

# Bacchae

By Euripides

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## Dionysus

I am Dionysus, the child of Zeus, and I have come to this land of the Thebans, where Kadmos' daughter Semele once bore me, delivered by a lightning-blast. Having assumed a mortal form in place of my divine one, **5** I am here at the fountains of Dirke and the water of Ismenos. Here near the palace I see the tomb of my thunder-stricken mother and the remains of her abode, smoldering with the still living flame of Zeus' fire, Hera's everlasting *hubris* against my mother. **10** I praise Kadmos, who has made this place hallowed, the shrine of his daughter, which now I have covered all around with the cluster-bearing grapevine.

I have left the rich lands of the Lydians and Phrygians, the sunny plains of the Persians, and **15** the walls of Bactria, passing over the harsh land of the Medes, and fertile Arabia, and all of Asia which lies along the coast of the sea, its beautifully-towered cities replete with a mixture of Hellenes and barbarians. **20** In Hellenic territory I have come here to Thebes first, having already established my *khoroï* and mysteries in those other lands so that I might be a *daimōn* manifest among mortals, and have raised my cry here, fitting a fawn-skin to my body and **25** taking a thyrsos in my hand, a dart of ivy. For my mother's sisters—the very ones for whom it was least becoming—claimed that I was not the child of Zeus, but that Semele had conceived a child from a mortal father and then blamed her sexual misconduct on Zeus, **30** Kadmos' plot, for which reason they claim that Zeus killed her, because she had told a false tale about her marriage. Therefore have I driven them from the house with frenzy, and they dwell in the mountains, out of their *phrenes*; and I have given them the compulsion to wear the outfit of my mysteries. All the female offspring of the house of Kadmos, **35** as many as are women, I have made to leave the house with madness, and they, mingled with the sons of Kadmos, sit on roofless rocks beneath green pines. It is necessary that this *polis* learn, even though it should not wish to, **40** that it is not an initiate into my Bacchic rites, and that I plead the case of my mother, Semele, in making myself manifest to mortals as a *daimōn*, whom she bore to Zeus.

Kadmos then gave his office and his tyranny to Pentheus, his daughter's son, **45** who fights against the gods in my person and drives me away from treaties, never making mention of me in his prayers. For which reasons I will show him and all the Thebans that I am a god. And when I have arranged the situation here to my satisfaction I will move on to another land, **50** revealing myself. But if ever the *polis* of Thebes should in anger seek to drive the Bacchae down from the mountains with arms, I, leading on my Maenads, will join battle with them. For these reasons I have assumed a mortal form, altering my shape into the nature of a man. **55** My sacred band, you women

who have left Tmolos, the bulwark of Lydia, whom I have brought from among the barbarians as assistants and companions for myself, raise up your kettle-drums, the native instruments of the *polis* of the Phrygians, the invention of mother Rhea and myself, **60** and going about the palace of Pentheus beat them, so that Kadmos' *polis* might see. I myself will go off to the folds of Kithairon, where the Bacchae are, and will join in their *choroi*.

*Dionysus vanishes. The Chorus of the Bacchae enters.*

### **Chorus**

**65** Having passed through sacred [*hieros*] Tmolos, coming from the land of Asia, I celebrate in honor of Bromios, a sweet labor [*ponos*] and an ordeal [*kamatos*] easily borne, crying "Evohe" for Bacchus. Who is in the way? Who is in the way? Who? Let him get out of the way indoors, and let everyone keep his mouth pure, **70** being *euphēmos*. For now I will celebrate Dionysus with hymns, at all times according to proper custom.

*strophe 1*

Blessed is he who keeps his life pure, with a good *daimōn* and knowing the rites of the gods, and who has his *psūkhē* initiated into the Bacchic revelry, dancing in inspired frenzy **75** over the mountains with holy purifications, and who, revering the mysteries of great mother Kybele, brandishing the *thyrsos*, **80** garlanded with ivy, serves as attendant [*therapōn*] to Dionysus. Go, Bacchae, go, Bacchae, bringing home the god Bromios, himself child of a god, **85** from the Phrygian mountains to the broad public spaces, suitable for *choroi*, in Hellas; Bromios,

*antistrophe 1*

whom once his mother bore, **90** casting him from her stomach as she was struck by Zeus' thunder while in the compulsions of birth pains, leaving life from the stroke of a thunderbolt. Immediately Zeus, Kronos' son, **95** received him in a chamber fitted for birth, and having covered him in his thigh shut him up with golden clasps out of Hera's sight. He bore forth **100** the bull-horned god when the Fates [*moirai*] had brought him to *telos*, and he garlanded him with crowns of snakes, for which reason Maenads cloak their wild prey over their locks.

*strophe 2*

**105** Oh Thebes, nurse of Semele, crown yourself with ivy, flourish with the verdant yew which bears beautiful fruit, and consecrate yourself with twigs of oak **110** or fir. Adorn your garments of spotted fawn-skin with fleeces of white sheep, and consecrate the *thyrsoi* [*narthēx* pl.], marks of *hubris*. Immediately all the earth will join in the *choroi*— **115** he becomes Bromios whoever leads the sacred band of women—to the mountain, to the mountain, where the female crowd awaits, having been goaded away from their weaving by Dionysus.

**120** Oh secret chamber of the Kouretes and you divine Cretan caves, parents of Zeus, where the Korybantes with their triple helmets **125** invented this circle, covered with stretched hide, and mixing it in their excited Bacchic dances with the sweet-voiced breath of Phrygian pipes, they handed it over to Rhea, an instrument resounding with the revel songs of the Bacchae. **130** Nearby, raving Satyrs went through the rites of the mother goddess. And they added the *khoroï* of the biennial festivals, in which Dionysus rejoices.

*epode*

**135** Sweet [*hēdus*] he is in the mountains, when, <sup>136</sup> after running in the sacred band [*thiasos*] <sup>137-138</sup> he drops to the ground, wearing the sacred [*hieron*] garment of fawn-skin, hunting <sup>139</sup> the blood of the goat killed, tracking the beauty and the pleasure [*kharis*] of raw flesh devoured, <sup>140</sup> rushing to the Phrygian, the Lydian mountains, <sup>141</sup> and the chorus leader [*ex-arkhos*] is Bromios [= Dionysus the Thunderer]. Cry "Euhoi!" <sup>142</sup> The plain flows with milk, it flows with wine, <sup>143</sup> it flows with the nectar of bees. <sup>144</sup> Like the smoke of Syrian incense, <sup>145</sup> the Bacchic one [*Bakkheus*], raising high <sup>146</sup> the fiery flame from the pine torch, <sup>147</sup> bursts forth from the stalk [*narthēx*], <sup>148</sup> arousing the stragglers with his running and with his dance-steps [*khoroï*], <sup>149</sup> agitating them with his cries [*iakhai*], <sup>150</sup> tossing his luxuriant [*trupheros*] locks into the upper air. <sup>151</sup> And amidst cries of "Euhoi!" his voice thunders words like this: <sup>152</sup> "Come on [and join the chorus], Bacchants [*bakkhai*], <sup>153</sup> come on [and join it], Bacchants, <sup>154</sup> surrounded by the luxuriant beauty of Mount Tmolos, watered by streams flowing with gold. <sup>155</sup> You all must sing and dance [*melpain*] Dionysus, <sup>156</sup> in tune with the thundering beat of kettle-drums, <sup>157-158</sup> glorifying with cries of 'Euhoi!' the god of the cry 'Euhoi!' <sup>159</sup> with Phrygian shouts and clamor, <sup>160</sup> when with its sweet song the pipe, <sup>161-163</sup> sacred [*hieros*] it is, thunders its pulsating sacred [*hiera*] tunes <sup>164</sup> for those who wander off to the mountain, to the mountain!" <sup>165</sup> And she, taking sweet pleasure [*hēdesthai*], <sup>166-169</sup> like a foal next to its grazing mother, rouses her swift-stepping legs to take one leap after the next, she the Bacchant [*bakkhē*].

*Teiresias enters.*

### Teiresias

**170** Who is at the gates? Call from the house Kadmos, son of Agenor, who left the *polis* of Sidon and fortified this city of the Thebans with towers. Let someone go and announce that Teiresias is looking for him. He knows why I have come and **175** what agreement I, an old man, have made with him, older yet: to twine the *thyrsoi*, to wear fawn-skins, and to crown our heads with ivy shoots.

*Kadmos enters.*

**Kadmos**

Most *philos*, from inside the house I heard and recognized your wise [*sophē*] voice—the voice of a *sophos* man— **180** and have come with this equipment of the god. To the best of our abilities we must extol him, the child of my daughter. Where is it necessary to take the *choros*, where must we put our feet and **185** shake our grey heads? Lead me, an old man, Teiresias, yourself old. For you are *sophos*. And so I would not tire night or day striking the ground with the *thyrsos*. Gladly I have forgotten that we are old.

**Teiresias**

Then you and I are experiencing [*paskhein*] the same thing, **190** for I too feel young and will try to join the *choros*.

**Kadmos**

Then we will go to the mountain in a chariot.

**Teiresias**

But in this way the god would not have equal *tīmē*.

**Kadmos**

I, an old man, will lead you like a pupil, though you are an old man.

**Teiresias**

The god will lead us there without ordeal.

**Kadmos**

**195** Are we the only ones in the polis who will join the *choros* in Dionysus' honor?

**Teiresias**

We alone are sensible, all the others foolish.

**Kadmos**

Delay is long. Take hold of my hand.

**Teiresias**

Here, take hold, and join your hand with mine.

**Kadmos**

Having been born mortal, I do not scorn the gods.

**Teiresias**

**200** In the eyes of the *daimones* we mortals do not act with wisdom [*sophiā*]. Our ancestral traditions, which we have held throughout our lives, no argument will overturn, not even if something *sophon* should be discovered by the depths of our *phrenes*. Will anyone say that I, who am about to join the *choros* with my head covered in ivy, **205** do not respect old age? For the god has made no distinction as to whether it is right for men young or old to join the *choros*, but wishes to have *tīmai*

and be extolled equally by all, setting no one apart.

### **Kadmos**

**210** Since you do not see the light of the sun here, Teiresias, I will be for you a spokesman [*prophētēs*] about what is happening. Pentheus, child of Ekhion, to whom I have given control [*kratos*] of this land, is coming here to the house now in all haste. How he quivers with excitement! What new matter will he tell us?

*Pentheus enters.*

### **Pentheus**

**215** I was away from this land when I heard of the new evils throughout this *polis*, that our women have left our homes in contrived Bacchic rites, and rush about in the shadowy mountains, honoring with *khoroī* this new *daimōn* **220** Dionysus, whoever he is. I hear that mixing-bowls stand full in the midst of their assemblies, and that each woman, flying to secrecy in different directions, yields to the embraces of men, on the pretext that they are Maenads worshipping. **225** They consider Aphrodite of greater priority than Dionysus.

Servants keep as many of them as I have caught in the public buildings with their hands chained. I will hunt from the mountains all that are missing, Ino and Agaue, who bore me to Ekhion, and **230** Autonoe, the mother of Aktaion. And having bound them in iron fetters, I will soon make them stop this criminal Bacchic activity. They say that a certain stranger [*xenos*] has come, a sorcerer from the Lydian land, with the locks of his tawny hair smelling sweetly, **235** having in his eyes the wine-dark graces [*kharites*] of Aphrodite. He stays with the young girls during the evenings and nights, alluring them with joyful mysteries. If I catch him within this house, **240** by cutting his head from his body I will stop him from beating his *thyrsos* and shaking his hair.

That's the man who claims that Dionysus is a god; that's the man who claims that Dionysus was once stitched into the thigh of Zeus, Dionysus, who was in reality burnt along with his mother by the flame of lightning, **245** because she had falsely claimed to have married Zeus. Is this not worthy of a terrible death by hanging, that he, whoever this *xenos* is, commits such acts of *hubris*?

But here is another wonder: I see the seer Teiresias clothed in dappled fawn-skins **250** along with my mother's father—a great absurdity—raging about with a *thyrsos* [*narthēx*]. I want to deny that I see your old age devoid of sense. Won't you cast away the ivy? **255** Will you not, father of my mother, free your hand of the *thyrsos*? You urged these things, Teiresias. Do you wish, introducing this new *daimōn* to humans, to examine birds and receive rewards of sacrifices? If your hoary old age did not protect you, you would sit in the midst of the Bacchantes **260** for introducing wicked rites. For where women have the delight of the grape at a feast, I say that none of their rites is healthy any longer.

### **Chorus**

Oh, what impiety! *xenos*, don't you reverence the gods and Kadmos who sowed the earth-born crop? **265** Do you, the child of Ekhion, disgrace your ancestry [*genos*]?

### **Teiresias**

Whenever a *sophos* man takes a good occasion for his speech, it is not a great task to speak well. You have a fluent tongue as though you are sensible, but there is no sense in your words. **270** A bold and powerful man, one capable of speaking well, becomes a *kakos* citizen if he lacks sense. Nor can I express how great this new god, whom you scorn, will be throughout Hellas. Two things, young man, **275** have supremacy among humans: The goddess Demeter—she is the earth, but call her whatever name you wish—nourishes mortals with dry food. But he who came then, the offspring of Semele, invented a rival, the wet drink of the grape, and introduced it to mortals. **280** It releases wretched mortals from their pains, whenever they are filled with the stream of the vine, and gives them sleep, a means of forgetting their daily woes. There is no other cure for pains [*ponoi*]. He, himself a god, is poured out in offerings to the gods, **285** so that through him men have their good things.

And do you laugh at him, because he was sewn up in Zeus' thigh? I will teach you that this is well: when Zeus snatched him from the fire of lightning, and led the child as a god to Olympus, **290** Hera wished to banish him from the sky. Zeus devised a counter-plan in a manner worthy of a god. Having broken a part of the air that surrounds the earth, he gave this to Hera as a pledge, protecting the real Dionysus from her quarreling. **295** Mortals say that in time he was nourished in the thigh of Zeus; because a god was hostage to the goddess Hera, by changing his name they composed the story. But this *daimōn* is a prophet, for Bacchic revelry and madness have in them much prophetic skill. **300** Whenever the god enters a body in full force, he makes the maddened tell the future. He also possesses some of the fate [*moira*] of Arēs. For terror sometimes strikes an army under arms and in its ranks before it even touches a spear— **305** this too is a frenzy from Dionysus. You will see him also on the rocks of Delphi, bounding with torches through the highland between the two peaks, leaping and shaking the Bacchic branch, mighty throughout Hellas. But believe me, Pentheus. **310** Do not dare to claim that might has power [*kratos*] among humans, nor think that you have any *phrenes* at all, even if you believe so: your mind is sick. Receive the god into your land, pour libations to him, celebrate the Bacchic rites, and garland your head.

Dionysus will not compel **315** the women to be moderate [*sōphrones*] in regard to Kypris [Aphrodite], but it is right to look for this attribute in their natures. She who is naturally *sōphrōn* will not be corrupted in Bacchic revelry. Do you see? You rejoice whenever many people are at your gates, **320** and the *polis* extols the name of Pentheus. He too, I think, delights in receiving *tīmē*. Kadmos, whom you mock, and I will crown our heads with ivy and dance, a hoary yoke-team—still we must join the *khoros*. **325** I will not be persuaded by your words to fight with the god. You are mad in a most grievous way, and you will not be cured by drugs, though your illness is

surely due to drugs.

### **Chorus**

Old man, you do not shame Phoebus with your words; by giving *tīmē* to Dionysus, a great god, you are balanced [*sōphrōn*].

### **Kadmos**

**330** Child, Teiresias has given you good recommendations. Dwell with us, not apart from the laws. Now you flit about and are not being clear in your thinking. Even if, as you say, he is not a god, call him one: tell a glorious falsehood, **335** so that Semele might seem to have given birth to a god, and our family [*genos*] might have *tīmē*.

You see the wretched fate of Aktaion [Actaeon], who was torn apart in the meadows by the blood-thirsty hounds he had raised, **340** having boasted that he was better at hunting than Artemis. May you not suffer [*paskhein*] this! Come, let me crown your head with ivy; give *tīmē* to the god along with us.

### **Pentheus**

Do not lay a hand on me! Go off and be a Bacchant, but don't wipe your foolishness off on me. I will prosecute the case [*dikē*] of this **345** teacher of your folly. Let someone go as quickly as possible to the seat where he watches the flights of birds and overturn it with levers, completely confounding everything; **350** release his garlands to the winds and storms. In this way I will especially grieve his heart. And some of you hunt throughout the city for this effeminate *xenos*, who introduces a new disease to the women and pollutes our beds. **355** If you catch him, bring him here bound, so that he might suffer as punishment a death by stoning, thus having seen a bitter Bacchic revelry in Thebes.

### **Teiresias**

O wretched man, how little you know what you are saying! You are mad now, and even before you were out of your *phrenes*. Let us go, Kadmos, and **360** let us beg the god, on behalf of this man, though he is savage, and on behalf of the *polis*, to inflict no new evil. But follow me with the ivy-clad staff, and try to support my body, and I will attempt to support yours; **365** it would be shameful for two old men to fall. Still, let come what may, we must serve Dionysus, the son of Zeus. But Pentheus will bring *penthos* to your house, Kadmos; this I say not on the basis of my prophetic art, but rather from my judgment of the situation. For a foolish man says foolish things.

*Teiresias and Kadmos exit.*

### **Chorus**

*strophe 1*

**370** Holiness, lady of the gods, Holiness, who bear your golden wings across the face of the earth, do you hear this from Pentheus? Do you hear this unholy **375** hubris

against Bromios, the child of Semele, the first *daimōn* at well-garlanded banquets [*euphrosunai*]? He holds this office, to introduce people into the sacred company of *choroi*, **380** to laugh to the accompaniment of the pipes, and to bring an end to cares, whenever the delight of the grape comes forth in the feasts of the gods, and in ivy-bearing banquets **385** the goblet surrounds men with sleep.

*antistrophe 1*

Misfortune is the end result [*telos*] of unbridled mouths and lawless folly. The life of serenity [*hēsukhiā*] **390** and sense remains unshaken and supports households. Though they dwell far off in the heavens, the gods see mortal affairs. **395** It is not wisdom [*sophiā*] to be overly *sophos*, and to think things unbecoming mortal men. Life is short, and in it he who pursues great things does not achieve that which is present. In my opinion, these are the ways of mad and **400** ill-counseling men.

*strophe 2*

Would that I could go to Cyprus, the island of Aphrodite, where the Loves dwell, who charm **405** mortals' hearts, and to Paphos, fertilized without rain by the streams of a foreign river flowing with a hundred mouths. Lead me, Bromios, *daimōn* of joy who leads the Bacchae, **410** to Pieria, beautiful seat of the Muses, the holy slope of Olympus. **415** There are the Graces [*charites*], there is desire, there it is divinely ordained [*themis*] for the Bacchae to celebrate their rites.

*antistrophe 2*

The *daimōn*, the son of Zeus, rejoices in banquets, and Peace, **420** which brings prosperity, goddess who nourishes youths, is *philē* to him. He gives an equal delight from wine, banishing grief, to the wealthy [*olbios*] and to the less fortunate. He hates whoever does not care about this: **425** to live day and *philai* nights in blessedness and to keep his wise *phrēn* and intellect away from over-curious men. **430** What the common multitude thinks and practices, that I would accept.

*An attendant enters.*

**Attendant** [*therapōn*]

Pentheus, we have come here, having caught the prey **435** for which you sent us, nor has our work been in vain. This beast was docile to us and did not withdraw in flight, but yielded willingly. He did not turn pale or change the wine-bright complexion of his cheek, but laughed and allowed us to bind him and lead him away. **440** He remained still, making my work easy, and I in shame said, "xenos, I do not willingly lead you away, but I am under Pentheus' orders." The Bacchae whom you shut up, carrying them off and binding them in chains in the public prison, **445** have gone off, freed from their bonds, and are gambling in the meadows, calling to the god Bromios. The chains fell off their feet by themselves, and keys opened the doors without the aid of a human hand. This man has come to Thebes full of many wonders. **450** You must take

care of the rest.

**Pentheus**

Release his hands. Caught in these nets he is not quick enough to escape me. But your body is not ill-formed, *xenos*, for relations with women, the reason you have come to Thebes; **455** your hair is long—for you are no wrestler—cascading along your cheek, full of desire; you have white skin, carefully made up, for by avoiding the sun's rays and remaining in the shade you hunt after Aphrodite with your beauty. **460** First tell me what is your ancestry [*genos*]?

**Dionysus**

I can tell you this easily, without boasting. I suppose you are familiar with flowery Tmolos.

**Pentheus**

I know of it; it surrounds the city of Sardis.

**Dionysus**

I am from there, and Lydia is my fatherland

**Pentheus**

**465** Why do you bring these rites to Hellas?

**Dionysus**

Dionysus, the child of Zeus, persuaded us.

**Pentheus**

Is there a Zeus who begets new gods there?

**Dionysus**

No, but Zeus who married Semele here.

**Pentheus**

Did he bring you under his spell at night, or in your sight?

**Dionysus**

**470** Seeing me just as I saw him, he gave me sacred rites.

**Pentheus**

What form do your rites have?

**Dionysus**

They cannot be told to mortals uninitiated in Bacchic revelry.

**Pentheus**

How do they benefit those who participate?

**Dionysus**

It is not right [*themis*] for you to hear, but they are worth knowing.

**Pentheus**

475 You have coined this story well, so that I desire to hear.

**Dionysus**

The rites are hostile to whoever practices impiety.

**Pentheus**

Are you saying that you saw clearly what the god was like?

**Dionysus**

He was whatever sort he wanted to be; I did not order this.

**Pentheus**

You contrived this well also, though speaking mere nonsense.

**Dionysus**

480 One will seem to be foolish if he speaks wise things [*sopha*] to a senseless man.

**Pentheus**

Did you come here first with this *daimōn*?

**Dionysus**

All the barbarians celebrate these rites.

**Pentheus**

Certainly, for their *phrenes* are far worse than the Hellenes'.

**Dionysus**

Better in this at any rate; but their laws are different.

**Pentheus**

485 Do you perform the sacred rites [*hiera*] by night or by day?

**Dionysus**

Mostly by night; darkness conveys awe.

**Pentheus**

This is treacherous towards women, and unsound.

**Dionysus**

Even during the day you can find what is shameful.

**Pentheus**

You must pay the penalty [*dikē*] for your evil devices.

**Dionysus**

490 And you for your ignorance and impiety toward the god.

**Pentheus**

How bold and practiced in speaking the Bacchant is!

**Dionysus**

Tell me what I must suffer [*paskhein*]. What terrible thing will you do to me?

**Pentheus**

First I will cut off your luxuriant [*habros*] hair.

**Dionysus**

My hair is sacred [*hieros*]. I am growing it for the god.

**Pentheus**

**495** Next give me this *thyrsos* from your hands.

**Dionysus**

Take it from me yourself. I bear it as the emblem of Dionysus.

**Pentheus**

We will keep you in prison.

**Dionysus**

The *daimōn* himself will release me, whenever I want.

**Pentheus**

When you call him, that is, standing among the Bacchae.

**Dionysus**

**500** Even now he sees, from close up, what I suffer [*paskhein*].

**Pentheus**

Where is he? He is not visible to my eyes.

**Dionysus**

Near me, but you, being impious, do not see him.

**Pentheus**

Seize him, he insults me and Thebes!

**Dionysus**

I warn you not to bind me, since I am balanced [*sōphrōn*] and you are not.

**Pentheus**

**505** And I, more powerful than you, bid them to bind you.

**Dionysus**

You do not know how you live, or what you are doing, or who you are.

**Pentheus**

I am Pentheus, son of Ekhion and Agaue.

### **Dionysus**

You are well suited to be miserable in your name.

### **Pentheus**

Go!

*To the attendants.*

Shut him up near the horse stable, **510** so that he may see only darkness.

*To Dionysus.*

Join the *choros* there. These women whom you have led here as accomplices to your evils we will either sell or, stopping them from making this noise and beating leather skins, make slaves for our looms.

### **Dionysus**

**515** I will go, since I need not suffer [*paskhein*] that which is not necessary. But Dionysus, who you claim does not exist, will pursue you for this *hubris*. For in treating us without *dikē* you are leading him into chains.

*Dionysus is led away by the attendants. Pentheus exits into the palace.*

### **Chorus**

*strophe*

Daughter of Akhelōios, **520** venerable Dirke, happy virgin, you once received the child of Zeus in your streams, when Zeus his father snatched him up from the immortal fire and saved him in his thigh, **525** crying out: "Go, Dithyrambus, enter this my masculine womb. I will make you illustrious, Dionysus, in Thebes, so that they will call you by this name." **530** But you, blessed Dirke, reject me, though I revel on your banks in garland-bearing companies of women. Why do you refuse me, why do you flee me? I swear by the cluster-bearing **535** grace [*kharis*] of Dionysus' vine that you will have a care for Bromios.

*antistrophe*

What rage, what rage does the earth-born race [*genos*] show, and Pentheus, **540** descended of old from a serpent, sired by earth-born Ekhion, a fierce monster, not a mortal man, like a bloody giant to fight against the gods! **545** He will soon bind me, the handmaid of Bromios, in chains, and he already holds my fellow-reveler within the house, hidden away in a dark prison. **550** Do you see this, Dionysus, son of Zeus: your spokesmen [*prophētēs* pl.] in the dangers of restraint? Come, lord, down from Olympus, brandishing your golden *thyrsos*, **555** and check the *hubris* of this murderous man.

Where on Nysa, which nourishes wild beast, or on Korykian height, do you lead with your *thyrsos* the bands of revelers? **560** Perhaps in the thickly wooded chambers of Olympus, where Orpheus once led together trees by playing songs on his lyre. **565** Blessed Pieria, the Joyful one reveres you and will come to set you singing and dancing in *choroi* of revelry; having crossed the swiftly-flowing Axion he will bring the **570** whirling Maenads, leaving father Lydia, giver of prosperity [*olbos*] and happiness [*eudaimoniā*] to mortals, who they say fertilizes the land of beautiful horses with its **575** fairest streams.

*Dionysus enters.*

**Dionysus**

Io! Hear my voice, hear it, Io Bacchae, Io Bacchae.

**Chorus**

Who is here, who? From what quarter did the voice of the Joyful one summon me?

**Dionysus**

**580** Io! Io! I say again; it is I, the child of Zeus and Semele.

**Chorus**

Io! Io! My master, my master! Come then to our band, Bromios.

**Dionysus**

**585** Shake this place, sovereign Spirit of Earthquake!

**Chorus**

—Oh! Oh! Soon the palace of Pentheus will be shaken in ruin!

—Bacchus is in the halls! Revere him!

— **590** We revere him!

—Did you see these stone lintels on the pillars falling apart? Bromios shouts in victory inside the palace!

**Dionysus**

Light the fiery lamp of lightning! **595** Burn, burn Pentheus' household!

**Chorus**

Oh! Oh! Do you not see the fire, do you not perceive, about the sacred [*hieron*] tomb of Semele, the flame that Zeus' thunderbolt left? **600** Throw to the ground your trembling bodies, Maenads, cast them down, for our lord, Zeus' offspring, is approaching the palace, turning everything upside down.

**Dionysus**

Barbarian women, **605** have you fallen on the ground so stricken with fear? You have, so it seems, felt Dionysus shaking the house of Pentheus. But get up, and, take courage, putting a stop to your trembling.

### **Chorus**

Oh greatest light for us in our joyful revelry, how happy I am to see you, I who was alone and desolate before.

### **Dionysus**

**610** Did you despair when I was sent to fall into Pentheus' dark dungeon?

### **Chorus**

Of course. What guardian did I have, if you were to suffer a disaster? But how were you freed from the impious man?

### **Dionysus**

I saved myself easily, without trouble.

### **Chorus**

**615** Did he not tie your hands in binding knots?

### **Dionysus**

In this too I mocked him, since thinking that he was chaining me he neither touched nor handled me, but fed on hopes. He found a bull by the stable where he shut me up, and threw shackles around its legs and hooves, **620** breathing out *thūmos*, dripping sweat from his body, biting his lips. And I, present nearby, sat serenely [*hēsukhos*] and looked on. Meanwhile, Bacchus came; he shook the house and set fire to his mother's tomb. When Pentheus saw this, **625** he ran here and there, thinking that the house was burning, and ordered the slaves to bring water; every servant was at work, toiling in vain.

Then he let this labor drop and, on the grounds that I had escaped, snatching a dark sword he rushed into the house. Then Bromios, so it seems to me—I can only give my opinion— **630** created a phantom in the courtyard. Pentheus rushed at it, stabbing at the shining air, as though slaughtering me. Besides this, Bacchus inflicted other damage on him. He knocked his house to the ground, and everything shattered into pieces, while Pentheus saw how bitter for him were the chains meant for me. **635** Letting slip the sword, he is exhausted from his cut and thrust. For he, a mortal man, dared to fight with a god.

Now I have left the house and come to you serenely [*hēsukhos*], with no thought of Pentheus. But I think—I hear the tramping of feet in the house— he will soon come out to the front of the house. **640** What will he say now? I will suffer him easily, even if he comes boasting greatly. A *sophos* man must practice good temper that is moderate [*sōphrōn*].

*Pentheus enters.*

### **Pentheus**

I have suffered [*paskhein*] a terrible disaster: the stranger, who was recently

imprisoned, has escaped me. Ah! **645** Here is the man. What is this? How do you appear in front of the house, having come out?

**Dionysus**

Stop. Calm down your anger.

**Pentheus**

How have you escaped your chains and come outside?

**Dionysus**

Did I not say—or did you not hear—that someone would deliver me?

**Pentheus**

**650** Who? You are always introducing strange explanations.

**Dionysus**

He who produces the grape vine for mortals.

**Pentheus**

[Pentheus' response is missing.]

**Dionysus**

His glory lies in your scorn.

**Pentheus**

Close up all the towers.

**Dionysus**

Why? Do gods not pass even over walls?

**Pentheus**

**655** You are very *sophos*, at least in all save what you should be *sophos* in.

**Dionysus**

I was born *sophos* in all that I should be.

*A messenger enters.*

Listen first to the words of this man, who has come from the mountain to bring you some message. We will wait; we won't flee.

**Messenger**

**660** Pentheus, ruler of this land of Thebes, I have come from Kithairon, where the bright flakes of white snow never melt.

**Pentheus**

What important news do you bring?

**Messenger**

Having seen the holy Bacchantes, who **665** goaded to madness have darted from this land with their fair feet, I have come to tell you and the *polis*, lord, that they are doing awesome and unbelievable things. I wish to hear whether I should tell you freely the situation there or whether I should repress my report, **670** for I fear, lord, the quickness of your *phrenes*, your keen temper and your overly royal disposition.

### **Pentheus**

Speak, since you will have full immunity from me. It is not right to be angry with the just [*dikaios*]. The more you tell me terrible things about the Bacchantes, **675** the more I will punish this one here who taught the women these tricks.

### **Messenger**

<sup>677</sup> I was just driving the herd up the slope, <sup>678</sup> a herd of cattle, driving them uphill from further downhill, at the time when the sun <sup>679</sup> sends forth its rays, warming the earth. <sup>680</sup> And I see three companies [*thiasoi*] of women's choruses [*choroi*], <sup>681</sup> one of which Autonoe was leading, the second, <sup>682</sup> your mother Agaue, and the third chorus [*choros*], Ino. <sup>683</sup> All were sleeping, their bodies relaxed, <sup>684</sup> some resting their backs on the leaves of fir trees, <sup>685</sup> while others were laying their heads on oak leaves strewn on the ground, <sup>686</sup> lying here and there in a moderate way [*sōphronōs*] and not, as you say, <sup>687</sup> filled with wine in a scene of wine-cups and tunes played on the pipe, <sup>688</sup> and not at all hunting to find Kypris [= Aphrodite] while roaming through the woods on their own.

<sup>689</sup> Then your mother raised the cry of *ololu* as she was <sup>690</sup> standing in the midst of the Bacchantes. She was signaling them to rouse their bodies and awaken from sleep <sup>691</sup> as soon as she heard the lowing of the horned cattle. <sup>692</sup> So they threw potent sleep from their eyes <sup>693</sup> and sprang upright—a marvel [*thauma*] of proper arrangement [*eukosmiā*] to behold <sup>694</sup> —young, old, and still unmarried virgins. <sup>695</sup> First they let their hair loose over their shoulders, <sup>696</sup> and then they re-arranged their fawn-skins, which already had <sup>697</sup> the fastenings of their knots come loose. <sup>698</sup> So they girded these spotted hides with serpents that licked their cheeks, <sup>699</sup> and some women were cradling in their arms a gazelle—or the cubs of wolves— <sup>700</sup> and, holding these wild things, they gave them white milk <sup>701</sup> —I mean, those women who had recently given birth and had their breasts still swollen, <sup>702</sup> having left behind at home their own babies. And they placed on their heads ivy <sup>703</sup> as garlands, and oak, and flowering yew. <sup>704</sup> One took her wand [*thursos*] and struck it against a rock, <sup>705</sup> and out of it a dewy stream of water sprang forth. <sup>706</sup> Another let her wand [*narthēx*] strike the ground of the earth, <sup>707</sup> and there the god sent forth a stream of wine. <sup>708</sup> All who had a desire [*pothos*] for the white drink <sup>709</sup> patted the earth with the tips of their fingers <sup>710</sup> and obtained jets of milk. And from the wands stuffed with ivy, <sup>711</sup> from those wands [*thursoi*] sweet streams of honey were dripping. <sup>712</sup> So, if you [= Pentheus] had been present, then the god whom you now blame— <sup>713</sup> you would have approached him with

prayers, yes, if you had seen these things.

<sup>714</sup> And we herdsmen and shepherds came together [*sun-ēlthomen*] <sup>715</sup> so that we could give each other a competition [*eris*] of words that we had in common, <sup>716</sup> concerning what kinds of terrifying things they do [*drân*], yes, terrifying and worthy of wonder [*thauma*]. Someone, a wanderer about the city and practiced in speaking, said to us all: "You who inhabit the holy plains of the mountains, shall we hunt **720** Pentheus' mother Agaue out from the Bacchic revelry and put the king under obligation [*kharis*] to us?" We agreed to the idea, and lay down in ambush, hiding ourselves in the foliage of bushes. They, at the appointed hour, began to wave the *thyrsos* in their revelries, calling on **725** Iacchus with united voice, the son of Zeus, Bromios. The whole mountain reveled along with them and even the beasts, and nothing was unmoved by their running. Agaue happened to be leaping near me, and I sprang forth to snatch her, **730** abandoning the thicket where I had hidden my body. But she cried out: "My fleet hounds, we are hunted by these men; follow me! Follow armed with your *thyrsoi* in your hands!"

We fled and escaped **735** being torn apart by the Bacchantes, but they, unarmed, sprang on the heifers browsing the grass. You could have seen one rending asunder a fatted lowing calf, while others tore apart cows. **740** You could have seen ribs or cloven hooves tossed all about; caught in the trees they dripped, dabbled in gore. Bulls who formerly with *hubris* showed their fury with their horns had their bodies cut to the ground, **745** dragged down by the countless hands of young girls. The garment of flesh was torn apart faster than you could blink your royal eyes. And aloft like birds in their course, they proceeded along the level plains, which produce the **750** bountiful Theban crops by the streams of the Asopos. Falling like attacking soldiers upon Hysiai and Erythrai, towns situated below Kithairon, they set everything in disorder. They snatched children from their homes. **755** At the same time, whatever they put on their shoulders, whether bronze or iron, was not held on by bonds, but did not fall to the ground. They carried fire on their locks, but it did not burn them. Some people in rage took up arms, being plundered by the Bacchantes, **760** the sight of which was terrible to behold, lord. For the men's pointed spears drew no blood, but the women, hurling the *thyrsoi* from their hands, kept wounding them and turned them to flight—women did this to men, not without the help of some god! **765** They returned to whence they had come, to the very fountains which the god had sent forth for them, and washed off the blood, and snakes cleaned the drops from the women's cheeks with their tongues.

**770** Receive then this *daimōn*, whoever he is, into this *polis*, master. For he is great in other respects, and they say that he even gives to mortals the grape that brings relief from cares. Without wine there is no longer Kypris or any other delightful thing for humans.

### Chorus

**775** I fear to speak freely to the *turannos*, but I will speak nevertheless. Dionysus is

inferior to none of the gods.

### **Pentheus**

Already like fire does this *hubris* of the Bacchae blaze up, a great source of reproach for the Hellenes. **780** But we must not hesitate. Go to the gates of Electra, bid all the shield-bearers and riders of swift horses to assemble, as well as all who brandish the light shield and pluck bowstrings with their hands, so that we can make an assault against the Bacchae. **785** For it is all too much if we suffer [*paskhein*] what we are suffering [*paskhein*] at the hands of women.

### **Dionysus**

Pentheus, though you hear my words you obey not at all. I say that it is not right for me to suffer [*paskhein*] at your hands and for you to raise arms against me the god; you must be serene [*hēsukhos*] instead. **790** Bromios will not allow you to remove the Bacchae from the joyful mountains.

### **Pentheus**

Do not instruct me, but be content in your escape from prison. Or shall I bring punishment upon you again?

### **Dionysus**

As a mortal I would sacrifice to the god rather **795** than kick against the goads in anger.

### **Pentheus**

I will sacrifice, slaughtering the women as they deserve, in the glens of Kithairon.

### **Dionysus**

You will all flee. And it will be a source of shame that you turn your bronze shield in flight from the *thyrsoi* of the Bacchae.

### **Pentheus**

**800** This *xenos* with whom we are wrestling is impossible and will be quiet neither suffering [*paskhein*] nor acting.

### **Dionysus**

Friend, you can still settle this situation satisfactorily.

### **Pentheus**

Doing what? By being a slave to my servants?

### **Dionysus**

Without arms I will bring the women here.

### **Pentheus**

**805** Alas! You are contriving this as a trick against me.

**Dionysus**

What sort of trick is it if I wish to save you?

**Pentheus**

You have conspired in common, so that you may have your revelry forever.

**Dionysus**

I certainly did, with the god, that is.

**Pentheus**

Bring me my armor. And you keep quiet.

**Dionysus**

**810** Wait! Do you wish to see the women sitting in the mountains?

**Pentheus**

Certainly. I'd pay an enormous amount of gold to see them.

**Dionysus**

Why do you want this so badly?

**Pentheus**

I would be sorry to see them in their drunkenness.

**Dionysus**

**815** But would you see gladly what is grievous to you?

**Pentheus**

To be sure, sitting quietly under the pines.

**Dionysus**

But they will track you down, even if you go in secret.

**Pentheus**

You are right; I will go openly.

**Dionysus**

Shall I guide you? Will you attempt the journey?

**Pentheus**

**820** Lead me as quickly as possible. I grudge you the time.

**Dionysus**

Put clothes of eastern linen on your body then.

**Pentheus**

What is this? Shall I then, instead of a man, be reckoned among the women?

**Dionysus**

So that they don't kill you if you appear there as a man.

**Pentheus**

Again you speak correctly; how *sophos* you have been all along.

**Dionysus**

**825** Dionysus gave me this education.

**Pentheus**

How can these things which you advise me so well be done?

**Dionysus**

I will go inside and dress you.

**Pentheus**

In what clothing? Female? But shame [*aidōs*] holds me back.

**Dionysus**

Are you no longer eager to view the Maenads?

**Pentheus**

**830** What attire do you bid me to put on my body?

**Dionysus**

I will spread out your hair at length on your head.

**Pentheus**

What is the second part of my outfit?

**Dionysus**

A robe down to your feet. And you will wear a headband.

**Pentheus**

And what else will you add to this for me?

**Dionysus**

**835** A *thyrsos* in your hand, and dappled fawn-skin.

**Pentheus**

I could not possibly put on a woman's dress.

**Dionysus**

But you will shed blood if you join battle with the Bacchae.

**Pentheus**

True. We must go first and spy.

**Dionysus**

This is more *sophos* than hunting trouble with trouble.

## Pentheus

**840** How will I go through the city without being seen by the Thebans?

## Dionysus

We will go on deserted roads. I will lead you.

## Pentheus

Anything is better than to be mocked by the Bacchae. Let us two go into the house, and I will consider what seems best.

## Dionysus

We can do what we like. I am at your service for anything.

## Pentheus

**845** I will go in. For I will either go bearing arms, or I will obey your guidance.

*He exits.*

## Dionysus

Women, the man is caught in our net. He will reach the Bacchae, where he will pay the penalty [*dikē*] with his death. Dionysus, now it is your task. You are not far off. **850** Let us punish him: first drive him out of his *phrenes*, send upon him a dizzying madness, since if he is of sound *phrenes* he will not consent to wear women's clothing, but he will put it on in insanity. I want him to be a source of laughter to the Thebans, led through the city in **855** women's guise after making such terrible threats in the past. <sup>857</sup> I am going now. The costume [*kosmos*] that he will take with him to the house of Hādēs <sup>858</sup> when he goes off to that place, slaughtered by the two hands of his own mother <sup>859</sup> —that costume will I attach to Pentheus. And he will come to know the son of Zeus, <sup>860</sup> Dionysus, the one who is by his own nature a god in the end [*telos*], <sup>861</sup> the one who is most terrifying [*deinos*], but, for humans, also most gentle [*ēpios*].

## Chorus

*strophe*

<sup>862</sup> Shall I ever, in choruses that last all night long, <sup>863</sup> set in motion my gleaming white <sup>864</sup> foot in a Bacchic revel as I thrust my throat <sup>865</sup> toward the upper air wet with dew, yes, thrusting it forward <sup>866</sup> —just like a fawn playfully <sup>867</sup> skipping around in the green delights of a meadow <sup>868</sup> after she has escaped from the terrifying <sup>869</sup> hunt. Now she is out of reach, <sup>870</sup> having leapt beyond their hunting nets, <sup>871</sup> even while the hunter keeps shouting <sup>872</sup> his hunting cry to his hounds, urging them to run faster and faster. <sup>873</sup> But the fawn, like a gust of wind with the vigor of her swift running, is now bounding past the meadow <sup>874</sup> that has the river next to it, and she can take sweet delight <sup>875</sup> in the absence of mortal men <sup>876</sup> amidst the tender shoots growing in the forest with its shady leaves. What is wisdom [*sophon*]? Or what finer prize do the gods give to

mortals than to hold one's hand **880** in victory over the head of one's enemies? <sup>881</sup>  
Whatever is beautiful [*kalon*] is near and dear [*philon*] forever.

*antistrophe*

Divine strength is roused with difficulty, but is trustworthy nevertheless. It chastises those mortals **885** who give *tīmē* to folly and those who in their insanity do not extol the gods. The gods cunningly conceal the slow foot of time and hunt out the impious. **890** One must not think or practice anything greater than the laws. It costs little to reckon that whatever involves a *daimōn* has power, **895** and that whatever has long been lawful is eternally and naturally so. What is wisdom [*sophon*]? Or what finer prize do the gods give to mortals than to hold one's hand **900** in victory over the head of one's enemies? <sup>901</sup> Whatever is beautiful [*kalon*] is near and dear [*philon*] forever. Fortunate [*eudaimōn*] is he who has fled a storm on the sea and reached harbor. *Eudaimōn* too is he who has overcome his toils. **905** Different people surpass others in various ways, be it in wealth [*olbos*] or in power. Mortals have innumerable hopes, and some come to *telos* in prosperity [*olbos*], while others fail. **910** I deem him blessed whose life is *eudaimōn* day by day.

### Dionysus

<sup>912</sup> You there! Yes, I'm talking to you, to the one who is so eager to see the things that should not be seen <sup>913</sup> and who rushes to accomplish things that cannot be rushed. It is you that I am talking to, Pentheus. <sup>914</sup> Come out from inside the palace. Let me have a good look at you <sup>915</sup> wearing the costume of a woman who is a maenad [*mainas*], a Bacchant [*bakkhē*], <sup>916</sup> ready to spy on your mother and her company.

*Pentheus emerges.*

<sup>917</sup> The way you are shaped, you look just like one of the daughters of Kadmos.

### Pentheus

<sup>918</sup> What is this? I think I see two suns, <sup>919</sup> and not one seven-gated city [*polisma*] of Thebes but two. <sup>920</sup> And, as you are leading me, you look like a bull <sup>921</sup> and horns seem to have sprouted on your head. <sup>922</sup> Were you ever before a beast? You have certainly now become a bull.

### Dionysus

<sup>923</sup> The god accompanies us, though formerly he was not of good intentions [*eu-menēs*]. <sup>924</sup> He has a truce with us, and now you see what you should be seeing.

### Pentheus

**925** So what do I appear [*phainesthai*] to be? Do I not have the dancing pose [*stasis*] of Ino <sup>926</sup> or of Agaue my mother?

### Dionysus

<sup>927</sup> Looking at you I think I see them right now. <sup>928</sup> Oh, but watch out: this lock of hair

[*plokamos*] here is out of place. It stands out, <sup>929</sup> not the way I had secured it, to be held down by the headband [*mitra*].

### **Pentheus**

**930** While I was inside, I was shaking it [= the lock of hair] forward and backward, <sup>931</sup> and, in a Bacchic state of mind [*bakkhiazōn*], I displaced it, moving it out of place.

### **Dionysus**

<sup>932</sup> Then I, whose concern it is to care [*therapeuein*] for you, will <sup>933</sup> arrange it [= the lock hair] all over again. Come on, hold your head straight.

### **Pentheus**

<sup>934</sup> You see it [= the lock of hair]? There it is! You arrange [*kosmeîn*] it for me. I can see I am really depending on you.

### **Dionysus**

**935** And your waistband has come loose. And those things are not in the right order, <sup>936</sup> I mean, the pleats of your robe [*peplos*], the way they extend down around your ankles.

### **Pentheus**

<sup>937</sup> That's the way I see it from my angle as well. At least, that is the way it is down around my right foot, <sup>938</sup> but, on this other side, the robe [*peplos*] does extend in a straight line down around the calf.

### **Dionysus**

<sup>937</sup> I really do think you will consider me the foremost among those who are near and dear [*philoî*] to you <sup>940</sup> when, contrary to your expectations, you see that Bacchants [*bakkhai*] are moderate [= *sōphrones*].

### **Pentheus**

<sup>941</sup> So which one will it be? I mean, shall I hold the wand [*thursos*] with my right hand <sup>942</sup> or with this other one here? Which is the way I will look more like a Bacchant [*bakkhē*]?

### **Dionysus**

<sup>943</sup> You must hold it in your right hand and, at the same time, with your right foot <sup>944</sup> you must make an upward motion. I approve [*aineîn*] of the way you have shifted in your thinking [*phrenes*].

### **Pentheus**

**945** Could I not carry on my shoulders the ridges of Mount Kithairon, <sup>946</sup> Bacchants and all?

### **Dionysus**

<sup>947</sup> You could if you wanted to. Your earlier thoughts [*phrenes*] <sup>948</sup> were not sound, but now they are the way they should be.

### **Pentheus**

<sup>949</sup> Shall we bring levers, or shall I use my hands for lifting, <sup>950</sup> throwing a shoulder or arm under the mountains as I raise them up?

### **Dionysus**

<sup>951</sup> But you must not destroy the dwelling places of the Nymphs <sup>952</sup> and the places where Pan stays, playing on his pipe.

### **Pentheus**

<sup>953</sup> You said it well. It is not by force that my victory over <sup>954</sup> the women should happen. I will hide my body under the shelter of the fir trees.

### **Dionysus**

**955** You will hide yourself by hiding as you should be hidden, <sup>956</sup> coming as a crafty spy on the maenads [*mainades*].

### **Pentheus**

<sup>957</sup> You know, I have this vision of them: there they are in the bushes, like birds in their most beloved [*phila*] hiding places, held in the tight grip of making love.

### **Dionysus**

<sup>959</sup> Yes, and are you not like a guardian who has been sent out to counter exactly this kind of thing? <sup>960</sup> Perhaps you will catch them, unless they beat you to it and you yourself get caught.

### **Pentheus**

<sup>961</sup> Bring me there, let us go there, passing right through the middle of Thebes on our way. <sup>962</sup> I am the only one of those [*Thebans*] who dares to do this.

### **Dionysus**

<sup>963</sup> You alone [*monos*] enter the struggle for the sake of this city [*polis*], you alone [*monos*]. <sup>964</sup> And so the ordeals [*agōnes*] that must happen are awaiting you. <sup>965</sup> Follow me. I am your guide, giving salvation [*sōtērios*]. <sup>966</sup> But then, on the way back, someone else will lead you down from up there.

### **Pentheus**

Yes, it will be my mother.

### **Dionysus**

<sup>967</sup> And you will be a distinctive sign [*epi-sēmon*] to all.

### **Pentheus**

I am going with that objective in mind.

## Dionysus

<sup>968</sup> You will return here being carried—

## Pentheus

You are talking about my desire for luxury [*habrotēs*]

## Dionysus

<sup>969</sup> —in the arms of your mother.

## Pentheus

Yes indeed, in such luxury [*truphē*].

## Dionysus

<sup>970</sup> I am reaching for things I deserve.

## Pentheus

I am undertaking worthy deeds.

## Dionysus

<sup>971</sup> A man of terror [*deinos*] you are, a man of terror [*deinos*], and you are going after experiences [*pathos* plural] that are things of terror [*deina*]. <sup>972</sup> The result will be that you will find a glory [*kleos*] reaching all the way up to the sky. <sup>973</sup> Hold out your hands, Agaue, and you too, her sisters, <sup>974</sup> daughters of Kadmos. The young man is being led by me <sup>975</sup> to this great ordeal [*agōn*] here. <sup>976</sup> And the one who will win the victory—that will be I myself. Bromios [= Dionysus the Thunderer] and I myself will be the victors. What signals [*sēmainein*] it are other things that are yet to happen.

*Dionysus and Pentheus exit.*

## Chorus

*strophe*

Go to the mountain, go, fleet hounds of Madness, where the daughters of Kadmos hold their company, and goad them **980** against the mad spy on the Maenads, the one dressed in women's garb. His mother first will see him from a smooth rock or crag, as he lies in ambush, and she will cry out to the Maenads: **985** "Who is this seeker of the mountain-going Kadmeians who has come to the mountain, to the mountain, Bacchae? Who bore him? For he was not born from a woman's blood, but is the offspring of some lioness **990** or of Libyan Gorgons." Let manifest *dikē* go forth, let it go with sword in hand, slay with a blow through the throat this **995** godless, lawless, unjust, earth-born offspring of Ekhion.

*antistrophe*

He with wicked plan and unjust disposition regarding your rites, Bacchus, and those of your mother, comes with raving heart **1000** and mad disposition to overcome by force [*biā*] what is invincible. The balance [*sōphrosunē*] for his purposes is death, that accepts no excuses when the affairs of the gods are concerned. To act like a mortal—this is a life that is free from pain. **1005** I do not envy the *sophon*, but rejoice in seeking it. But other things are great and manifest. Oh, that life might flow towards the good, cultivating pure and pious things day and night, giving *tīmē* to the gods, **1010** banishing customs outside of *dikē*. Let manifest *dikē* go forth, let it go with sword in hand, slay with a blow through the throat this **1015** godless, lawless, unjust, earth-born offspring of Ekhion.

*epode*

Reveal yourself as a bull or many-headed serpent or raging lion in appearance. **1020** Go, Bacchus, with smiling face throw a deadly noose around the neck of this hunter of the Bacchae as he falls beneath the flock of Maenads.

*A Messenger enters.*

### **Messenger**

House once fortunate in Hellas, **1025** house of the Sidonian old man who once sowed in the ground the earth-born harvest of the serpent Ophis, how I groan for you, though I am but a slave. But still the masters' affairs are of concern to good servants.

### **Chorus**

What's the matter? Do you bring some news from the Bacchae?

### **Messenger**

**1030** Pentheus, the child of Ekhion, is dead.

### **Chorus**

Lord Bacchus, truly you appear to be a great god.

### **Messenger**

What do you mean? Why have you said this? Do you rejoice at the misfortunes of my masters, woman?

### **Chorus**

I, a *xenē*, rejoice in barbarian strains; **1035** no longer do I cower in fear of chains.

### **Messenger**

Do you think Thebes so devoid of men?

### **Chorus**

Bacchus, Bacchus, not Thebes, holds power [*kratos*] over me.

### **Messenger**

You may be forgiven, **1040** but it is not good to rejoice at troubles once they have actually taken place, women.

### **Chorus**

Speak. Tell me what kind of death he died, the man without *dikē*, who contrived things without *dikē*.

### **Messenger**

When we left the settlements of the Theban land and crossed the streams of Asopos, **1045** we began to ascend the heights of Kithairon, Pentheus and I— for I was following my master—and the *xenos*, who was the conductor of our mission. First we sat in a grassy vale, **1050** keeping our feet and voice quiet, so that we might see them without being seen. There was a little valley surrounded by precipices, wet with water, shaded by pine trees, where the Maenads were sitting, their hands busy with delightful labors [*ponoi*]. Some of them were **1055** again crowning the wilted *thyrsos*, making it leafy with ivy, while some, like colts freed from the dappled yoke, were singing a Bacchic tune to one another. Pentheus, that unhappy man, said, not seeing the crowd of women: “*xenos*, **1060** from where we are standing I cannot see these false Maenads. But on the banks of the ravine, ascending a lofty pine, I might view properly the shameful acts of the Maenads.” And then I saw the *xenos* perform a marvel. Seizing hold of the lofty top-most branch of a pine tree, **1065** he drew it down, down, down to the black ground. It was bent just as a bow or a curved wheel, when it is marked out by a compass, describes a circular course; in this way the *xenos* drew the mountain bough and bent it to the earth, doing what no mortal could. **1070** He sat Pentheus down on the pine branch, and released it gently from his hands, taking care not to shake him off. The pine stood firmly upright into the sky, with my master seated on its back. **1075** He was seen by the Maenads more than he saw them. He was just becoming visible sitting on the tree up above, and the *xenos* was no longer anywhere to be seen, when a voice, Dionysus, I guess, cried out from the air: “Young women, **1080** I bring the one who has made you and me and my rites a laughing-stock. Punish him!” And as he said this a light of holy fire was placed between heaven and earth.

The air became quiet and the woody glen **1085** kept its leaves silent, nor would you have heard the sounds of animals. The women, not having heard the sound clearly, stood upright and looked all around. He repeated his order, and when the daughters of Kadmos recognized the clear command of Bacchus, **1090** they—mother Agaue, her sisters, and all other Bacchae—began to move rapidly, no slower than doves, running eagerly with their feet. They leapt through the torrent-streaming valley and mountain cliffs, frantic with the inspiration of the god. **1095** When they saw my master sitting in the pine, first they climbed a rock towering opposite the tree and began to hurl at him large rocks violently thrown. At the same time he was fired upon by branches of fir, and other women hurled their *thyrsoi* through the air **1100** at Pentheus, a sad target

indeed. But they did not reach him, for the wretched man, completely confounded, sat at a height too great for their eagerness. Finally they shattered, as though with a thunder-bolt, some oak branches and began to tear up the roots of the tree with these ironless levers. **1105** When they did not succeed in their toils, Agaue said: "Come, standing round in a circle, seize each a branch, Maenads, so that we may catch this inaccessible beast, and so that he does not make public the secret *khoroï* of the god." They applied countless hands **1110** to the pine and dragged it up from the earth. Pentheus falls crashing to the ground from his lofty seat, wailing greatly; for he knew he was near doom.

His own mother, as priestess, began the slaughter, **1115** and fell upon him. He threw the miter from his head so that wretched Agaue might recognize and not kill him. Touching her cheek, he said: "It is I, mother, your son Pentheus, whom you bore in the house of Ekhion. **1120** Pity me, mother! Do not kill me, your child, for my errors!"

But she, foaming at the mouth and rolling her eyes all about, with her *phrenes* not as they should be, was under the control of Bacchus, and he did not convince her. **1125** Seizing his left arm at the elbow and propping her foot against the unfortunate man's side, she tore out his shoulder, not by her own strength, but with the god providing assistance to her hands. Ino began to work on the other side, **1130** tearing his flesh, while Autonoe and the rest of the crowd pressed on. All were making noise together, and he groaned to the extent that he had life left in him, while they shouted in victory. One of them started to carry an arm, another a leg, boots and all. His ribs were stripped bare **1135** by their tearings. The whole band, hands bloodied, started playing a game of catch with Pentheus' flesh.

His body lies scattered in pieces, parts of him in the rugged rocks, others caught in the deep foliage of the woods; the search for them is not easy. **1140** The miserable head, which his mother happened to take in her hands, she fixed on the end of a *thyrsos* and carries through the midst of Kithairon like that of a wild lion, leaving behind her sisters among the Maenads' *khoroï*. She comes inside these walls, preening herself on the ill-fated prey **1145**, calling upon Bacchus, her fellow hunter, her accomplice in the chase, the victor, in whose service she wins a triumph of tears.

And as for me, I will depart out of the way of this disaster before Agaue reaches the house. **1150** Balance [*sōphroneîn*] and reverence for the affairs of the gods is best. I think this is the most *sophon* possession for mortals' use.

### Chorus

Let us honor Bacchus with the *khoroï*, let us cry out what has happened. **1155** Pentheus, descendant of the serpent, who assumed female garb and beautiful *thyrsos* [*narthēx*]  
— certain death— and a bull was the leader of his calamity. **1160** Kadmeian Bacchae, you have accomplished a glorious victory, but one that brings woe and tears.

It is a fine *agōn* to cover one's dripping hands with the blood of one's own son. **1165**  
But I see Pentheus' mother Agaue coming home, her eyes contorted; receive the  
triumphal procession [*kōmos*] of the god of joy!

*Agaue rushes in, carrying the head of Pentheus.*

**Agaue**

Asian Bacchae . . .

**Chorus**

Why do you urge me?

**Agaue**

We bring home from the mountain a **1170** freshly cut tendril, our blessed prey.

**Chorus**

I see it and will accept you as a fellow member of the procession [*kōmos*].

**Agaue**

I caught this young wild lion cub without snares, **1175** as you can see.

**Chorus**

From what wilderness?

**Agaue**

Kithairon . . .

**Chorus**

Kithairon?

**Agaue**

. . . slew him.

**Chorus**

Who is she who struck him?

**Agaue**

The prize is mine first. **1180** I am called blessed Agaue by the worshippers.

**Chorus**

Who else?

**Agaue**

Kadmos' other . . .

**Chorus**

Kadmos' what?

**Agaue**

Kadmos' other offspring lay hold of this beast after me. This is a lucky catch!

**Chorus**

[The chorus' response is missing.]

**Agaue**

Share in the feast then.

**Chorus**

What? I share in the feast, wretched woman?

**Agaue**

**1185** The bull is young; he has just recently grown a downy cheek under the crest of his hair.

**Chorus**

Yes, his hair looks like a wild beast's.

**Agaue**

Bacchus, a *sophos* huntsman, **1190** wisely set the Maenads against this beast.

**Chorus**

Our lord is hunter.

**Agaue**

Do you approve of this?

**Chorus**

I do.

**Agaue**

Soon the Kadmeians . . .

**Chorus**

**1195** And your son Pentheus, too . . .

**Agaue**

. . . will praise his mother who has caught this lion-like catch.

**Chorus**

Extraordinary.

**Agaue**

And extraordinarily caught.

**Chorus**

Are you proud?

**Agaue**

I am delighted, for I have performed great, great, conspicuous deeds on this hunt.

### **Chorus**

**1200** Now show the citizens, wretched woman, the prize which you have brought in victory.

### **Agae**

You who dwell in this fair-towered city of the Theban land, come to see this catch which we the daughters of Kadmos hunted down, **1205** not with thonged Thessalian javelins, or with nets, but with the white-armed edges of our hands. Should huntsmen boast when they use in vain the work of spear-makers? We caught and **1210** tore apart the limbs of this beast with our very own hands. Where is my old father? Let him approach. Where is my son Pentheus? Let him raise a ladder against the house so that he can ascend and affix to the triglyphs this **1215** lion's head which I have captured and brought back.

*Enter Kadmos and his servants, carrying the remains of Pentheus' body.*

### **Kadmos**

Follow me, carrying the miserable burden of Pentheus, follow me, attendants, before the house. There I am bringing this body of his, exhausted from countless searches, for I discovered it torn apart in the folds of Kithairon. **1220** I picked up nothing in the same place, and it was lying in the woods where discovery was difficult. I heard of my daughters' bold deeds when I had already come within the walls of the city on my return from the Bacchae with old Teiresias. **1225** I turned back to the mountain and now bring back the child who was killed by the Maenads. I saw Autonoe, who once bore Aktaion to Aristaios, and Ino with her, both in the thickets, still mad, wretched creatures. **1230** But someone told me that Agae was coming here with Bacchic foot, and this was correct, for I see her—not a happy [*eudaimōn*] sight!

### **Agae**

Father, you may boast a great boast, that you have sired daughters the best by far of all mortals. **1235** I mean all of them, but myself in particular, who have left my shuttle at the loom and gone on to bigger things: to catch wild animals with my two hands. I carry the trophy of these noble feats [*aristeiā*] in my arms, as you see, **1240** so that it may hang from your house. And you, father, receive it in your hands. Preening yourself in my catch, summon your *philoī* to a feast. For you are blessed, blessed indeed, now that I have performed these deeds.

### **Kadmos**

Oh, *penthos* beyond measuring, one which I cannot stand to see, **1245** since you have committed murder with miserable hands! Having cast down a fine sacrificial victim to the *daimones*, you invite Thebes and me to a banquet. Alas, first for your woes, then for my own! With *dikē*, yet too severely, lord Bromios has destroyed us, **1250** though he is a member of our own family.

**Agaue**

How morose and sullen in its countenance is man's old age. I hope that my son is a good hunter, taking after his mother, when he goes after wild beasts together with the young men of Thebes. **1255** But all he can do is fight with the gods. You must admonish him, father. Who will call him here to my sight, so that he may see how happy [*eudaimōn*] I am?

**Kadmos**

Alas, alas! When you realize what you have done you will suffer a **1260** terrible pain. But if you remain time and again in the state you are in now, though hardly fortunate you will not imagine that you have encountered disaster.

**Agaue**

But what of these matters is not good, or what is painful?

**Kadmos**

First cast your eye to the sky.

**Agaue**

**1265** Well, why did you tell me to look at it?

**Kadmos**

Is it still the same, or does it appear to have changed?

**Agaue**

It is brighter than before and more translucent.

**Kadmos**

Is your *psūkhē* still quivering?

**Agaue**

I don't understand your utterance [*epos*], for I have become somehow **1270** sobered, changing from my former *phrenes*.

**Kadmos**

Can you hear and respond clearly?

**Agaue**

How I forget what I said before, father!

**Kadmos**

To whose house did you come in marriage?

**Agaue**

You gave me, as they say, to Ekhion, one of the Spartoi.

**Kadmos**

**1275** What son did you bear to your husband in the house?

**Agaue**

Pentheus, from my union with his father.

**Kadmos**

Whose head do you hold in your hands?

**Agaue**

A lion's, as they who hunted him down said.

**Kadmos**

Examine it correctly then; it takes but little effort to see.

**Agaue**

**1280** Alas! What do I see? What is this that I carry in my hands?

**Kadmos**

Look at it and learn more clearly.

**Agaue**

I see the greatest pain, wretched that I am.

**Kadmos**

Does it look at all like a lion?

**Agaue**

No, but I, wretched, hold the head of Pentheus.

**Kadmos**

**1285** Mourned by me before you recognized him.

**Agaue**

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

**Kadmos**

Miserable truth [*alētheia*], how inopportunistly you arrive!

**Agaue**

Tell me. My heart leaps awaiting what is to come.

**Kadmos**

You and your sisters killed him.

**Agaue**

**1290** Where did he die? Was it here at home, or in what place?

**Kadmos**

Where formerly dogs divided Aktaion among themselves.

**Agaue**

And why did this miserable man go to Kithairon?

**Kadmos**

He went to mock the god and your revelry.

**Agaue**

But in what way did we go there?

**Kadmos**

**1295** You were mad, and the whole city was frantic with Bacchus.

**Agaue**

Dionysus destroyed us—now I understand.

**Kadmos**

He was wronged with *hubris*: you did not consider him a god.

**Agaue**

And where is the most *philon* body of my child, father?

**Kadmos**

I have tracked it with difficulty and brought it back.

**Agaue**

**1300** Are its joints laid properly together?

**Kadmos**

[Kadmos' response is missing from our text.]

**Agaue**

What part had Pentheus in my folly?

**Kadmos**

He, just like you, did not revere the god, who therefore joined all in one ruin, both you and this one here, and thus destroyed the house and me. **1305** I did not beget male children, and I see this offspring of your womb, wretched woman, most miserably and disgracefully slain. He was the hope of our line— you, child, who supported the house, son of my daughter, **1310** an object of fearful reverence for the *polis*. Seeing you, no one wished to treat the old man with *hubris*, for you would have taken fitting *dikē*. But now I, great Kadmos, who sowed and reaped a most beautiful crop, the Theban people, will be banished from the house without *tīmē*. **1315** Most *philos* of men— though you are dead I still count you among my most *philoī*—child, no longer will you address and embrace me, your mother's father, touching my chin with your hand and **1320** saying: "Who treats you without *dikē* and *tīmē*, old man? Who vexes and troubles your heart? Tell me, father, so that I can punish the one who does you wrong." But now I am miserable, while you are wretched, your mother pitiful, and your relatives wretched. **1325** If anyone scorns the *daimones*, let him look to the

death of this man and acknowledge them.

### **Chorus**

I grieve for you, Kadmos. Your daughter's child has the *dikē* he deserved, but it is grievous to you.

### **Agauē**

Father, you see how much my situation has turned around.

[The next 50 lines are missing, in which Dionysus returns to Thebes triumphant.]

### **Dionysus** *To Kadmos.*

**1330** Changing your form, you will become a dragon, and your wife Harmonia, Arēs' daughter, whom you, though mortal, took in marriage, will be turned into a beast, and will receive in exchange the form of a serpent. And as the oracle of Zeus says, you will drive along with your wife a pair of heifers, ruling over barbarians. **1335** You will sack many cities with a force of countless numbers. And when they plunder the oracle of Apollo, they will have a miserable *nostos*, but Arēs will protect you and Harmonia and will settle your life in the land of the blessed. **1340** So say I, Dionysus, born not from a mortal father, but from Zeus. If you had known how to be balanced [*sōphrōn*] when you did not wish to, you would have acquired Zeus' offspring as an ally, and would now be fortunate [*eudaimōn*].

### **Kadmos**

Dionysus, we beseech you, we have acted without *dikē*.

### **Dionysus**

**1345** You have learned it too late; you did not know it when you should have.

### **Kadmos**

Now we know, but you go too far against us.

### **Dionysus**

I, a god by birth, was insulted by your *hubris*.

### **Kadmos**

Gods should not resemble mortals in their anger.

### **Dionysus**

My father Zeus decreed this long ago.

### **Agauē**

**1350** Alas! A miserable exile has been decreed for us, old man.

### **Dionysus**

Why then do you delay what must necessarily be?

### **Kadmos**

Child, what a terrible misery has befallen us—you, your brothers and sisters, and wretched me. I shall go as an aged immigrant to the barbarians. **1355** Still, it is foretold that I shall bring into Hellas a motley barbarian army. I, leading their spears, endowed with the fierce nature of a serpent, will lead my wife Harmonia, daughter of Arēs, against the altars and tombs of Hellas. **1360** I will neither rest from my evils in my misery, nor will I sail over the downward-flowing Acheron and be at peace [*hēsukhos*].

**Agaue**

O father, I will go into exile deprived of you.

**Kadmos**

Why do you embrace me with your hands, child, **1365** like a white swan does its exhausted parent?

**Agaue**

Where can I turn, banished from my fatherland?

**Agaue**

Farewell, home! Farewell, *polis* of my forefathers! In misfortune I leave you, an exile from my bedchamber.

**Kadmos**

**1370** Go now, child, to the land of Aristaios.

**Agaue**

I bemoan you, father.

**Kadmos**

And I you, child, and I weep for your sisters.

**Agaue**

Terribly indeed has **1375** lord Dionysus brought this suffering to your home.

**Dionysus**

I suffered [*paskhein*] terrible things at your hands, and my name was without honor in Thebes.

**Agaue**

Farewell, my father.

**Kadmos**

Farewell, **1380** unhappy daughter. With difficulty indeed would you reach this “faring well”!

**Agaue**

Lead me, escorts, where I may take comfort in my pitiful sisters as companions to my

exile. May I go where accursed Kithairon may not see me, **1385** nor I see Kithairon with my eyes, nor where a memorial of a Bacchic *thyrsos* has been dedicated; let these concern other Bacchae.

### **Chorus**

Many are the forms of things of the *daimones*, and the gods bring many things to pass unexpectedly. **1390** What is expected does not come to *telos*, and a god finds a way for the unexpected. So too has this affair turned out.

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