶ 400
 κακοβούλων παρ' ἔμοι-
 γε φωτῶν.

ἰκοίμαν ποτὶ Κύπρον,
 νᾶσον τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας,
 ἵν' οἱ θελξίφρονες νέμον-
 ται θνατοῖσιν Ἔρωτες, 405
 Πάφον θ' ἂν ἑκατόστομοι
 βαρβάρου ποταμοῦ ῥοαὶ
 καρπίζουσιν ἄνομβροι.
 οὐ δ' ἄ καλλιστενομένα
 Πιερία μούσειος ἔδρα, 410
 σεμνὰ κλιτὺς Ὀλύμπου,
 ἐκεῖσ' ἄγε με, Βρόμιε Βρόμιε,
 πρόβακχ' εὖτε δαίμον.

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 [390]
 maintains tranquillity.
 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, [400]
 men 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, [410]
 where Muses dwell,
 or to Olympus' sacred slopes,

ἐκεῖ Χάριτες,
 ἐκεῖ δὲ Πόθος· ἐκεῖ δὲ βάκ- 415
 χαις θέμις ὀργιάζειν.
 ὁ δαίμων ὁ Διὸς παῖς
 χαίρει μὲν θαλάισιν,
 φιλεῖ δ' ὀλβοδότειραν Ἐᾶ-
 ρήναν, κουροτρόφον θεάν. 420
 ἴσαν δ' ἔς τε τὸν ὄλβιον
 τὸν τε χείρονα δῶκ' ἔχειν
 οἴνου τέρψιν ἄλυτον·
 μισεῖ δ' ᾧ μὴ ταῦτα μέλει,
 κατὰ φάος νύκτας τε φίλας 425
 εὐαίωνα διαζῆν,
 σοφὰν δ' ἀπέχειν πραπίδα φρένα τε
 περισσῶν παρὰ φωτῶν·
 τὸ πλήθος ὅ τι 430
 τὸ φαυλότερον ἐνόμισε χρῆ-
 ταί τε, τόδ' ἂν δεχοίμαν.

ΘΕΡΑΠΩΝ

Πενθεῦ, πάρεσμεν τήνδ' ἄγραν ἡγρευκότες
 ἐφ' ἣν ἔπεμψας, οὐδ' ἄκρανθ' ὠρμήσαμεν. 435
 ὁ θῆρ δ' ὄδ' ἡμῖν πρᾶος οὐδ' ὑπέσπασεν
 φυγῆ πτόδ', ἀλλ' ἔδωκεν οὐκ ἄκων χέρας
 οὐδ' ὠχρός, οὐδ' ἥλλαξεν οἴνωπὸν γένυν,
 γελῶν δὲ καὶ δεῖν κἀπάγειν ἐφίετο
 ἔμενέ τε, τοῦμόν εὐτρεπὲς ποιούμενος. 440
 κἀγὼ δι' αἰδοῦς εἶπον· ὦ ξέν', οὐχ ἐκὼν
 ἄγω σε, Πενθέως δ' ὅς μ' ἔπεμψ' ἐπιστολαῖς.
 ἄς δ' αὖ σὺ βάκχας εἶρξας, ἄς συνήρπασας
 κᾶδηςας ἐν δεσμοῖσι πανδήμου στέγης,
 φροῦδαί γ' ἐκείναι λελυμέναι πρὸς ὀργάδας 445
 σκιρτῶσι Βρόμιον ἀνακαλούμεναι θεόν·

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 420
 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— 430
 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. 440
 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,

αὐτόματα δ' αὐταῖς δεσμὰ διελύθη ποδῶν
κλῆδές τ' ἀνήκαν θύρετρ' ἄνευ θνητῆς χερός.
πολλῶν δ' ὄδ' ἀνήρ θαυμάτων ἦκει πλέως
ἐς τάσδε Θήβας. σοὶ δὲ τᾶλλα χρὴ μέλειν. 450

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

μέθεσθε χειρῶν τοῦδ'· ἐν ἄρκυσι γὰρ ὦν
οὐκ ἔστιν οὕτως ὠκὺς ὥστε μ' ἐκφυγεῖν.

ἀτὰρ τὸ μὲν σώμ' οὐκ ἄμορφος εἶ, ξένε,
ὡς ἐς γυναικάς, ἐφ' ὅπερ ἐς Θήβας πάρει.
πλόκαμός τε γάρ σου ταναός, οὐ πάλης ὕπο, 455
γένυν παρ' αὐτὴν κεχυμένος, πόθου πλέως·
λευκὴν δὲ χροιάν ἐκ παρασκευῆς ἔχεις,
οὐχ ἡλίου βολαῖσι, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ σκιάς,
τὴν Ἀφροδίτην καλλονῇ θηρώμενος.
πρῶτον μὲν οὖν μοι λέξον ὅστις εἶ γένος. 460

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

οὐ κόμπος οὐδεὶς· ῥάδιον δ' εἰπεῖν τόδε.
τὸν ἀνθεμῶδη Τιμῶλον οἶσθά που κλύων.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

οἶδ', ὅς τὸ Σάρδεων ἄστρῳ περιβάλλει κύκλῳ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐντεῦθεν εἰμι, Λυδία δέ μοι πατρίς.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πόθεν δὲ τελετὰς τάσδ' ἄγεις ἐς Ἑλλάδα; 465

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς εἰσέβησ', ὁ τοῦ Διός.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

Ζεὺς δ' ἔστ' ἐκεῖ τις, ὅς νέους τίκτει θεούς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

οὐκ, ἀλλ' ὁ Σεμέλην ἐνθάδε ζεύξας γάμοις.

summoning their god. Chains fell off their feet,
just dropping on their own. Keys opened doors
not turned by human hands. This man here
has come to Thebes full of amazing tricks.
But now the rest of this affair is up to you. [450]

[Soldier hands chained Dionysus over to Pentheus]

PENTHEUS [moving up close to Dionysus, inspecting him carefully]

Untie his hands. I've got him in my nets.
He's not fast enough to get away from me.

[Soldiers remove the chains from Dionysus' hands. Pentheus moves in closer]

Well, stranger, I see this body of yours
is not unsuitable for women's pleasure—
that's why you've come to Thebes. As for your hair,
it's long, which suggests that you're no wrestler.
It flows across your cheeks That's most seductive.
You've a white skin, too. You've looked after it,
avoiding the sun's rays by staying in the shade,
while with your beauty you chase Aphrodite.
But first tell me something of your family. [460]

DIONYSUS

That's easy enough, though I'm not boasting.
You've heard of Tmolus, where flowers grow.

PENTHEUS

I know it. It's around the town of Sardis.

DIONYSUS

I'm from there. My home land is Lydia.

PENTHEUS

Why do you bring these rituals to Greece?

DIONYSUS

Dionysus sent me—the son of Zeus.

PENTHEUS

Is there some Zeus there who creates new gods?

DIONYSUS

No. It's the same Zeus who wed Semele right here.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πότερα δὲ νύκτωρ σ' ἢ κατ' ὄμμι' ἠνάγκασεν;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὄρων ὄρωντα, καὶ δίδωσιν ὄργια.

470

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τὰ δ' ὄργι' ἐστὶ τίν' ιδέαν ἔχοντά σοι;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἄρρητ' ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἔχει δ' ὄνησιν τοῖσι θύουσιν τίνα;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

οὐ θέμις ἀκοῦσαί σ', ἔστι δ' ἄξι' εἰδέναι.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

εὖ τοῦτ' ἐκιβδήλευσας, ἴν' ἀκοῦσαι θέλω.

475

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἀσέβειαν ἀσκοῦντ' ὄργι' ἐχθαίρει θεοῦ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τὸν θεὸν ὄραν γὰρ φῆς σαφῶς, ποῖός τις ἦν;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὁποῖος ἤθελ'. οὐκ ἐγὼ 'τασσον τόδε.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τοῦτ' ἀῖ παρωχέτευσας εὖ κοῦδὲν λέγων.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

δόξει τις ἀμαθεῖ σοφὰ λέγων οὐκ εὖ φρονεῖν.

480

PENTHEUS

Did this Zeus overpower you at night,
in your dreams? Or were your eyes wide open?

DIONYSUS

I saw him — he saw me. He gave me
the sacred rituals.

[470]

PENTHEUS

Tell me what they're like,
those rituals of yours.

DIONYSUS

That information
cannot be passed on to men like you,
those uninitiated in the rites of Bacchus.

PENTHEUS

Do they benefit those who sacrifice?

DIONYSUS

They're worth knowing, but you're not allowed to hear.

PENTHEUS

You've avoided that question skillfully,
making me want to hear an answer.

DIONYSUS

The rituals are no friend of any man
who's hostile to the gods.

PENTHEUS

This god of yours,
since you saw him clearly, what's he like?

DIONYSUS

He was what he wished to be, not made to order.

PENTHEUS

Again you fluently evade my question,
saying nothing whatsoever.

DIONYSUS

Yes, but then
a man can seem totally ignorant
when speaking to a fool.

[480]

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἦλθες δὲ πρῶτα δεῦρ' ἄγων τὸν δαίμονα;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

πᾶς ἀναχορεύει βαρβάρων τὰδ' ὄργια.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

φρονούσι γὰρ κάκιον Ἑλλήνων πολὺ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

τὰδ' εὖ γε μᾶλλον· οἱ νόμοι δὲ διάφοροι.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τὰ δ' ἱερά νύκτωρ ἢ μεθ' ἡμέραν τελεῖς; 485

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

νύκτωρ τὰ πολλὰ· σεμνότητ' ἔχει σκότος.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τοῦτ' ἐς γυναικας δόλιόν ἐστι καὶ σαθρόν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

κὰν ἡμέρα τό γ' αἰσχρὸν ἐξεύροι τις ἄν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

δίκην σε δοῦναι δεῖ σοφισμάτων κακῶν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

σὲ δ' ἀμαθίας γε κάσεβοῦντ' ἐς τὸν θεόν. 490

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ὡς θρασὺς ὁ βᾶκχος κοῦκ ἀγύμναστος λόγων.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

εἶφ' ὅ τι παθεῖν δεῖ· τί με τὸ δεινὸν ἐργάσῃ;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πρῶτον μὲν ἀβρὸν βόστρυχον τεμῶ σέθεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος· τῷ θεῷ δ' αὐτὸν τρέφω.

PENTHEUS

Is Thebes
the first place you've come to with your god?

DIONYSUS

All the barbarians are dancing in these rites.¹⁰

PENTHEUS

I'm not surprised. They're stupider than Greeks.

DIONYSUS

In this they are much wiser. But their laws
are very different, too.

PENTHEUS

When you dance these rites,
is it at night or during daylight?

DIONYSUS

Mainly at night. Shadows confer solemnity.

PENTHEUS

And deceive the women. It's all corrupt!

DIONYSUS

One can do shameful things in daylight, too.

PENTHEUS

You must be punished for these evil games.

DIONYSUS

You, too—for foolishness, impiety
towards the god. [490]

PENTHEUS

How brash this Bacchant is!
How well prepared in using language!

DIONYSUS

What punishment am I to suffer?
What harsh penalties will you inflict?

PENTHEUS

First, I'll cut off this delicate hair of yours.

DIONYSUS

My hair is sacred. I grow it for the god.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 ἔπειτα θύρσον τόνδε παράδος ἐκ χεροῖν. 495

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 αὐτός μ' ἀφαιροῦ· τόνδε Διονύσου φορῶ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 εἶρκταῖσί τ' ἔνδον σῶμα σὸν φυλάξομεν.

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

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 ὅταν γε καλέσης αὐτὸν ἐν βάκχαις σταθείς.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 καὶ νῦν ἂ πάσχω πλησίον παρῶν ὄρᾱ. 500

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 καὶ ποῦ ἴστω; οὐ γὰρ φανερός ὄμμασίν γ' ἐμοῖς.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 παρ' ἐμοί· σὺ δ' ἀσεβῆς αὐτὸς ὦν οὐκ εἰσορᾶς.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 λάζυσθε· καταφρονεῖ με καὶ Θήβας ὄδε.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 αὐδῶ με μὴ δεῖν σωφρονῶν οὐ σώφροσιν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 ἐγὼ δὲ δεῖν γε, κυριώτερος σέθεν. 505

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅ τι ζῆς, οὐδ' ὅ δρᾶς, οὐδ' ὅστις εἶ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 Πενθεύς, Ἀγαύης παῖς, πατρός δ' Ἐχίονος.

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. [500]

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

ἐνδυστυχήσαι τοῦνομι' ἐπιτήδειος εἶ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

χώρει· καθείρξατ' αὐτὸν ἱππικαῖς πέλας
φάτναισιν, ὡς ἂν σκότιον εἰσορᾶ κνέφας. 510
ἐκεῖ χόρευε· τάσδε δ' ἄς ἄγων πάρει
κακῶν συνεργοὺς ἢ διεμπολήσομεν
ἢ χεῖρα δούπου τοῦδε καὶ βύρσης κτύπου
παύσας, ἐφ' ἰστοῖς δμωίδας κεκτήσομαι.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

στείχομι' ἄν· ὅ τι γὰρ μὴ χρεῶν, οὔτοι χρεῶν 515
παθεῖν. ἀτάρ τοι τῶνδ' ἄπου' ὑβρισμάτων
μέτεισι Διόνυσός σ', ὃν οὐκ εἶναι λέγεις·
ἡμᾶς γὰρ ἀδικῶν κείνον εἰς δεσμοὺς ἄγεις.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

Ἀχελῷου θύγατερ,
πότνι' εὐπάρθενε Δίρκα, 520
σὺ γὰρ ἐν σαῖς ποτε παγαῖς
τὸ Διὸς βρέφος ἔλαβες,
ὅτε μηρῶ πυρὸς ἐξ ἀ-
θανάτου Ζεὺς ὁ τεκῶν ἦρ-
πασέ νω, τὰδ' ἀναβοάσας· 525
ἴθι, Διθύραμβ', ἐμὰν ἄρ-
σενα τάνδε βᾶθι νηδύν·
ἀναφαίνω σε τόδ', ὦ Βάκ-
χιε, Θήβαις ὀνομάζεις.
σὺ δέ μ', ὦ μάκαιρα Δίρκα, 530
στεφανηφόρους ἀπωθῆ
θιάσους ἔχουσιν ἐν σοί.

DIONYSUS

A suitable name. It suggests misfortune.

PENTHEUS [to his soldiers]

Go now.

Lock him up—in the adjoining stables.
That way he'll see nothing but the darkness [510]
There you can dance. As for all those women,
those partners in crime you brought along with you,
we'll sell them off or keep them here as slaves,
working our looms, once we've stopped their hands
beating those drum skins, making all that noise.

[Exit Pentheus into the palace, leaving Dionysus with the soldiers]

DIONYSUS

I'll go, then. For I won't have to suffer
what won't occur. But you can be sure of this—
Dionysus, whom you claim does not exist,
will go after you for retribution
after all your insolence. He's the one
you put in chains when you treat me unjustly.

[The soldiers lead Dionysus away to an area beside the palace]

CHORUS

O Sacred Dirce, blessed maiden,
daughter of Achelous, [520]
your streams once received
the new-born child of Zeus,
when his father snatched him
from those immortal fires,
then hid him in his thigh,
crying out these words,
“Go, Dithyrambus,
enter my male womb.
I'll make you known as Bacchus
to all those in Thebes,
who'll invoke you with that name.”
But you, O sacred Dirce, [530]
why do you resist me,
my garland-bearing company,
along your river banks?

τί μ' ἀναΐνη; τί με φεύγεις;
 ἔτι ναὶ τὰν βοτρυνώδη
 Διονύσου χάριν οἶνας, 535
 ἔτι σοι τοῦ Βρομίου μελήσει.

οἶαν οἶαν ὀργὰν
 ἀναφαίνει χθόνιον
 γένος ἐκφύς τε δράκοντός
 ποτε Πενθεύς, ὃν Ἐχίων 540
 ἐφύτευσε χθόνιος,
 ἀγριωπὸν τέρας, οὐ φῶ-
 τα βρότειον, φόνιον δ' ὄσ-
 τε γίγαντ' ἀντίπαλον θεοῖς·
 ὃς ἀμ' ἐν βρόχοισι τὰν τοῦ 545
 Βρομίου τάχα ξυνάψει,
 τὸν ἐμὸν δ' ἐντὸς ἀχει δώ-
 ματος ἤδη θιασώταν
 σκοτίαῖς κρυπτὸν ἐν εἴρκταις.
 ἐσορᾶς τὰδ', ὦ Διὸς παῖ 550
 Διόνυσε, σοὺς προφάτας
 ἐν ἀμίλλαισιw ἀνάγκας;
 μόλε, χρυσῶπα τινάσσων,
 ἄνα, θύρσον κατ' Ὀλυμπον,
 φονίου δ' ἀνδρὸς ὕβριν κατὰσχεσ. 555

πόθι Νύσας ἄρα τᾶς θη-
 ροτρόφου θυρσοφορεῖς
 θιάσους, ὦ Διόνυσ', ἢ
 κορυφαῖς Κωρυκίαις;
 τάχα δ' ἐν ταῖς πολυδένδρεσ- 560
 σιν Ὀλύμπου θαλάμαις, ἐν-
 θα ποτ' Ὀρφεὺς κιθαρίζων
 σύναγεν δένδρεα μούσαις,
 σύναγεν θήρας ἀγρώτας.
 μάκαρ ὦ Πιερία, 565
 σέβεταιί σ' Εὐῖος, ἥξει

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, [540]
 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 [550]
 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 [560]
 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 ἄμα βακχεύ-
μασι, τόν τ' ὠκυρόαν
διαβὰς Ἄξιόν εἰλισ-
σομένας Μαινάδας ἄξει,
Λυδίαν πατέρα τε, τὸν
τᾶς εὐδαιμονίας βροτοῖς
ὀλβοδόταν, τὸν ἔκλυον
εὐίππον χώραν ὕδασι
καλλίστοισι λιπαίνειν.

570

575

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἰώ,
κλύετ' ἐμᾶς κλύετ' αὐδᾶς,
ἰὼ βάκχαι, ἰὼ βάκχαι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τίς ὄδε, τίς ὄδε πόθεν ὁ κέλαδος
ἀνά μ' ἐκάλεσεν Εὐίου;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἰὼ ἰώ, πάλιν αὐδῶ,
ὁ Σεμέλας, ὁ Διὸς παῖς.

580

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἰὼ ἰὼ δέσποτα δέσποτα,
μόλε νυν ἡμέτερον ἐς
θίασον, ὦ Βρόμιε Βρόμιε.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

σεῖε πέδον χθονὸς Ἕννοσι πότνια.

585

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ᾶ ᾶ,
τάχα τὰ Πενθέως μέλαθρα διατι-
νάξεται πεσήμασι.

— ὁ Διόνυσος ἀνὰ μέλαθρα·
σέβετε νυν.

590

— σέβομεν ᾶ.

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

[570]

[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!

[580]

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

Ai! 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.

[590]

— εἶδετε λάνα κίσσω ἔμβολα
διάδρομα τάδε; Βρόμιος ὄδ' ἀλα-
λάζεται στέγας ἔσω.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἄπτε κεραύνιον αἶθοπα λαμπάδα·
σύμφλεγε σύμφλεγε δώματα Πενθέως. 595

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἦ ἦ,
πῦρ οὐ λεύσσεις, οὐδ' ἀυγάζη,
Σεμέλας ἱερὸν ἀμφὶ τάφον, ἄν
ποτε κεραυνόβολος ἔλιπε φλόγα
Δίου βροντᾶς;
δίκετε πεδόσε τρομερὰ σώματα 600
δίκετε, Μαινάδες· ὁ γὰρ ἄναξ
ἄνω κάτω τιθεὶς ἔπεισι
μέλαθρα τάδε Διὸς γόνος.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

βάρβαροι γυναῖκες, οὕτως ἐκπεπληγμένοι φόβω
πρὸς πέδω πεπτώκατ'; ἦσθησθ', ὡς ἔοικε, Βακχίου 605
διατινάξαντος ' δῶμα Πενθέως· ἀλλ' ἐξανίστατε '
σῶμα καὶ θαρσεῖτε σαρκὸς ἐξαμείψασαι τρόμον.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ φάος μέγιστον ἡμῶν εὐίου βακχεύματος,
ὡς ἐσεῖδον ἀσμένη σε, μονάδ' ἔχουσ' ἐρημίαν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

εἰς ἀθυμίαν ἀφίκεσθ', ἠνίκ' εἰσεπεμπόμην,
Πενθέως ὡς ἐς σκοτεινὰς ὀρκάνας πεσούμενος; 610

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πῶς γὰρ οὔ; τίς μοι φύλαξ ἦν, εἰ σὺ συμφορᾶς τύχους;
ἀλλὰ πῶς ἠλευθερώθης ἀνδρὸς 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, [600]
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, [610]
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 ἐξέσωσ' ἔμαυτὸν ῥαδίως ἄνευ πόνου.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

οὐδέ σου συνήψε χεῖρε δεσμίοισιν ἐν βρόχοις; 615

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ταῦτα καὶ καθύβρισ' αὐτόν, ὅτι με δεσμεύειν δοκῶν
οὐτ' ἔθιγεν οὐθ' ἤψαθ' ἡμῶν, ἐλπίσιν δ' ἐβόσκετο.
πρὸς φάτναις δὲ ταῦρον εὐρών, οὐ καθεῖρξ' ἡμᾶς ἄγων,
τῶδε περὶ βρόχους ἔβαλλε γόνασι καὶ χηλαῖς ποδῶν,
θυμὸν ἐκπνέων, ἰδρῶτα σώματος στάζων ἄπο, 620
χείλεσιν διδούς ὀδόντας· πλησίον δ' ἐγὼ παρῶν
ἦσυχος θάσσω ἐλευσσον. ἐν δὲ τῶδε τῶ χρόνῳ
ἀνετίναξ' ἐλθὼν ὁ Βάκχος δῶμα καὶ μητρὸς τάφῳ
πῦρ ἀνήψ'. ὁ δ' ὡς ἐσεῖδε, δώματ' αἴθεσθαι δοκῶν,
ἦσ' ἐκέισε κᾶτ' ἐκέισε, δμῶσιν Ἀχελῶον φέρειν 625
ἐννέπων, ἅπας δ' ἐν ἔργῳ δοῦλος ἦν, μάτην πονῶν.
διαμεθεὶς δὲ τόνδε μόχθον, ὡς ἐμοῦ πεφευγόςτος,
ἔται ξίφος κελαινὸν ἀρπάσας δόμων ἔσω.
κᾶθ' ὁ Βρόμιος, ὡς ἔμοιγε φαίνεται, δόξαν λέγω,
φάσμ' ἐποίησεν κατ' αὐλήν· ὁ δ' ἐπὶ τοῦθ' ὠρμημένος 630
ἦσσε κἀκέντει φαεννὸν αἰθέρ', ὡς σφάζων ἐμέ.
πρὸς δὲ τοῖσδ' αὐτῶ τάδ' ἄλλα Βάκχιος λυμαίνεται.
δώματ' ἔρρηξεν χαμᾶζε· συντεθράνωται δ' ἅπαν
πικροτάτους ἰδόντι δεσμούςσ τοὺς ἐμούςσ· κόπου δ' ὕπο
διαμεθεὶς ξίφος παρῆται· πρὸς θεὸν γὰρ ὦν ἀνήρ 635
ἐς μάχην ἐλθεῖν ἐτόλμησε. ἦσυχος δ' ἐκβὰς ἐγὼ
δωμάτων ἦκω πρὸς ὑμᾶς, Πενθέως οὐ φροντίσας.
ὡς δέ μοι δοκεῖ—ψοφεῖ γοῦν ἀρβύλη δόμων ἔσω—
ἐς προνώπι' αὐτίχ' ἦξει. τί ποτ' ἄρ' ἐκ τούτων ἐρεῖ;

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 [620]
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 [630]
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?

ῥαδίως γὰρ αὐτὸν οἶσω, κὰν πνέων ἔλθῃ μέγα. 640
 πρὸς σοφοῦ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς ἀσκεῖν σῶφρον' εὐοργησίαν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πέπονθα δεινά· διαπέφευγέ μ' ὁ ξένος,
 ὃς ἄρτι δεσμοῖς ἦν κατηναγκασμένος.
 ἕα ἕα·
 ὄδ' ἐστὶν ἀνὴρ· τί τάδε; πῶς προνώπιος 645
 φαίνη πρὸς οἴκοις τοῖς ἐμοῖς, ἕξω βεβῶς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

στήσον πόδ', ὀργῇ δ' ὑπόθεσ ἤσυχον πόδα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πόθεν σὺ δεσμὰ διαφυγῶν ἕξω περᾶς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

οὐκ εἶπον—ἢ οὐκ ἤκουσας—ὅτι λύσει μέ τις;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τίς; τοὺς λόγους γὰρ ἐσφέρεις καινοὺς αἰεί. 650

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὃς τὴν πολύβοτρυν ἄμπελον φύει βροτοῖς.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

<...>

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὠνείδισας δὴ τοῦτο Διονύσω καλόν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

κλήειν κελεύω πάντα πύργον ἐν κύκλῳ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

τί δ'; οὐχ ὑπερβαίνουσι καὶ τεῖχη θεοί;

Well, I'll deal with him quite gently, [640]
 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.
 [seeing 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? [650]
 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?

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
σοφὸς σοφὸς σύ, πλὴν ἂν δεῖ σ' εἶναι σοφόν. 655

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἂν δεῖ μάλιστα, ταῦτ' ἔγωγ' ἔφυν σοφός.
κείνου δ' ἀκούσας πρῶτα τοὺς λόγους μάθε,
ὄς ἐξ ὄρους πάρεστιν ἀγγελῶν τί σοι
ἡμεῖς δέ σοι μενούμεν, οὐ φευξοῦμεθα.

ἌΓΓΕΛΟΣ
Πενθεῦ κρατύνων τῆσδε Θηβαίας χθονός, 660
ἦκω Κιθαιρῶν ἐκλιπῶν, ὅν οὔποτε
λευκῆς χιόνος ἀνείσαν εὐαγεῖς βολαί.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἦκεις δὲ ποῖαν προστιθείς σπουδῆν λόγου;

ἌΓΓΕΛΟΣ
βάκχας ποτνιαδάς εἰσιδῶν, αἱ τῆσδε γῆς
οἴστροισι λευκὸν κῶλον ἐξηκόντισαν, 665
ἦκω φράσαι σοὶ καὶ πόλει χρήζων, ἄναξ,
ὡς δεινὰ δρώσι θαυμάτων τε κρείσσονα.
θέλω δ' ἀκοῦσαι, πότερά σοι παρρησίᾳ
φράσω τὰ κείθεν ἢ λόγον στειλώμεθα.
τὸ γὰρ τάχος σου τῶν φρενῶν δέδοικ', ἄναξ, 670
καὶ τοῦξυθυμον καὶ τὸ βασιλικὸν λίαν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
λέγ', ὡς ἀθῶος ἐξ ἐμοῦ πάντως ἔση.
τοῖς γὰρ δίκαιοις οὐχὶ θυμοῦσθαι χρεῶν.
ὅσω δ' ἂν εἴπῃς δεινότερα βακχῶν πέρι,
τοσῶδε μᾶλλον τὸν ὑποθέντα τὰς τέχνας 675
γυναιξὶ τόνδε τῆ δίκη προσθήσομεν.

PENTHEUS
You're so wise, except in all those things
in which you should be wise.

DIONYSUS
I was born wise,
especially in matters where I need to be.

[Enter the Messenger, a cattle herder from the hills]

DIONYSUS
But first you'd better listen to this man,
hear what he has to say, for he's come here
from the mountains to report to you.
I'll still be here for you. I won't run off.

MESSENGER
Pentheus, ruler of this land of Thebes, [660]
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— [670]
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.

ἀγελαῖα μὲν βοσκήματ' ἄρτι πρὸς λέπας
 μόσχων ὑπεξήκριζον, ἠνίχ' ἥλιος
 ἀκτῖνας ἐξίησι θερμαίνων χθόνα.
 ὀρῶ δὲ θιάσους τρεῖς γυναικείων χορῶν, 680
 ὧν ἡρχ' ἐνὸς μὲν Αὐτονόη, τοῦ δευτέρου
 μήτηρ Ἀγαυή σή, τρίτου δ' Ἰνώ χοροῦ.
 ἠῦδον δὲ πᾶσαι σώμασιν παρειμέναι,
 αἱ μὲν πρὸς ἐλάτης νῶτ' ἐρείσασαι φόβην,
 αἱ δ' ἐν δρυὸς φύλλοισι πρὸς πέδῳ κάρα 685
 εἰκῆ βαλοῦσαι σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῆς
 ὠνωμένας κρατῆρι καὶ λωτοῦ ψόφῳ
 θηρᾶν καθ' ὕλην Κύπριω ἡρημωμένας.
 ἢ σὴ δὲ μήτηρ ὠλόλυξεν ἐν μέσαις
 σταθείσα βάκχαις, ἐξ ὕπνου κινεῖν δέμας, 690
 μυκήμαθ' ὡς ἤκουσε κεροφόρων βοῶν.
 αἱ δ' ἀποβαλοῦσαι θαλερὸν ὀμμάτων ὕπνον
 ἀνῆξαν ὀρθαί, θαῦμ' ἰδεῖν εὐκοσμίας,
 νέαι παλαιαὶ παρθένοι τ' ἔτ' ἄζυγες.
 καὶ πρῶτα μὲν καθείσαν εἰς ὦμους κόμας 695
 νεβρίδας τ' ἀνεστείλανθ' ὄσαισι ἀμμάτων
 σύνδεσμ' ἐλέλυτο, καὶ καταστίκτους δορὰς
 ὄφεσι κατεζώσαντο λιχμῶσιν γένυν.
 αἱ δ' ἀγάλαισι δορκάδ' ἢ σκύμνους λύκων
 ἀγρίους ἔχουσαι λευκὸν ἐδίδοσαν γάλα, 700
 ὄσαις νεοτόκοις μαστὸς ἦν σπαργῶν ἔτι
 βρέφη λιπούσαις· ἐπὶ δ' ἔθεντο κισσίνους
 στεφάνους δρυὸς τε μίλακός τ' ἀνθροφόρου.
 θύρσον δέ τις λαβοῦσ' ἔπαισεν ἐς πέτραν,
 ὅθεν δροσώδης ὕδατος ἐκπηδᾷ νοτίς· 705
 ἄλλη δὲ νάρθηκ' ἐς πέδον καθήκε γῆς,
 καὶ τῆδε κρήνην ἐξανῆκ' οἴνου θεός·
 ὄσαις δὲ λευκοῦ πάματος πόθος παρήν,
 ἄκροισι δακτύλοισι διαμῶσαι χθόνα
 γάλακτος ἐσμούς εἶχον· ἐκ δὲ κισσίνων 710
 θύρσων γλυκεῖαι μέλιτος ἔσταζον ροαί.

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 [680]
 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, [690]
 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 [700]
 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 [710]
 thick sweet honey dripped. Oh, if you'd been there,

ὥστ', εἰ παρήσθα, τὸν θεὸν τὸν νῦν ψέγεις
 εὐχαῖσιν ἂν μετήλθες εἰσιδὼν τάδε.
 ξυνήλθομεν δὲ βουκόλοι καὶ ποιμένες,
 κοινῶν λόγων δώσοντες ἀλλήλοις ἔριν 715
 ὡς δεινὰ δρῶσι θαυμάτων τ' ἐπάξια.
 καὶ τις πλάνης κατ' ἄστυ καὶ τρίβων λόγων
 ἔλεξεν εἰς ἅπαντας. ὦ σεμνὰς πλάκας
 ναίοντες ὀρέων, θέλετε θηρασώμεθα
 Πενθέως Ἀγαύην μητέρ' ἐκ βακχευμάτων 720
 χάριω τ' ἄνακτι θώμεθα; εὐ δ' ἡμῖν λέγειν
 ἔδοξε, θάμνων δ' ἔλλοχίζομεν φόβαις
 κρύψαντες αὐτούς· αἱ δὲ τὴν τεταγμένην
 ὥραν ἐκίνουν θύρσον ἐς βακχεύματα,
 Ἴακχον ἀθρόω στόματι τὸν Διὸς γόνον 725
 Βρόμιον καλοῦσαι· πᾶν δὲ συνεβάκχευ' ὄρος
 καὶ θήρες, οὐδὲν δ' ἦν ἀκίνητον δρόμω.
 κυρεῖ δ' Ἀγαυή πλυσίον θρώσκουσά μου·
 καγὼ ἔξεπήδησ' ὡς συναρπάσαι θέλων,
 λόχμην κενώσας ἐνθ' ἐκρυπτόμην δέμας. 730
 ἦ δ' ἀνεβόησεν· ὦ δρομάδες ἐμαὶ κύνες,
 θηρώμεθ' ἀνδρῶν τῶνδ' ὕπ'. ἀλλ' ἔπεσθέ μοι,
 ἔπεσθε θύρσοις διὰ χερῶν ὥπλισμένοι.
 ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν φεύγοντες ἐξηλύξαμεν
 βακχῶν σπαραγμόν, αἱ δὲ νεμομέναις χλόην 735
 μόσχους ἐπήλθον χειρὸς ἀσιδήρου μέτα.
 καὶ τὴν μὲν ἂν προσεῖδες εὐθνηλον πόρην
 μυκωμένην ἔχουσαν ἐν χερῶν δίχα,
 ἄλλαι δὲ δαμάλας διεφόρουν σπαράγμασιν.
 εἶδες δ' ἂν ἠ πλεύρ' ἠ δίκηλον ἔμβασιν 740
 ῥιπτόμεν' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω· κρεμαστὰ δὲ
 ἔσταζ' ὑπ' ἐλάταις ἀναπεφυρμέν' αἷματι.
 ταῦροι δ' ὑβρισταὶ κᾶς κέρας θυμούμενοι
 τὸ πρόσθεν ἐσφάλλοντο πρὸς γαῖαν δέμας,
 μυριάσι χερῶν ἀγόμενοι νεανίδων. 745
 θᾶσσον δὲ διεφοροῦντο σαρκὸς ἐνδυτὰ
 ἦ σὲ ξυνάψαι βλέφαρα βασιλείοις κόραις.

if you'd seen this, you'd come with reverence
 to that god whom you criticize so much.
 Well, we cattle herders and shepherds met
 to discuss and argue with each other
 about the astonishing things we'd seen.
 And then a man who'd been in town a bit
 and had a way with words said to us all,
 "You men who live in the holy regions
 of these mountains, how'd you like to hunt down
 Pentheus' mother, Agave — take her [720]
 away from these Bacchic celebrations,
 do the king a favour?" To all of us
 he seemed to make good sense. So we set up
 an ambush, hiding in the bushes,
 lying down there. At the appointed time,
 the women started their Bacchic ritual,
 brandishing the thyrsus and calling out
 to the god they cry to, Bromius, Zeus' son.
 The entire mountain and its wild animals
 were, like them, in one Bacchic ecstasy.
 As these women moved, they made all things dance.
 Agave, by chance, was dancing close to me.
 Leaving the ambush where I'd been concealed,
 I jumped out, hoping to grab hold of her. [730]
 But she screamed out, "Oh, my quick hounds,
 men are hunting us. Come, follow me.
 Come on, armed with that thyrsus in your hand."
 We ran off, and so escaped being torn apart.
 But then those Bacchic women, all unarmed,
 went at the heifers browsing on the turf,
 using their bare hands. You should have seen one
 ripping a fat, young, lowing calf apart —
 others tearing cows in pieces with their hands.
 You could've seen ribs and cloven hooves [740]
 tossed everywhere — some hung up in branches
 dripping blood and gore. And bulls, proud beasts till then,
 with angry horns, collapsed there on the ground,
 dragged down by the hands of a thousand girls.
 Hides covering their bodies were stripped off
 faster than you could wink your royal eye.

χωροῦσι δ' ὥστ' ὄρνιθες ἀρθείσαι δρόμῳ
 πεδίων ὑποτάσεις, αἶ παρ' Ἀσωποῦ ροαῖς
 εὐκαρπον ἐκβάλλουσι Θηβαίων στάχυν· 750
 Ὑσιὰς τ' Ἐρυθράς θ', αἶ Κιθαιρῶνος λέπας
 νέρθεν κατωκήκασιν, ὥστε πολέμοι,
 ἐπεσπεσοῦσαι πάντ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω
 διέφερον· ἤρπαζον μὲν ἐκ δόμων τέκνα·
 ὅποσα δ' ἐπ' ὤμοις ἔθεσαν, οὐ δεσμῶν ὑπο 755
 προσείχετ' οὐδ' ἔπιπτεν ἐς μέλαν πέδον,
 οὐ χαλκός, οὐ σιδηρός· ἐπὶ δὲ βοστρύχοις
 πῦρ ἔφερον, οὐδ' ἔκαιεν. οἱ δ' ὀργῆς ὑπο
 ἐς ὄπλ' ἐχώρουν φερόμενοι βακχῶν ὑπο·
 οὐπερ τὸ δεινὸν ἦν θέαμ' ἰδεῖν, ἀναξ. 760
 τοῖς μὲν γὰρ οὐχ ἤμασσε λογχωτὸν βέλος,
 κεῖναι δὲ θύρσους ἐξανιείσαι χερῶν
 ἐτραυμάτιζον κάπενώτιζον φυγῆ
 γυναιῖκες ἄνδρας, οὐκ ἄνευ θεῶν τινος.
 πάλιν δ' ἐχώρουν ὅθεν ἐκίνησαν πόδα, 765
 κρήνας ἐπ' αὐτὰς ἄς ἀνήκ' αὐταῖς θεός.
 νάβαντο δ' αἶμα, σταγόνα δ' ἐκ παρηίδων
 γλώσση δράκοντες ἐξεφαίδρυνον χροός.
 τὸν δαίμον' οὖν τόνδ' ὅστις ἔστ', ὦ δέσποτα,
 δέχου πόλει τῆδ'· ὡς τά τ' ἄλλ' ἐστὶν μέγας, 770
 κακεῖνό φασι αὐτόν, ὡς ἐγὼ κλύω,
 τὴν παυσίλυπον ἄμπελον δοῦναι βροτοῖς.
 οἴνου δὲ μηκέτ' ὄντος οὐκ ἔστιν Κύπρις
 οὐδ' ἄλλο τερπνὸν οὐδὲν ἀνθρώποις ἔτι.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ταρβῶ μὲν εἰπεῖν τοὺς λόγους ἐλευθέρους 775
 πρὸς τὸν τύραννον, ἀλλ' ὅμως εἰρήσεται·
 Διόνυσος ἦσσαν οὐδενὸς θεῶν ἔφν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἦδη τόδ' ἐγγὺς ὥστε πῦρ ὑφάπτεται
 ὑβρισμα βακχῶν, ψόγος ἐς Ἑλληνας μέγας.

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, [750]
 they raided Hysiae 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, [760]
 my lord, was dreadful. For their pointed spears
 did not draw blood. But when those women
 threw the thyrsi in their hands, they wounded them
 and 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 [770]
 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· στείχ' ἐπ' Ἥλέκτρας ἰὼν 780
 πύλας· κέλευε πάντα ἀσπιδηφόρους
 ἵππων τ' ἀπαντᾶν ταχυπόδων ἐπεμβάτας
 πέλτας θ' ὅσοι πάλλουσι καὶ τόξων χερὶ
 ψάλλουσι νευράς, ὡς ἐπιστρατεύσομεν
 βάκχαισιν· οὐ γὰρ ἀλλ' ὑπερβάλλει τάδε, 785
 εἰ πρὸς γυναικῶν πεισόμεσθ' ἂ πάσχομεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

πίθει μὲν οὐδέν, τῶν ἐμῶν λόγων κλύων,
 Πενθεῦ· κακῶς δὲ πρὸς σέθεν πάσχων ὅμως
 οὐ φημι χρῆναί σ' ὅπλ' ἐπαίρεσθαι θεῶ,
 ἀλλ' ἡσυχάζειν· Βρόμιος οὐκ ἀνέξεται 790
 κινουῦντα βάκχας σ' εὐίων ὀρῶν ἄπο.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

οὐ μὴ φρενώσεις μ', ἀλλὰ δέσμιος φυγῶν
 σῶση τόδ'; ἢ σοὶ πάλιν ἀναστρέψω δίκην;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

θύοιμ' ἂν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἢ θυμούμενος
 πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζοιμι θνητὸς ὢν θεῶ. 795

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

θύσω, φόνον γε θήλυν, ὥσπερ ἄξιαί,
 πολὺν ταραξας ἐν Κιθαιρώνος πτυχαῖς.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

φεύξεσθε πάντες· καὶ τόδ' αἰσχρόν, ἀσπίδας
 θύρσοισι βακχῶν ἐκτρέπειν χαλκηλάτους

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἀπόρω γε τῷδε συμπεπλεγμέθα ξένω, 800
 ὃς οὔτε πάσχων οὔτε δρῶν σιγήσεται.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὦ τᾶν, ἔτ' ἔστω εὖ καταστήσαι τάδε.

[To one of his armed attendants]

Go to the Electra Gates. Call out the troops, [780]
 the heavy infantry, all fast cavalry.
 Tell them to muster, along with all those
 who carry shields—all the archers, too,
 the men who pull the bowstring back by hand.
 We'll march out against these Bacchae.
 In this whole business we will lose control,
 if we have to put up with what we've suffered
 from these women.

DIONYSUS

You've heard what I had to say,
 Pentheus, but still you're not convinced.
 Though I'm suffering badly at your hands,
 I say you shouldn't go to war against a god.
 You should stay calm. Bromius will not let you [790]
 move his Bacchae from their mountains.

PENTHEUS

Don't preach to me! You've got out of prison—
 enjoy that fact. Or shall I punish you some more?

DIONYSUS

I'd sooner make an offering to that god
 than in some angry fit kick at his whip—
 a mortal going to battle with a god.

PENTHEUS

I'll sacrifice all right—with a slaughter
 of those women, just as they deserve—
 in the forests on Cithaeron.

DIONYSUS

You'll all run.
 What a disgrace! To turn your bronze shields round,
 fleeing the thyrsi of those Bacchic women!

PENTHEUS [turning to one of his armed attendants, as if to go]

It's useless trying to argue with this stranger— [800]
 whatever he does or suffers, he won't shut up.

DIONYSUS [calling Pentheus back]

My lord! There's still a chance to end this calmly.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τί δρῶντα; δουλεύοντα δουλείαις ἐμαῖς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐγὼ γυναικας δεῦρ' ὄπλων ἄξω δίχα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

οἴμοι· τὸδ' ἤδη δόλιον ἔς με μηχανᾶ. 805

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ποῖόν τι, σῶσαί σ' εἰ θέλω τέχναις ἐμαῖς;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ξυνέθεσθε κοινῇ τάδ', ἵνα βακχεύητ' αἰεί.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

καὶ μὴν ξυνεθέμην—τουτό γ' ἔστι—τῷ θεῷ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἐκφέρετέ μοι δεῦρ' ὄπλα, σὺ δὲ παῦσαι λέγων.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ᾶ. 810

βούλη σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

μάλιστα, μυρίον γε δούς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

τί δ' εἰς ἔρωτα τοῦδε πέπτωκας μέγαν;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

λυπρῶς νιν εἰσίδομι' ἂν ἐξφνωμένας.

PENTHEUS

By doing what? Should I become a slave
to my own slaves?

DIONYSUS

I'll bring the women here—
without the use of any weapons.

PENTHEUS

I don't think so.
You're setting me up for your tricks again.

DIONYSUS

What sort of trick, if I want to save you
in my own way?

PENTHEUS

You've made some arrangement,
you and your god, so you can always dance
your Bacchanalian orgies.

DIONYSUS

Yes, that's true.
I have made some arrangement with the god.

PENTHEUS [*to one of his armed servants*]

You there, bring me my weapons.
[*to Dionysus*]

And you—

No more talk! Keep quiet!

DIONYSUS

Just a minute! [810]
[*moving up to Pentheus*]
How'd you like to gaze upon those women out there,
sitting together in the mountains?

PENTHEUS

I'd like that.
Yes, for that I'd pay in gold—and pay a lot.

DIONYSUS

Why is that? Why do you desire it so much?

PENTHEUS

I'd be sorry to see the women drunk.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ὄμως δ' ἴδοις ἂν ἠδέως ἅ σοι πικρά; 815

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
σάφ' ἴσθι, σιγῇ γ' ὑπ' ἐλάταις καθήμενος.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἀλλ' ἐξιχνεύσουσίν σε, κὰν ἔλθῃς λάθρα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἀλλ' ἐμφανῶς· καλῶς γὰρ ἐξείπας τάδε.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἄγωμεν οὖν σε κάπιχειρήσεις ὁδῶ;

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
ἄγ' ὡς τάχιστα, τοῦ χρόνου δέ σοι φθονῶ. 820

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
στεῖλαι νυν ἀμφὶ χρωτὶ βυσσίνους πέπλους.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
τί δὴ τόδ'; ἐς γυναικάς ἐξ ἀνδρὸς τελῶ;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
μή σε κτάνωσιν, ἦν ἀνὴρ ὀφθῆς ἐκεῖ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
εὐ γ' εἶπας αὖ τόδ'· ὡς τις εἶ πάλαι σοφός.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς ἐξεμούσωσεν τάδε. 825

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
πῶς οὖν γένοιτ' ἂν ἃ σύ με νουθετεῖς καλῶς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
ἐγὼ στελῶ σε δωμάτων ἔσω μολών.

DIONYSUS
Would you derive pleasure from looking on,
viewing something you find painful?

PENTHEUS
Yes, I would—
if I were sitting in the trees in silence.

DIONYSUS
But even if you go there secretly,
they'll track you down.

PENTHEUS
You're right.
I'll go there openly.

DIONYSUS
So you're prepared,
are you, to make the trip? Shall I lead you there?

PENTHEUS
Let's go, and with all speed. I've got time. [820]

DIONYSUS
In that case, you must clothe your body
in a dress—one made of eastern linen.

PENTHEUS
What! I'm not going up there as a man?
I've got to change myself into a woman?

DIONYSUS
If they see you as a man, they'll kill you.

PENTHEUS
Right again. You always have the answer.

DIONYSUS
Dionysus taught me all these things.

PENTHEUS
How can I best follow your suggestion?

DIONYSUS
I'll go inside your house and dress you up.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 τίνα στολήν; ἢ θῆλυν; ἀλλ' αἰδώς μ' ἔχει.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 οὐκέτι θεατῆς μαινάδων πρόθυμος εἶ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 στολήν δὲ τίνα φῆς ἀμφὶ χρωτ' ἐμὸν βαλεῖν; 830

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 κόμην μὲν ἐπὶ σῶ κρατὶ ταναὸν ἔκτενω.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 τὸ δεύτερον δὲ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τί μοι;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 πέπλοι ποδήρεις· ἐπὶ κάρᾳ δ' ἔσται μίτρα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 ἦ καὶ τι πρὸς τοῖσδ' ἄλλο προσθήσεις ἐμοί;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 θύρσον γε χειρὶ καὶ νεβροῦ στικτὸν δέρας. 835

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην θῆλυν ἐνδύναι στολήν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 ἀλλ' αἶμα θήσεις συμβαλὼν βάκχαις μάχην.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 ὀρθῶς· μολεῖν χρὴ πρῶτον εἰς κατασκοπήν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
 σοφώτερον γοῦν ἢ κακοῖς θηρᾶν κακά.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
 καὶ πῶς δι' ἄστεως εἴμι Καδμείους λαθών; 840

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? [830]

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? [840]

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὁδοὺς ἐρήμους ἴμεν· ἐγὼ δ' ἠγήσομαι.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πᾶν κρείσσον ὥστε μὴ ἴγγελᾶν βάκχας ἐμοί.
ἐλθόντ' ἐς οἴκους . . . ἂν δοκῆ βουλευέσομαι.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἔξεστι· πάντα τό γ' ἐμὸν εὐτρεπὲς πάρα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

στείχοιμ' ἄν· ἢ γὰρ ὄπλ' ἔχων πορεύσομαι 845
ἢ τοῖσι σοῖσι πείσομαι βουλευέμασιν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

γυναῖκες, ἀνὴρ ἐς βόλον καθίσταται,
ἤξει δὲ βάκχας, οὗ θανῶν δώσει δίκην.
Διόνυσε, νῦν σὸν ἔργον· οὐ γὰρ εἰ πρόσω- 850
τεισώμεθ' αὐτόν. πρῶτα δ' ἔκστησον φρενῶν,
ἐνεῖς ἐλαφρὰν λύσσαν· ὡς φρονῶν μὲν εὖ
οὐ μὴ θελήσῃ θῆλυν ἐνδύναι στολήν,
ἔξω δ' ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐνδύσεται.
χρήζω δέ νιν γέλωτα Θηβαίοις ὀφλεῖν 855
γυναικόμορφον ἀγόμενον δι' ἄστεως
ἐκ τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν πρὶν, αἰσι δεινὸς ἦν.
ἀλλ' εἴμι κόσμον ὄνπερ εἰς Ἄιδου λαβῶν
ἄπεισι μητρὸς ἐκ χεροῖν κατασφαγεῖς,
Πενθεὶ προσάψων· γνώσεται δὲ τὸν Διὸς 860
Διόνυσον, ὃς πέφυκεν ἐν τέλει θεός,
δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἠπιώτατος.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἄρ' ἐν παννυχίοις χοροῖς
θήσω ποτὲ λευκὸν
πόδ' ἀναβακχεύουσα, δέραν 865
εἰς αἰθέρα δροσερὸν ρίπτουσ',

DIONYSUS

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

PENTHEUS

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.

DIONYSUS

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

PENTHEUS

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]

DIONYSUS

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. 850
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, 860
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—

ὡς νεβρὸς χλοεραῖς ἐμπαί-
 ζουσα λείμακος ἠδοναῖς,
 ἠνίκ' ἂν φοβερὰν φύγη
 θήραν ἕξω φυλακᾶς
 εὐπλέκτων ὑπὲρ ἀρκύων, 870
 θωῦσσω δὲ κυναγέτας
 συντείνῃ δράμημα κυνῶν·
 μόχθοις τ' ὠκυδρόμοις τ' ἀέλ-
 λαις θράσκει πεδίον
 παραποτάμιον, ἠδομένα
 βροτῶν ἐρημίαις σκιαρο-
 κόμοιό τ' ἔρνεσιν ὕλας. 875

τί τὸ σοφόν; ἢ τί τὸ κάλλιον
 παρὰ θεῶν γέρας ἐν βροτοῖς
 ἢ χεῖρ' ὑπὲρ κορυφᾶς
 τῶν ἐχθρῶν κρείσσω κατέχει;
 ὅ τι καλὸν φίλον αἰεί. 880

ὀρμᾶται μόλις, ἀλλ' ὅμως
 πιστόν τι τὸ θεῖον
 σθένος· ἀπευθύνει δὲ βροτῶν
 τοὺς τ' ἀγνωμοσύναν τιμῶν-
 τας καὶ μὴ τὰ θεῶν αὔξον-
 τας σὺν μαινομένα δόξα. 885
 κρυπτεύουσι δὲ ποικίλως
 δαρὸν χρόνου πόδα καὶ
 θηρῶσιν τὸν ἄσεπτον. οὐ
 γὰρ κρείσσόν ποτε τῶν νόμων
 γινώσκειν χρῆ καὶ μελετᾶν.
 κούφα γὰρ δαπάνα νομί-
 ζειν ἄσχυν τόδ' ἔχειν,
 ὅ τι ποτ' ἄρα τὸ δαυμόνιον,
 τό τ' ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ νόμιμον 895
 αἰεὶ φύσει τε πεφυκός.

τί τὸ σοφόν; ἢ τί τὸ κάλλιον
 παρὰ θεῶν γέρας ἐν βροτοῖς

like a playful fawn
 celebrating its green joy
 across the meadows—
 joy that it's escaped the fearful hunt—
 as she runs beyond the hunters,
 leaping past their woven nets— [870]
 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? [880]
 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. [890]
 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—

ἢ χεῖρ' ὑπὲρ κορυφᾶς
τῶν ἐχθρῶν κρείσσω κατέχειν;
ὄ τι καλὸν φίλον αἶεί.

εὐδαίμων μὲν ὅς ἐκ θαλάσσης
ἔφυγε χεῖμα, λιμένα δ' ἔκιχεν·
εὐδαίμων δ' ὅς ὑπερθε μόχθων
ἐγένεθ'. ἐτέρα δ' ἕτερος ἕτερον
ὄλβω καὶ δυνάμει παρήλθεν.

μυρία δ' ἔτι μυρίοις
εἰσὶν ἐλπίδες· αἱ μὲν
τελευτώσιν ἐν ὄλβω
βροτοῖς, αἱ δ' ἀπέβησαν·
τὸ δὲ κατ' ἡμαρ ὅτ' αὖ βίος
εὐδαίμων, μακαρίζω.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

σὲ τὸν πρόθυμον ὄνθ' ἂ μὴ χρεῶν ὄραν
σπεύδοντά τ' ἀσπούδαστα, Πενθέα λέγω,
ἔξιθι πάροιθε δωμάτων, ὄφθητί μοι,
σκευὴν γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκχης ἔχων,
μητρὸς τε τῆς σῆς καὶ λόχου κατάσκοπος·
πρέπεις δὲ Κάδμου θυγατέρων μορφὴν μιᾷ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

καὶ μὴν ὄραν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ,
δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πόλισμ' ἐπτάστομον·
καὶ ταῦρος ἡμῖν πρόσθεν ἡγεῖσθαι δοκεῖς
καὶ σῶ κέρατα κρατὶ προσπεφυκέναι.
ἀλλ' ἢ ποτ' ἦσθα θήρ; τεταύρωσαι γὰρ οὖν.

to hold their powerful hands
over the heads of their enemies?
Ah yes, what's good is always loved. [900]

Whoever has escaped a storm at sea
is a happy man in harbour,
whoever overcomes great hardship
is likewise another happy man.
Various men out-do each other
in wealth, in power,
in all sorts of ways.
The hopes of countless men
are infinite in number.
Some make men rich;
some come to nothing.
So I consider that man blessed
who lives a happy life
existing day by day. [910]

[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. [920]
Were you once upon a time a beast?
It's certain now you've changed into a bull.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὁ θεὸς ὀμαρτεῖ, πρόσθεν ὦν οὐκ εὐμενής,
ἔνσπονδος ἡμῖν· νῦν δ' ὄρα's ἂ χρῆ σ' ὄραν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

τί φαίνομαι δῆτ'; οὐχὶ τὴν Ἰνου's στάσιν 925
ἦ τὴν Ἀγαύης ἐστάναι, μητρὸς γ' ἐμῆς;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

αὐτὰς ἐκείνας εἰσορᾶν δοκῶ σ' ὄρων.
ἀλλ' ἐξ ἔδρας σοι πλόκαμος ἐξέστηχ' ὄδε,
οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ νιν ὑπὸ μίτρα καθήρμισα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἔνδον προσείων αὐτὸν ἀνασείων τ' ἐγὼ 930
καὶ βακχιάζων ἐξ ἔδρας μεθώρμισα.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἡμεῖς, οἷς σε θεραπεύειν μέλει,
πάλιν καταστελοῦμεν· ἀλλ' ὄρθου κάρα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἰδοῦ, σὺ κόσμει· σοὶ γὰρ ἀνακείμεσθα δῆ.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ζῶναί τέ σοι χαλῶσι κοῦχ ἐξῆς πέπλων 935
στολίδες ὑπὸ σφυροῖσι τείνουσιν σέθεν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

κάμοι δοκοῦσι παρά γε δεξιὸν πόδα·
τὰνθένδε δ' ὀρθῶς παρὰ τένοντ' ἔχει πέπλος.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἦ ποῦ με τῶν σῶν πρῶτον ἠγγήση φίλων,
ὅταν παρὰ λόγον σώφρονας βάρκχας ἴδης. 940

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. [930]

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. [940]

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

πότερα δὲ θύρσον δεξιᾶ λαβὼν χερὶ
ἢ τῆδε, βᾶκχη μᾶλλον εἰκασθήσομαι;

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐν δεξιᾶ χερὶ χᾶμα δεξιῶ ποδὶ
αἶρειν νιν· αἰνῶ δ' ὅτι μεθέστηκας φρενῶν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἄρ' ἂν δυναίμην τὰς Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχὰς
αὐταῖσι βᾶκχαις τοῖς ἐμοῖς ὤμοις φέρειν; 945

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

δύναί' ἄν, εἰ βούλοιο· τὰς δὲ πρὶν φρένας
οὐκ εἶχες ὑγιεῖς, νῦν δ' ἔχεις οἷας σε δεῖ.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

μοχλοὺς φέρωμεν; ἢ χεροῖν ἀνασπάσω
κορυφαῖς ὑποβαλὼν ὤμον ἢ βραχίονα; 950

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

μὴ σύ γε τὰ Νυμφῶν διολέσης ἰδρύματα
καὶ Πανὸς ἔδρας ἐνθ' ἔχει συρίγματα.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

καλῶς ἔλεξας· οὐ σθένει νικητέον
γυναῖκας· ἐλάττισιν δ' ἐμὸν κρύψω δέμας.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

κρύψῃ σὺ κρύψιν ἢν σε κρυφθῆναι χρεῶν,
ἐλθόντα δόλιον μαινάδων κατάσκοπον. 955

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

καὶ μὴν δοκῶ σφᾶς ἐν λόχμαῖς ὄρνιθας ὡς
λέκτρων ἔχεσθαι φιλάτοις ἐν ἔρκεσιν.

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]

DIONYSUS

Your mind has changed. I applaud you for it.

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 ἐπ' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἀποστέλλῃ φύλαξ·
λήψη δ' ἴσως σφᾶς, ἣν σὺ μὴ ληφθῆς πάρος. 960

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

κόμιζε διὰ μέσης με Θηβαίας χθονός·
μόνος γὰρ αὐτῶν εἰμ' ἀνὴρ τολμῶν τόδε.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

μόνος σὺ πόλεως τῆσδ' ὑπερκάμνεις, μόνος·
τοιγάρ σ' ἀγῶνες ἀναμένουσιν οὓς ἐχρῆν.
ἔπου δέ· πομπὸς δ' εἰμ' ἐγὼ σωτήριος, 965
κεῖθεν δ' ἀπάξει σ' ἄλλος.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἢ τεκοῦσά γε.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐπίσημον ὄντα πᾶσιν.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἐπὶ τὸδ' ἔρχομαι.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

φερόμενος ἦξεις . . .

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἀβρότητ' ἐμὴν λέγεις.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ἐν χερσὶ μητρός.

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

καὶ τρυφᾶν μ' ἀναγκάσεις.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

τρυφάς γε τοιάσδε. 970

ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ

ἀξίων μὲν ἄπτομαι.

DIONYSUS

Perhaps. That's why you're going—as a guard
to stop all that. Maybe you'll capture them, [960]
unless you're captured first.

PENTHEUS

Lead on—

through the centre of our land of Thebes.
I'm the only man in all the city
who dares to undertake this enterprise.

DIONYSUS

You bear the city's burden by yourself,
all by yourself. So your work is waiting there,
the tasks that have been specially set for you.
Follow me. I'm the guide who'll rescue you.
When you return someone else will bring you back.

PENTHEUS

That will be my mother.

DIONYSUS

For everyone

you'll have become someone to celebrate.

PENTHEUS

That's why I'm going.

DIONYSUS

You'll be carried back . . .

PENTHEUS: *[interrupting]*

You're pampering me!

DIONYSUS *[continuing]*

. . . in your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS

You've really made up your mind to spoil me.

DIONYSUS

To spoil you? That's true, but in my own way.

PENTHEUS

Then I'll be off to get what I deserve. [970]

[Exit Pentheus]

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

δεινὸς σὺ δεινὸς κἀπὶ δεινῷ ἔρχῃ πάθη,
 ὥστ' οὐρανῶ στηρίζον εὐρήσεις κλέος.
 ἔκτειν', Ἀγαυή, χεῖρας αἶθ' ὁμόσποροι
 Κάδμου θυγατέρες· τὸν νεανίαν ἄγω
 τόνδ' εἰς ἀγῶνα μέγαν, ὃ νικήσων δ' ἐγὼ
 καὶ Βρόμιος ἔσται. τᾶλλα δ' αὐτὸ σημαεῖ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἴτε θοαὶ Λύσσας κύνες ἴτ' εἰς ὄρος,
 θίασον ἔνθ' ἔχουσι Κάδμου κόραι,
 ἀνοιστρήσατέ νιν
 ἐπὶ τὸν ἐν γυναικομίμῳ στολᾶ
 λυσσώδη κατάσκοπον μαινάδων.
 μάτηρ πρῶτά νιν λευρᾶς ἀπὸ πέτρας
 ἢ σκόλοπος ὄψεται
 δοκεύοντα, μαινάσιν δ' ἀπίσει.
 Τίς ὄδ' ὀρειδρόμων
 μαστήρ Καδμείων ἐς ὄρος ἐς ὄρος ἔμολ'
 ἔμολεν, ὦ βᾶκχαι; τίς ἄρα νιν ἔτεκεν;
 οὐ γὰρ ἐξ αἵματος
 γυναικῶν ἔφνυ, λεαίνας δέ τινος
 ὄδ' ἢ Γοργόνων Λιβυσσᾶν γένος.
 — ἴτω δίκαια φανερός, ἴτω ξιφηφόρος
 φονεύουσα λαϊμῶν διαμπὰξ
 τὸν ἄθεον ἄνομον ἄδικον Ἐχίονος
 γόνον γηγενῆ.

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 I

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." [990]

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.

- ὄς ἀδίκῳ γνώμα παρανόμῳ τ' ὄργῃ
 περὶ σὰ Βάκχι', ὄργια ματρός τε σᾶς
 μανείσα πραπίδι
 παρακόπῳ τε λήματι στέλλεται, 1000
 τάνικατον ὡς κρατήσων βία,
 γνωμῶν σωφρόνα θάνατος ἀπροφάσι-
 στος ἐς τὰ θεῶν ἔφν.
 βροτείως τ' ἔχειν ἄλυπος βίος.
 τὸ σοφὸν οὐ φθονῶ. 1005
 χαίρω θηρεύουσα. τὰ δ' ἕτερα μεγάλα
 φανερά τ' ὦ, νάειν ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ βίον,
 ἡμαρ ἐς νύκτα τ' εὐ-
 αγοῦντ' εὐσεβεῖν, τὰ δ' ἔξω νόμιμα
 δίκας ἐκβαλόντα τιμῶν θεούς. 1010
- ἴτω δίκᾳ φανερός, ἴτω ξιφηφόρος 1013
 φονεύουσα λαიმῶν διαμπὰξ
 τὸν ἄθεον ἄνομον ἄδικον Ἐχίονος 1015
 τόκον γηγενῆ.
- φάνηθι ταῦρος ἢ πολύκρανος ἰδεῖν 1018
 δράκων ἢ πυριφλέγων ὀράσθαι λέων.
 ἴθ', ὦ Βάκχε, θηραγρευτῆ βακχῶν 1020
 γελῶντι προσώπῳ περίβαλε βρόχον
 θανάσιμον ὑπ' ἀγέλαν πεσόν-
 τι τὰν μαινάδων.

ἌΓΓΕΛΟΣ Β

- ὦ δῶμ' ὃ πρὶν ποτ' εὐτύχεις ἀν' Ἑλλάδα,
 Σιδωνίου γέροντος, ὄς τὸ γηγενὲς 1025

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, [1000]
 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. [1010]

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 [1020]
 cast your deadly noose upon
 that hunter of the Bacchae,
 as the group of Maenads brings him down.

[Enter Second Messenger, one of Pentheus' attendants]

SECOND MESSENGER

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

δράκοντος ἔσπειρ' Ὀφεις ἐν γαίᾳ θέρος,
ὡς σε στενάζω, δούλος ἂν μὲν, ἀλλ' ὅμως
χρηστοῖσι δούλοις συμφορὰ τὰ δεσποτῶν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί δ' ἔστιν; ἐκ βακχῶν τι μηνύεις νέον;

ἜΓΓΕΛΟΣ

Πενθεὺς ὄλωλεν, παῖς Ἐχίονος πατρός. 1030

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὠναξ Βρόμιε, θεὸς φαίνη μέγας.

ἜΓΓΕΛΟΣ

πῶς φῆς; τί τοῦτ' ἔλεξας; ἦ 'πὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς
χαίρεις κακῶς πράσσουσι δεσπόταις, γυναῖ;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

εὐάζω ξένα μέλεσι βαρβάροις·
οὐκέτι γὰρ δεσμῶν ὑπὸ φόβῳ πτήσσω. 1035

ἜΓΓΕΛΟΣ

Θήβας δ' ἀνάνδρους ᾧδ' ἄγεις . . .

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὁ Διόνυσος ὁ Διόνυσος, οὐ Θῆβαι
κράτος ἔχουσ' ἐμόν.

ἜΓΓΕΛΟΣ

συγγνωστὰ μὲν σοι, πλὴν ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις
κακοῖσι χαίρειν, ᾧ γυναῖκες, οὐ καλόν. 1040

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. [1030]

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. [1040]

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἔννεπέ μοι, φράσον, τίνι μόρω θνήσκει
ἀδικος ἀδικά τ' ἐκπορίζων ἀνὴρ;

ἮΓΓΕΛΟΣ

ἐπεὶ θεράπνας τῆσδε Θηβαίας χθονὸς
λιπόντες ἐξέβημεν Ἄσωποῦ ροάς,
λέπας Κιθαιρώνειον εἰσεβάλλομεν 1045
Πενθεὺς τε ἀγῶ—δεσπότη γὰρ εἰπόμην—
ξένος θ' ὃς ἡμῖν πομπὸς ἦν θεωρίας.
πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ποιηρὸν ἴζομεν νάπος,
τά τ' ἐκ ποδῶν σιγηλὰ καὶ γλώσσης ἄπο
σώζοντες, ὡς ὀρώμεν οὐχ ὀρώμενοι. 1050
ἦν δ' ἄγκος ἀμφίκρημνον, ὕδασι διάβροχον,
πεύκαισι συσκιάζον, ἔνθα μαινάδες
καθῆντ' ἔχουσαι χεῖρας ἐν τερπνοῖς πόνοις.
αἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν θύρσον ἐκλελοιπότα
κισσῶ κομήτην αὐθις ἐξανέστεφον, 1055
αἱ δ', ἐκλιποῦσαι ποικίλ' ὡς πῶλοι ζυγά,
βακχεῖον ἀντέκλαζον ἀλλήλαις μέλος.
Πενθεὺς δ' ὁ τλήμων θῆλυν οὐχ ὀρῶν ὄχλον
ἔλεξε τοιάδ'. ὦ ξέν', οὐ μὲν ἔσταμεν,
οὐκ ἐξικνοῦμαι μαινάδων ὄσσοις νόθων· 1060
ὄχθων δ' ἔπ', ἀμβὰς ἐς ἐλάτην ὑψαύχενα,
ἴδοιμ' ἂν ὀρθῶς μαινάδων αἰσχροουργίαν.
τοῦντεῦθεν ἤδη τοῦ ξένου τὸ θαῦμ' ὀρῶ·
λαβὼν γὰρ ἐλάτης οὐράνιον ἄκρον κλάδον
κατήγευ, ἦγεν, ἦγεν ἐς μέλαν πέδον· 1065
κυκλοῦτο δ' ὥστε τόξον ἢ κυρτὸς τροχὸς
τόρνω γραφόμενος περιφορὰν ἔλκει δρόμον·
ὡς κλῶν' ὄρειον ὁ ξένος χεροῖν ἄγων
ἐκαμπτεν ἐς γῆν, ἔργματ' οὐχὶ θνητὰ δρῶν.
Πενθέα δ' ἰδρύσας ἐλατίνων ὄζων ἔπι, 1070
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. [1050]
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 thyrsos, 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. [1060]
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. [1070]
Then his hands released the tree, but slowly,
so it stood up straight, being very careful

ἀτρέμα, φυλάσσω μὴ ἀναχαιτίσειέ νιν,
 ὀρθὴ δ' ἐς ὀρθὸν αἰθέρ' ἐστηρίζετο,
 ἔχουσα νώτοις δεσπότην ἐφήμενον.
 ὦφθη δὲ μάλλον ἢ κατείδε μαινάδας. 1075
 ὅσον γὰρ οὐπω δῆλος ἦν θάσσω ἀνω,
 καὶ τὸν ξένον μὲν οὐκέτ' εἰσορᾶν παρῆν,
 ἐκ δ' αἰθέρος φωνή τις, ὡς μὲν εἰκάσαι
 Διόνυσος, ἀνεβόησεν. ὦ νεάνιδες,
 ἄγω τὸν ὑμᾶς καμὲ τὰμά τ' ὄργια 1080
 γέλων τιθέμενον. ἀλλὰ τιμωρεῖσθέ νιν.
 καὶ ταῦθ' ἄμ' ἠγόρευε καὶ πρὸς οὐρανὸν
 καὶ γαῖαν ἐστήριξε φῶς σεμινοῦ πυρός.
 σίγησε δ' αἰθέρ, σίγα δ' ὕλιμος νάπη
 φύλλ' εἶχε, θηρῶν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἤκουσας βοήν. 1085
 αἰ δ' ὡσὶν ἠχῆν οὐ σαφῶς δεδεγμένοι
 ἔστησαν ὀρθαὶ καὶ διήνεγκαν κόρας.
 ὃ δ' αὐθις ἐπέκλευσεν. ὡς δ' ἐγνώρισαν
 σαφῆ κελευσμὸν Βακχίου Κάδμου κόραι,
 ἦξαν πελείας ὠκύτητ' οὐχ ἦσσονες 1090
 ποδῶν τρέχουσαι συντόνοις δραμήμασι,
 μήτηρ Ἀγαυή σύγγονοί θ' ὀμόσποροι
 πᾶσαί τε βάκχαι. διὰ δὲ χειμάρρου νάπης
 ἀγμῶν τ' ἐπήδων θεοῦ πνοαῖσιν ἐμμανεῖς.
 ὡς δ' εἶδον ἐλάτη δεσπότην ἐφήμενον, 1095
 πρῶτον μὲν αὐτοῦ χερμάδας κραταιβόλους
 ἔρριπτον, ἀντίπυργον ἐπιβᾶσαι πέτραν,
 ὄζοισί τ' ἐλατίνοισιν ἠκοντίζετο.
 ἄλλαι δὲ θύρσους ἴεσαν δι' αἰθέρος
 Πενθέως, στόχον δύστηνον. ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦνυτον. 1100
 κρεῖσσον γὰρ ὕψος τῆς προθυμίας ἔχων
 καθῆσθ' ὁ τλήμων, ἀπορία λελημμένος.
 τέλος δὲ δρυῖνους συγκεραυνοῦσαι κλάδους
 ρίζας ἀνεσπάρασσον ἀσιδήροις μοχλοῖς.
 ἐπεὶ δὲ μόχθων τέρματ' οὐκ ἐξήνυτον, 1105
 ἔλεξ' Ἀγαυή. Φέρε, περιστᾶσαι κύκλω
 πτόρθου λάβεσθε, μαινάδες, τὸν ἀμβάτην

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, [1080]
 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, [1090]
 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 thyrsos through the air at him,
 sad, miserable Pentheus, their target. [1100]
 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,

θῆρ' ὡς ἔλωμεν, μηδ' ἀπαγγείλη θεοῦ
 χοροὺς κρυφαίους. αἱ δὲ μυρίαν χέρα
 προσέθεσαν ἐλάτῃ κἀξανέσπασαν χθονός· 1110
 ὑψοῦ δὲ θάσσων ὑψόθεν χαμαιριφῆς
 πίπτει πρὸς οὐδας μυρίοις οἰώγμασιν
 Πενθεύς· κακοῦ γὰρ ἐγγὺς ὦν ἐμάνθανεν.
 πρώτη δὲ μήτηρ ἤρξεν ἱερέα φόνου
 καὶ προσπίτνει νιν· ὁ δὲ μίτραν κόμης ἄπο 1115
 ἔρριψεν, ὥς νιν γνωρίσασα μὴ κτάνοι
 τλήμων Ἀγαυή, καὶ λέγει, παρηίδος
 ψαύων· Ἐγὼ τοι, μήτηρ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
 Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος·
 οἴκτιρε δ' ὦ μήτέρ με, μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς 1120
 ἀμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνῃς.
 ἦ δ' ἀφρὸν ἐξειῖσα καὶ διαστρόφους
 κόρας ἐλίσσουσ', οὐ φρονουῖσ' ἂ χρὴ φρονεῖν,
 ἐκ Βακχίου κατείχετ', οὐδ' ἔπειθέ νιν.
 λαβοῦσα δ' ὠλένης ἀριστερὰν χέρα, 1125
 πλευραῖσιν ἀντιβᾶσα τοῦ δυσδαίμονος
 ἀπεσπάραξεν ὦμον, οὐχ ὑπὸ σθένους,
 ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς εὐμάρειαν ἐπεδίδου χεροῖν·
 Ἴνώ δὲ τὰπὶ θάτερ' ἐξαιργάζετο,
 ῥηγνῦσα σάρκας, Ἀυτονόη τ' ὄχλος τε πᾶς 1130
 ἐπεῖχε βακχῶν· ἦν δὲ πᾶσ' ὁμοῦ βοή,
 ὁ μὲν στενάζων ὅσον ἐτύγχαν' ἐμπνέων,
 αἱ δ' ἠλάλαζον. ἔφερε δ' ἦ μὲν ὠλένην,
 ἦ δ' ἴχνος αὐταῖς ἀρβύλαις· γυμνοῦντο δὲ
 πλευραὶ σπαραγμοῖς· πᾶσα δ' ἡματωμένη 1135
 χεῖρας διεσφαίριζε σάρκα Πενθέως.
 κείται δὲ χωρὶς σῶμα, τὸ μὲν ὑπὸ στύφλοις
 πέτραις, τὸ δ' ὕλης ἐν βαθυξύλω φόβῃ,
 οὐ ῥάδιον ζήτημα· κρᾶτα δ' ἄθλιον,
 ὅπερ λαβοῦσα τυγχάνει μήτηρ χεροῖν, 1140
 πήξασ' ἐπ' ἄκρον θύρσον ὡς ὀρεστέρου

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, 1110
 crashing to earth down from his lofty perch,
 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— 1120
 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,
 then tore his shoulder out. The strength she had—
 it was not her own. The god put power
 into those hands of hers. Meanwhile Ino,
 her sister, went at the other side,
 ripping off chunks of Pentheus' flesh,
 while Autonoe and all the Bacchae, 1130
 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 1140
 stumbled on it. Her hands picked it up,
 then stuck it on a thysus, at the tip.

φέρει λέοντος διὰ Κιθαιρώνος μέσου,
 λιπούσ' ἀδελφὰς ἐν χοροῖσι μαινάδων.
 χωρεῖ δὲ θήρα δυσπότημα γαυρουμένη
 1145 τειχέων ἔσω τῶνδ', ἀνακαλοῦσα Βάκχιον
 τὸν ξυγκύναγον, τὸν ξυνεργάτην ἄγρας,
 τὸν καλλίνικον, ᾧ δάκρυα νικηφορεῖ.
 ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν τῆδ' ἐκποδῶν τῆ ξυμφορᾷ
 ἄπειμ', Ἀγαυήν πρὶν μολεῖν πρὸς δώματα.
 1150 τὸ σωφρονεῖν δὲ καὶ σέβειν τὰ τῶν θεῶν
 κάλλιστον· οἶμαι δ' αὐτὸ καὶ σοφώτατον
 θνητοῖσιν εἶναι κτῆμα τοῖσι χρωμένοις.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀναχορεύσωμεν Βάκχιον,
 ἀναβοάσωμεν ξυμφορὰν
 τὰν τοῦ δράκοντος Πενθέος ἐκγενέτα·
 1155 ὃς τὰν θηλυγενῆ στολὰν
 νάρθηκά τε, πιστὸν Ἴαιδαν,
 ἔλαβεν εὐθυρσον,
 ταῦρον προσηγητῆρα συμφορᾶς ἔχων.
 βάκχαι Καδμείαι,
 1160 τὸν καλλίνικον κλεινὸν ἐξεπράξατε
 ἐς στόνον, ἐς δάκρυα.
 καλὸς ἀγών, χέρ' αἵματι στάζουσιν
 περιβαλεῖν τέκνου.

— ἀλλ', εἰσορῶ γὰρ ἐς δόμους ὀρμωμένην
 1165 Πενθέως Ἀγαυήν μητέρ' ἐν διαστρόφοις
 ὄσσοις, δέχεσθε κῶμον εὐίου θεοῦ.

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,
 [1150] 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.

[Exit Messenger]

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
 [1160] 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!

ἌΓΑΥΗ
Ἀσιάδες βάκχαι—

ΧΟΡΟΣ
τί μ' ὀροθύνεις, ὦ;

ἌΓΑΥΗ
φέρομεν ἐξ ὀρέων
ἔλिका νεότομον ἐπὶ μέλαθρα,
μακάριον θήραν. 1170

ΧΟΡΟΣ
ὀρῶ καί σε δέξομαι σύγκωμον.

ἌΓΑΥΗ
ἔμαρψα τόνδ' ἄνευ βρόχων
λέοντος ἀγροτέρου νέον ἱνω.
ὡς ὀρᾶν πάρα. 1175

ΧΟΡΟΣ
πόθεν ἐρημίας;

ἌΓΑΥΗ
Κιθαιρῶν . . .

ΧΟΡΟΣ
Κιθαιρῶν;

ἌΓΑΥΗ
κατεφόνευσέ νιν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ
τίς ἄ βαλοῦσα;

ἌΓΑΥΗ
πρῶτον ἐμὸν τὸ γέρας.
μάκαιρ' Ἀγαυή κληζόμεθ' ἐν θιάσοις. 1180

ΧΟΡΟΣ
τίς ἄλλα;

ἌΓΑΥΗ
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. [1170]
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. [1180]

CHORUS
Who else?

AGAVE
Well, from Cadmus . . .

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί Κάδμου;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

γένεθλα
 μετ' ἐμὲ μετ' ἐμὲ τοῦδ'
 ἔθιγε θηρός· εὐτυχίης γ' ἄδ' ἄγρᾱ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

<...>

ἌΓΑΥΗ

μέτεχέ νυν θοίνας.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τί; μετέχω, τλᾶμον;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

νέος ὁ μόσχος ἄρ-
 τι γέννυ ὑπὸ κόρυθ' ἀπαλότριχα
 κατάκομον θάλλει.

1185

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πρέπει γ' ὥστε θῆρ ἄγραυλος φόβῃ.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ὁ Βάκχιος κυναγέτας
 σοφὸς σοφῶς ἀνέπηλ' ἐπὶ θῆρα
 τόνδε μαινάδας.

1190

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὁ γὰρ ἀναξ ἀγρεύς.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ἐπαινείς;

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἐπαινῶ.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

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.

[1190]

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 . . . 1195

ἌΓΑΥΗ
ματέρ' ἐπαινέσεται,
λαβούσαν ἄγρην τάνδε λεοντοφυῆ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ
περισσάν.

ἌΓΑΥΗ
περισσῶς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ
ἀγάλλη;

ἌΓΑΥΗ
γέγηθα,
μεγάλα μεγάλα καὶ
φανερὰ τᾶδ' ἄγρην κατειργασμένα.

ΧΟΡΟΣ
δείξόν νυν, ὦ τάλαινα, σὴν νικηφόρον 1200
ἀστοῖσιν ἄγρην ἣν φέρουσ' ἐλήλυθας.

ἌΓΑΥΗ
ὦ καλλίπυργον ἄστῃ Θηβαίας χθονὸς
ναίοντες, ἔλθεθ' ὡς ἴδητε τήνδ' ἄγρην,
Κάδμου θυγατέρες θηρὸς ἣν ἠγρεύσαμεν,
οὐκ ἀγκυλητοῖς Θεσσαλῶν στοχάσασιν, 1205
οὐ δικτύοισιν, ἀλλὰ λευκοπήχεσι
χειρῶν ἀκμαῖσιν. κᾶτα κομπάζειν χρεῶν
καὶ λογοποιῶν ὄργανα κτᾶσθαι μάτην;
ἡμεῖς δέ γ' αὐτῇ χειρὶ τόνδε θ' εἴλομεν,
χωρὶς τε θηρὸς ἄρθρα διεφορήσαμεν. 1210
ποῦ μοι πατήρ ὁ πρέσβυς; ἐλθέτω πέλας.
Πενθεύς τ' ἐμὸς παῖς ποῦ ἔστιν; αἰρέσθω λαβῶν
πηκτῶν πρὸς οἴκους κλιμάκων προσαμβάσεις,
ὡς πασσαλεύση κᾶτα τριγλύφοις τόδε
λέοντος ὃν ἀρείμι θηράσασ' ἐγώ. 1215

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

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

CHORUS
It's a strange trophy.

AGAVE
And strangely captured, too.

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

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

CHORUS
Well then, you most unfortunate woman, [1200]
show off your hunting prize, your sign of victory,
to all the citizens.

AGAVE [*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— [1210]
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

ἔπειθέ μοι φέροντες ἄθλιον βάρος
 Πενθέως, ἔπειθε, πρόσπολοι, δόμων πάρος,
 οὐδ' ἰσχυρῶν μοχθῶν μυρίοις ζητήμασιν
 φέρω τόδ', εὐρών ἐν Κιθαιρῶνος πτυχαῖς
 διασπαρακτόν, κοῦδ' ἐν ταύτῳ πέδῳ 1220
 λαβῶν, ἐν ὕλῃ κείμενον δυσσευρέτῳ.
 ἤκουσα γάρ του θυγατέρων τολμήματα,
 ἤδη κατ' ἄστῳ τειχεῶν ἔσω βεβῶς
 σὺν τῷ γέροντι Τειρεσίᾳ Βακχῶν πάρα·
 πάλιν δὲ κάμψας εἰς ὄρος κομίζομαι 1225
 τὸν κατθανόντα παῖδα Μαινάδων ὑπο.
 καὶ τὴν μὲν Ἀκτέων Ἀρισταίῳ ποτὲ
 τεκοῦσαν εἶδον Αὐτονόην Ἰνώ θ' ἄμα
 ἔτ' ἀμφὶ δρυμοὺς οἰστροπλήγας ἀθλίας,
 τὴν δ' εἰπέ τις μοι δεῦρο βακχεῖῳ ποδὶ 1230
 στείχειν Ἀγαυήν, οὐδ' ἄκραντ' ἠκούσαμεν·
 λεύσσω γὰρ αὐτήν, ὄψιν οὐκ εὐδαίμονα.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

πάτερ, μέγιστον κομπάσαι πάρεστί σοι,
 πάντων ἀρίστας θυγατέρας σπείραι μακρῶ
 θνητῶν· ἀπάσας εἶπον, ἐξόχως δ' ἐμέ, 1235
 ἢ τὰς παρ' ἰστοῖς ἐκλιποῦσα κερκίδας
 ἐς μείζον' ἤκω, θήρας ἀγρεύειν χεροῖν.
 φέρω δ' ἐν ὠλέναισιν, ὡς ὄρας, τάδε
 λαβοῦσα τὰριστέα, σοῖσι πρὸς δόμοις
 ὡς ἀγκρεμασθῆ· σὺ δέ, πάτερ, δέξαι χεροῖν· 1240

[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, [1220]
 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 Aristaeus—and Ino,
 she was with her there, in the forest,
 both still possessed, quite mad, poor creatures.
 Someone said Agave was coming here, [1230]
 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.

[offering him Pentheus' head]

Take this, father [1240]
 let your hands welcome it. Be proud of it,

γαυρούμενος δὲ τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀγρεύμασιν
κάλει φίλους ἐς δαῖτα· μακάριος γὰρ εἶ,
μακάριος, ἡμῶν τοιάδ' ἐξεργασμένων.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὦ πένθος οὐ μετρητὸν οὐδ' οἶόν τ' ἰδεῖν,
φόνον ταλαίναις χερσὶν ἐξεργασμένων. 1245
καλὸν τὸ θῦμα καταβαλοῦσα δαίμοσιν
ἐπὶ δαῖτα Θήβας τάσδε καμὲ παρακαλεῖς.
οἴμοι κακῶν μὲν πρῶτα σῶν, ἔπειτ' ἐμῶν·
ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἐνδίκως μὲν, ἀλλ' ἄγαν,
Βρόμιος ἀναξ ἀπώλεσ' οἰκείος γεγώς. 1250

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ὡς δύσκολον τὸ γῆρας ἀνθρώποις ἔφν
ἐν τ' ὄμμασι σκυθρωπὸν. εἶθε παῖς ἐμὸς
εὔθηρος εἴη, μητρὸς εἰκασθεὶς τρόποις,
ὄτ' ἐν νεανίασι Θεβαίοις ἄμα
θηρῶν ὀριγνῶτ'. ἀλλὰ θεομαχεῖν μόνον 1255
οἶός τ' ἐκείνος. νοθητεῖος, πάτερ,
σοῦστίν. τίς αὐτὸν δεῦρ' ἂν ὄψιν εἰς ἐμὴν
καλέσειεν, ὡς ἴδῃ με τὴν εὐδαίμονα;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

φεῦ φεῦ· φρονήσασαι μὲν οἶ' ἐδράσατε
ἀλγήσετ' ἄλγος δεινόν· εἰ δὲ διὰ τέλους 1260
ἐν τῷδ' αἰὲ μενεῖτ' ἐν ᾧ καθέστατε,
οὐκ εὐτυχῶσαι δόξετ' οὐχὶ δυστυχεῖν.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

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

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

πρῶτον μὲν ἐς τόνδ' αἰθέρ' ὄμμα σὸν μέθες.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ἰδοῦ· τί μοι τόνδ' ἐξυπέπας εἰσορᾶν; 1265

of what I've caught. Summon all your friends—
have a banquet, for you are blessed indeed,
blessed your daughters have achieved these things.

CADMUS

This grief's beyond measure, beyond endurance.
With these hands of yours you've murdered him.
You strike down this sacrificial victim,
this offering to the gods, then invite me,
and all of Thebes, to share a banquet.
Alas—first for your sorrow, then my own.
Lord god Bromius, born into this family,
has destroyed us, acting out his justice, [1250]
but too much so.

AGAVE

Why such scowling eyes?
How sorrowful and solemn old men become.
As for my son, I hope he's a fine hunter,
who copies his mother's hunting style,
when he rides out with young men of Thebes
chasing after creatures in the wild.
The only thing he seems capable of doing
is fighting with the gods. It's up to you,
father, to reprimand him for it.
Who'll call him here into my sight,
so he can see my good luck for himself?

CADMUS

Alas! Alas! What dreadful pain you'll feel
when you recognize what you've just done. [1260]
If you stay forever in your present state,
you'll be unfortunate, but you won't feel
as if you're suffering unhappiness.

AGAVE

But what in all this is wrong or painful?

CADMUS

First, raise your eyes. Look up into the sky.

AGAVE

All right. But why tell me to look up there?

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἔθ' αὐτὸς ἢ σοι μεταβολὰς ἔχειν δοκεῖ;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

λαμπρότερος ἢ πρὶν καὶ διειπετέστερος.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

τὸ δὲ πτοηθὲν τόδ' ἔτι σῆ ψυχῆ πάρα;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

οὐκ οἶδα τοῦπος τοῦτο. γίγνομαι δέ πως
ἔννοος, μετασταθείσα τῶν πάρος φρενῶν.

1270

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

κλύοις ἂν οὖν τι κάποκρίναι' ἂν σαφῶς;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ὡς ἐκλέλησμαι γ' ἂ πάρος εἵπομεν, πάτερ.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἐς ποῖον ἦλθες οἶκον ὑμεναίων μέτα;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

Σπαρτῶ μ' ἔδωκας, ὡς λέγουσ', Ἐχίονι.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

τίς οὖν ἐν οἴκοις παῖς ἐγένετο σῶ πόσει;

1275

ἌΓΑΥΗ

Πενθείς, ἐμῆ τε καὶ πατρὸς κοινωνία.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

τίνος πρόσωπον δῆτ' ἐν ἀγκάλαις ἔχεις;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

λέοντος, ὡς γ' ἔφασκον αἱ θηρώμεναι.

CADMUS

Does the sky still seem the same to you,
or has it changed?

AGAVE

It seems, well, brighter . . .
more translucent than it was before.

CADMUS

And your inner spirit—is it still shaking?

AGAVE

I don't understand what it is you're asking.
But my mind is starting to clear somehow.
It's changing . . . it's not what it was before.

[1270]

CADMUS

Can you hear me? Can you answer clearly?

AGAVE

Yes. But, father, what we discussed before,
I've quite forgotten.

CADMUS

Then tell me this—
to whose house did you come when you got married?

AGAVE

You gave me to Echion, who, men say,
was one of those who grew from seeds you cast.

CADMUS

In that house you bore your husband a child.
What was his name?

AGAVE

His name was Pentheus.
I conceived him with his father.

CADMUS

Well then,
this head your hands are holding—whose is it?

AGAVE

It's a lion's. That's what the hunters said.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

σκέψαι νυν ὀρθῶς· βραχὺς ὁ μόχθος εἰσιδεῖν.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ἔα, τί λεύσσω; τί φέρομαι τόδ' ἐν χεροῖν; 1280

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἄθρησον αὐτὸ καὶ σαφέστερον μάθε.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ὄρῳ μέγιστον ἄλγος ἢ τάλαιν' ἐγώ.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

μῶν σοι λέοντι φαίνεται προσεικέναι;

ἌΓΑΥΗ

οὐκ, ἀλλὰ Πενθέως ἢ τάλαιν' ἔχω κάρα.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὠμωγμένον γε πρόσθεν ἢ σὲ γνωρίσαι. 1285

ἌΓΑΥΗ

τίς ἔκτανέν νιν; —πῶς ἐμὰς ἦλθεν χέρας;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

δύστην' ἀλήθει', ὡς ἐν οὐ καιρῷ πάρει.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

λέγ', ὡς τὸ μέλλον καρδία πήδημ' ἔχει.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

σύ νιν κατέκτας καὶ κασίγνηται σέθεν.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ποῦ δ' ὤλετ'; ἢ κατ' οἶκον; ἢ ποίοις τόποις; 1290

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
 οὔπερ πρὶν Ἀκτέωνα διέλαχον κύνες.
 ἌΓΑΥΗ
 τί δ' ἐς Κιθαιρῶν' ἦλθε δυσδαίμων ὄδε;
 ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
 ἐκερτόμει θεὸν σάς τε βακχείας μολῶν.
 ἌΓΑΥΗ
 ἡμεῖς δ' ἐκείσε τίνι τρόπῳ κατήραμεν;
 ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
 ἐμάνητε, πᾶσά τ' ἐξεβακχέυθη πόλις. 1295
 ἌΓΑΥΗ
 Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς ὤλεσ', ἄρτι μανθάνω.
 ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
 ὕβριν γ' ὕβρισθεῖς· θεὸν γὰρ οὐχ ἠγγεῖσθέ νιν.
 ἌΓΑΥΗ
 τὸ φίλτατον δὲ σῶμα ποῦ παιδός, πάτερ;
 ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
 ἐγὼ μόλις τόδ' ἐξερευνήσας φέρω.
 ἌΓΑΥΗ
 ἦ πᾶν ἐν ἄρθροισι συγκεκλιμένον καλῶς; 1300
 ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
 <...>
 ἌΓΑΥΗ
 Πενθεὶ δὲ τί μέρος ἀφροσύνης προσῆκ' ἐμῆς;
 ΚΑΔΜΟΣ
 ὑμῖν ἐγένεθ' ὅμοιος, οὐ σέβων θεόν.
 τοιγὰρ συνῆψε πάντας ἐς μίαν βλάβην,
 ὑμᾶς τε τόνδε θ', ὥστε διολέσαι δόμους
 καῶν, ὅστις ἄτεκνος ἀρσένων παίδων γεγῶς 1305

CADMUS
 He was killed
 where dogs once made a common meal of Actaeon.
 AGAVE
 Why did this poor man go to Cithaeron?
 CADMUS
 He went there to ridicule the god
 and you for celebrating Dionysus.
 AGAVE
 But how did we happen to be up there?
 CADMUS
 You were insane—the entire city
 was in a Bacchic madness.
 AGAVE
 Now I see.
 Dionysus has destroyed us all.
 CADMUS
 He took offense at being insulted.
 You did not consider him a god.
 AGAVE
 Father, where's the body of my dearest son?
 CADMUS
 I had trouble tracking the body down.
 I brought back what I found.
 AGAVE
 Are all his limbs laid out
 just as they should be? And Pentheus,
 what part did he play in my madness? [1300]
 CADMUS
 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,

τῆς σῆς τόδ' ἔρνος, ὦ τάλαινα, νηδύος
 αἴσχιστα καὶ κάκιστα κατθανόνθ' ὀρώ,
 ᾧ δῶμ' ἀνέβλεφ'—ὄς συνείχες, ὦ τέκνον,
 τοῦμόν μελαθρον, παιδὸς ἐξ ἐμῆς γεγώς,
 πόλει τε τάρβος ἦσθα· τὸν γέροντα δὲ 1310
 οὐδεὶς ὑβρίζειν ἤθελ' εἰσορῶν τὸ σὸν
 κάρα· δίκην γὰρ ἀξίαν ἐλάμβανες.
 νῦν δ' ἐκ δόμων ἄτιμος ἐκβεβλήσομαι
 ὁ Κάδμος ὁ μέγας, ὃς τὸ Θηβαίων γένος
 ἔσπειρα καξήμησα κάλλιστον θέρος. 1315
 ὦ φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν—καὶ γὰρ οὐκέτ' ὦν ὅμως
 τῶν φιλτάτων ἔμοιγ' ἀριθμήσει, τέκνον—
 οὐκέτι γενείου τοῦδε θιγγάνων χερί,
 τὸν μητρὸς αὐδῶν πατέρα προσπτύξει, τέκνον,
 λέγων· Τίς ἀδικεῖ, τίς σ' ἀτιμάζει, γέρον; 1320
 τίς σὴν ταρασσει καρδίαν λυπηρὸς ὦν;
 λέγ', ὡς κολάζω τὸν ἀδικοῦντά σ', ὦ πάτερ.
 νῦν δ' ἄθλιος μὲν εἰμ' ἐγώ, τλήμων δὲ σύ.
 οἰκτρὰ δὲ μήτηρ, τλήμονες δὲ σύγγονοι.
 εἰ δ' ἔστιν ὅστις δαιμόνων ὑπερφρονεῖ, 1325
 ἐς τοῦδ' ἀθρήσας θάνατον ἠγείσθω θεούς.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

τὸ μὲν σὸν ἀλγῶ, Κάδμε· σὸς δ' ἔχει δίκην
 παῖς παιδὸς ἀξίαν μὲν, ἀλγεωνῆν δὲ σοί.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ὦ πάτερ, ὀρᾶς γὰρ τᾶμ' ὅσῳ μετεστράφη

...

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

[addressing the remains of Pentheus]

My child, you upheld the honour of our house,
 my daughter's son. You were feared in Thebes. [1310]
 No one who saw you ever would insult me,
 though I was old, for you would then inflict
 fit punishment. Now the mighty Cadmus,
 the man who sowed and later harvested
 the most splendid crop—the Theban people—
 will be an exile, banished from his home,
 a dishonoured man. Dearest of men,
 even though, my child, you're alive no more,
 I count you among those closest to me.
 You won't be touching my cheek any more,
 holding me in your arms, and calling me
 “grandfather,” as you ask me, “Old man,
 who's injuring or dishonouring you? [1320]
 Who upsets your heart with any pain?
 Tell me, father, so I can punish him—
 anyone who treats you in an unjust way.”
 Now you're in this horrifying state,
 I'm in misery, your mother's pitiful,
 and all your relatives are in despair.
 If there's a man who disrespects the gods,
 let him think about how this man perished—
 then he should develop faith in them.

CHORUS LEADER

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

AGAVE

Father, you see how all has changed for me.¹²
 [From being your royal and honoured daughter,
 the mother of a king, I'm now transformed—
 an abomination, something to fill
 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—

...

...

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

δράκων γενήση μεταβαλῶν, δάμαρ τε σὴ 1330
 ἐκθηρωθεῖσ' ὄφεος ἀλλάξει τύπον,
 ἦν Ἄρεος ἔσχεσ Ἄρμονίαν θνητὸς γεγώς.
 ὄχον δὲ μύσχων, χρησμὸς ὡς λέγει Διός,
 ἐλᾶς μετ' ἀλόχου, βαρβάρων ἡγούμενος.
 πολλὰς δὲ πέρσεις ἀναρίθμω στρατεύματι 1335
 πόλεις· ὅταν δὲ Δοξίου χρηστήριον
 διαρπάσωσι, νόστον ἄθλιον πάλιν
 σχήσουσι. σὲ δ' Ἄρης Ἄρμονίαν τε ρύσεται
 μακάρων τ' ἐς αἶαν σὸν καθιδρῦσει βίον.
 ταῦτ' οὐχὶ θνητοῦ πατρὸς ἐκγεγώς λέγω 1340
 Διόνυσος, ἀλλὰ Ζηγνός· εἰ δὲ σωφρονεῖν
 ἔγνωθ', ὅτ' οὐκ ἠθέλετε, τὸν Διὸς γόνον
 εὐδαιμονεῖτ' ἂν σύμμαχον κεκτημένοι.

to hold their powerful hands
 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. [1330]
 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, [1340]
 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, λισσόμεσθ' ἄ, ἡδίκηκαμεν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

ὄψι' ἐμάθεθ' ἡμᾶς, ὅτε δὲ χρῆν, οὐκ ἤδετε. 1345

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ἐγνώκαμεν ταῦτ'· ἀλλ' ἐπεξέρχη λίαν.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

καὶ γὰρ πρὸς ὑμῶν θεὸς γεγὼς ὑβριζόμεν.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὄργας πρέπει θεοὺς οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοῖς.

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

πάλαι τάδε Ζεὺς οὐμὸς ἐπένευσεν πατήρ.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

αἰαί, δέδοκται, πρέσβυ, τλήμονες φυγαί. 1350

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

τί δήτα μέλλεθ' ἄπερ ἀναγκαίως ἔχει;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

ὦ τέκνον, ὡς ἐς δεινὸν ἦλθομεν κακὸν
 πάντες, σύ θ' ἢ τάλαινα σύγγονοί τε σαί,
 ἐγὼ θ' ὁ τλήμων· βαρβάρους ἀφίξομαι
 γέρων μέτοκος· ἔτι δέ μοι τὸ θέσφατον 1355
 ἐς Ἑλλάδ' ἀγαγεῖν μιγάδα βάρβαρον στρατόν.
 καὶ τὴν Ἄρεως παῖδ' Ἄρμονίαν, δάμαρτ' ἐμήν,
 δράκων δρακαίνης φύσιν ἔχουσαν ἀγρίαν
 ἄξω πὶ βωμοὺς καὶ τάφους Ἑλληνικούς,
 ἡγούμενος λόγχαισιν· οὐδὲ παύσομαι 1360
 κακῶν ὁ τλήμων, οὐδὲ τὸν καταιβάτην
 Ἀχέροντα πλεύσας ἤσυχος γενήσομαι.

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.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ὦ πάτερ, ἐγὼ δὲ σοῦ στερεῖσα φεύξομαι.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

τί μ' ἀμφιβάλλεις χερσίν, ὦ τάλαινα παῖ,
ὄρνις ὅπως κηφήνα πολιούχρων κύκνος; 1365

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ποῖ γὰρ τράπωμαι πατρίδος ἐκβεβλημένη;

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

οὐκ οἶδα, τέκνον· μικρὸς ἐπίκουρος πατήρ.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

χαῖρ', ὦ μέλαθρον, χαῖρ', ὦ πατρία
πόλις· ἐκλείπω σ' ἐπὶ δυστυχία
φυγὰς ἐκ θαλάμων. 1370

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

στεῖχέ νιν, ὦ παῖ, τὸν Ἀρισταίου ...

ἌΓΑΥΗ

στένομαί σε, πάτερ.

ΚΑΔΜΟΣ

καγὼ σέ, τέκνον,
καὶ σὰς ἐδάκρυσσα κασιγνήτας.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

δεινῶς γὰρ τάνδ' αἰκείαν
Διόνυσος ἄναξ τοὺς σοὺς εἰς
οἴκους ἔφερεν. 1375

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ

καὶ γὰρ ἔπασχον δεινὰ πρὸς ὑμῶν,
ἀγέραστον ἔχων ὄνομ' ἐν Θήβαις.

ἌΓΑΥΗ

χαίρε, 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.¹⁴

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 τόδ' ἂν ἦκοις. 1380

ἌΓΑΥΗ

ἄγετ', ὦ πομποί, με κασιγνήτας
 ἵνα συμφνγάδας ληψόμεθ' οἰκτρὰς.
 ἔλθοιμι δ' ὅπου
 μήτε Κιθαιρῶν ἔμ' ἴδοι μιαρὸς
 μήτε Κιθαιρῶν ὄσσοισιν ἐγώ, 1385
 μήθ' ὅθι θύρσου μνημ' ἀνάκειται.
 Βάκχαις δ' ἄλλαισι μέλοιεν.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

πολλὰ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων,
 πολλὰ δ' ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί·
 καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,
 τῶν δ' ἀδοκίτων πόρον ἡῦρε θεός.
 τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τόδε πρᾶγμα. 1390

CADMUS

My most unhappy daughter,
 may you fare well. That will be hard for you. [1380]

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 thyrus. Let others
 make Bacchic celebrations their concern.

[Exit Agave]

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. Timolus 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.