

THE FOCUS CLASSICAL LIBRARY  
Series Editors • James Clauss and Stephen Esposito

Aristophanes: Acharnians • Jeffrey Henderson  
Aristophanes: The Birds • Jeffrey Henderson  
Aristophanes: Clouds • Jeffrey Henderson  
Aristophanes: Frogs • Henderson  
Aristophanes: Lysistrata • Jeffrey Henderson  
Aristophanes: Three Comedies: Acharnians, Lysistrata, Clouds • Jeffrey Henderson  
Euripides: The Bacchae • Stephen Esposito  
Euripides: Four Plays: Medea, Hippolytus, Heracles, Bacchae • Stephen Esposito, ed.  
Euripides: Hecuba • Robin Mitchell-Boyask  
Euripides: Heracles • Michael R. Halleran  
Euripides: Hippolytus • Michael R. Halleran  
Euripides: Medea • Anthony Podlecki  
Euripides: The Trojan Women • Diskin Clay  
Golden Verses: Poetry of the Augustan Age • Paul T. Alessi  
Golden Prose in the Age of Augustus • Paul T. Alessi  
Hesiod: Theogony • Richard Caldwell  
Hesiod: Theogony & Works and Days • Stephanie Nelson  
The Homeric Hymns • Susan Shelmerdine  
Ovid: Metamorphoses • Z. Philip Ambrose  
Plautus: Captivi, Amphitryon, Casina, Pseudolus • David Christenson  
Roman Lives • Brian K. Harvey  
Sophocles: Antigone • Ruby Blondell  
Sophocles: Electra • Hanna M. Roisman  
Sophocles: King Oidipous • Ruby Blondell  
Sophocles: Oidipous at Colonus • Ruby Blondell  
Sophocles: Philoktetes • Seth Schein  
Sophocles: The Theban Plays • Ruby Blondell  
Terence: Brothers (Adelphoe) • Charles Mercier  
Vergil: The Aeneid • Richard Caldwell

## EURIPIDES: FOUR PLAYS

MEDEA  
HIPPOLYTUS  
HERACLES  
BACCHAE

TRANSLATION WITH NOTES  
AND INTRODUCTION

STEPHEN ESPOSITO, EDITOR  
BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Copyright © 2004 Stephen Esposito

Cover: Brygos Painter (5th BCE). Maenad (Bacchant), Attic Wine Cup, 490 BCE. Staatliche Antikensammlung, Munich, Germany. Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

ISBN 978-1-58510-048-4  
ISBN 10 1-58510-048-X

15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5

This book is published by Focus Publishing, R. Pullins & Company, Inc., PO Box 369, Newburyport MA 01950. All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, by photocopying, recording, or by any other means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Focus Classical Library  
Focus Publishing  
R. Pullins Company  
Newburyport MA

0909TS

---

# BACCHAE

Translation and notes by Stephen Esposito

## CHARACTERS

- AGAVE, mother of Pentheus, leader of the Theban Bacchae  
CADMUS, grandfather of Pentheus and Dionysus; father of Agave; founder and former king of Thebes  
CHORUS, fifteen Bacchae (frenzied female worshippers of Dionysus) from Lydia (in Asia Minor); also called "maenads" (mad-women)  
DIONYSUS, (= "The Stranger"): son of immortal Zeus and mortal Semele; first cousin of Pentheus; appears both as a god (1-63 and 1329-51) and as a human, i.e. as the disguised Lydian "Stranger" (434-518, 604-861, 912-976)  
MESSENGER #1, herdsman from Thebes  
MESSENGER #2, slave of Pentheus  
PENTHEUS, son of Agave and Echion; first cousin of Dionysus; successor to his grandfather Cadmus as king of Thebes; probably 18-20 years old  
SOLDIER, one of Pentheus' guards  
TIRESIAS, blind old prophet of Thebes

*Setting: The time is the heroic past before the Trojan War, in the third generation after the founding of Thebes. The scene is the palace of King Pentheus on the acropolis of seven-gated Thebes, one of the most powerful cities of Mycenaean Greece. Thebes was also a center of Dionysiac cult and a chief city of Boeotia ("Cow-land"), a region of central Greece; the city was dominated to the south by Mt. Cithaeron, some ten miles away.*

*The wooden facade of Pentheus' palace forms the back-drop at center stage and shows several Doric columns supporting an entablature (591, 1214). To one side is a fenced-in, vine-covered sanctuary containing the tomb of Semele (Dionysus' mother) and the smouldering ruins of her house (7-12).*

## PROLOGUE

*Enter Dionysus, stage left, disguised as an exotic young holy man from Asia; he carries a thyrsus,<sup>o</sup> wears a smiling mask, fawnskin cloak and ivy wreath.*

### DIONYSUS

I have come to this land of Thebes as the son of Zeus. 1  
Dionysus is my name. Semele, the daughter of Cadmus,

---

1 *Thyrsus*: A long, light fennel-stalk crowned with a bundle of ivy.

gave me birth after being forced into labor by fiery lightning.  
 Exchanging my divinity for human form I have arrived  
 at Dirce's streams and the waters of Ismenus.<sup>5</sup> 5  
 I see the tomb of my thunder-struck mother here  
 near the palace and the fallen ruins of her house  
 smouldering with the still living flames of Zeus' blast,  
 a memorial of Hera's undying hybris<sup>6</sup> against my mother. 10  
 I praise Cadmus who keeps this ground untrodden,  
 a shrine for his daughter. But it was I who covered her sanctuary  
 all around with the grape-vine's clustering foliage.  
 After leaving the gold-rich fields of the Lydians  
 and Phrygians, I moved on to Persia's sun-parched plateaux  
 and Bactra's walls and the bleak land 15  
 of the Medes<sup>7</sup> and opulent Arabia  
 and all of Asia Minor whose parts hug the salty sea  
 with beautifully-towered cities  
 full of Greeks and barbarians mixed together.  
 I first came to this Greek city 20  
 only after I had roused to dancing all those Asian lands  
 and established my rites there so that I might be seen by mortals as a  
 god.  
 It was this very Thebes, of all the Greek lands, that I first incited  
 to female shrieks of ecstasy, wrapping her in fawnskins,  
 putting into her hands the thyrsus, my ivy javelin. 25  
 I did this because my mother's sisters, of all people,<sup>8</sup>  
 denied that I, Dionysus, was begotten from Zeus. Semele, they say,  
 was seduced by some mortal but then, by Cadmus' clever contrivance,  
 she charged the error of her bed to Zeus. For this reason,  
 because Semele had lied about her union with the god, 30  
 her three sisters sneered that Zeus had killed her.  
 To punish that slander I myself stung those same sisters,<sup>9</sup>  
 hounding them from their homes with fits of frenzy so that now,  
 knocked out of their senses, they make their homes on Mt. Cithaeron.<sup>10</sup>

5 Dirce and Ismenus: The two small rivers of Thebes. Dionysus was washed in the waters of Dirce at the time of his birth (cp. 519-22).

9 Hera: Zeus' seventh and permanent wife. She was bitterly jealous of her husband's frequent affairs. For an example of Hera's jealousy, see *Heracles* 840 and 1308-10.

16 Medes: Inhabitants of Media (Asia), southwest of the Caspian Sea.

26 Semele's sisters (= Dionysus' aunts): Agave, Autonoe, and Ino.

32-37 *Dionysus' opening act of war*: This begins the play's action. All Thebes' women are driven into a frenzy and onto the mountain. *The play, then, takes place in a city without women* (except for the chorus of Asian maenads in the orchestra) until Agave's entry at 1168.

34 Cithaeron: A mountain sacred to Dionysus, ten miles south of Thebes.

I forced them to wear the vestments of my mysteries 35  
 and the entire female seed of Cadmeians, all who were women,  
 I drove from their homes in madness. Mingled together  
 with Cadmus' daughters, the women of Thebes sit beneath green firs  
 on roofless rocks. For this city must learn well,  
 even if it doesn't want to learn, that it is still uninitiated in my bacchic  
 rites. 40  
 I must vindicate my mother Semele  
 by revealing myself to mortals as the god whom she bore to Zeus.  
 Cadmus, then, has passed the power and privileges of his monarchy  
 to the son of his daughter Agave. But that one, Pentheus,  
 fights against the gods by fighting against me. He thrusts me away 45  
 from his libations and mentions me nowhere in his prayers.  
 For this reason I shall show him and all Thebans  
 that I am a god. After setting matters here in order  
 I will move on to another land, revealing myself there too.  
 But if the city of Thebans, with wrath and weapons, 50  
 seeks to drive the Bacchae down from the mountain  
 I will wage war on the city, marshalling my army of maenads.<sup>11</sup>  
 For this reason I have changed my appearance to a mortal one  
 and transformed my shape into the nature of a man.

*Dionysus turns and addresses the entering chorus; they show no sign of hearing him.*

Hail, my sisterhood of worshippers,<sup>12</sup> you who left Mt. Tmolus,<sup>13</sup> 55  
 bulwark of Lydia, women I wooed from foreign lands.  
 Comrades in rest, companions of the road,  
 raise up those drums native to Phrygia's cities,  
 the invention of mother Rhea<sup>14</sup> and myself.  
 Surround this royal house of Pentheus! 60  
 Strike your drums so that Cadmus' city may come to see!  
 Meanwhile I shall hasten to the folds of Mt. Cithaeron  
 to join the choral dances of my Theban Bacchae.

*Exit Dionysus, stage left, towards Cithaeron; enter Chorus, orchestra left,*

52 *Maenads* ("frenzied women") are the same as Bacchae ("female devotees of Bacchus"), though the term *maenads* (occurring mainly in the play's second half) highlights their frenzy.

55 "*Sisterhood of worshippers*": *Thiasos* is the religious term for cult groups devoted to Dionysus.

55 Tmolus: Mountain in Asia Minor, sacred (64) to Dionysus.

59 Rhea: A Greek goddess (a Titan, sister and wife of Kronos, and mother of Zeus) who is here identified with the Asiatic goddess Cybele, the great Mother Goddess of Phrygia in Asia Minor.

wearing dresses, fawnskins and (probably) turbans. Each bacchant carries a tambourine-like drum.

## CHORAL ENTRANCE SONG°

## PRELUDE

From the land of Asia I hasten, leaving behind Tmolus, sacred mountain,  
swift in my sweet toiling for Bromios the Roaring God° 65  
wearied but not wearied,  
praising Bacchus, crying out "euoi."°  
Who is in the street, in the street?°  
Who is in the palace? Let him come outside to watch.  
Let everyone keep their lips pure in holy silence.° I shall forever sing 70  
in Dionysus' honor the hymns that custom has prescribed.

## HYMN TO DIONYSUS

## STROPHE 1

O blessed is he who, happy in his heart,°  
knows the initiation rites of the gods,°  
purifies his life and  
joins his soul to the cult group,° 75  
dancing on the mountains, with holy purifications  
celebrating the Bacchic rituals.  
O blessed the man who dutifully observes  
the mysteries of the Great Mother, Cybele.°  
Swinging high the thyrsus 80  
and crowned in ivy°

*FIRST CHORAL SONG (64-169):* The chorus of fifteen Asiatic Bacchae now enters the orchestra. The young, vigorous women, in their maenadic costumes and masks, sing and dance excitedly to the music of a reed-piper.

65 *Bromios* ("the Roarer"): A cult name of Dionysus (22x in the *Bacchae*).

67 "Euoi": An exclamation of joy used in the cult of Dionysus to praise the god.

68 "Who is in the street, in the street?" is one of this song's three cultic formulas (cp. 83, 152; 116, 165).

70 Reverential silence customarily preceded ritual acts such as this "cultic" entrance by the chorus.

72-77 *Prerequisites for Dionysiac happiness:* a) knowledge of the mysteries; b) living a pure life; c) initiation into the *thiasos*; d) participation in the mountain rituals honoring Dionysus.

73 Knowledge of the Dionysiac mysteries was secret except to initiates.

75 *Joining one's soul (psyche) to the cult group (thiasos):* refers to the soul's union with god or to a loss of the self as a result of the merging of individual with group consciousness as physical exhaustion is translated into physical well-being.

79 Cybele: An Asiatic goddess worshipped in Asia Minor as the 'Great Mother' of all living things.

81 Ivy: Being "ever-green" ivy symbolized the vine god's vigor and vitality.

he serves Dionysus.

Onward you Bacchae, onward Bacchae,°  
escort the roaring Bromios home,  
a god and the son of a god! Escort him 85  
down from the Phrygian mountains into Greece's wide-wayed streets,  
streets wide for dancing, Bromios the Roaring God!

## ANTISTROPHE 1

At that time when Dionysus' mother was pregnant°  
Zeus' thunder flew down  
forcing her into the pangs of labor. 90  
She thrust the child from her womb prematurely  
and was herself slain by the bolt of lightning.  
Immediately Zeus, the son of Cronus,  
received the baby in his own birth chambers  
concealing it in his thigh. 95  
Stitching his leg back together  
with golden clasps  
he hid the infant from Hera.  
When the Fates ordained it°  
Zeus gave birth to a bull-horned god 100  
and crowned him with crowns of snakes.  
This is why maenads fling round in their hair  
beast-eating snakes, the spoil of their hunting.

## STROPHE 2

O Thebes, nurse of Semele, 105  
crown yourself with ivy!  
Abound, abound  
with rich berry-laden evergreen creepers!  
Rave with bacchic frenzy  
carrying your branches of oak or fir! 110  
Crown your garments of dappled deerskin  
with the fleece of white wool!  
Make the violent fennel-wands holy all round!°

83 Another ritual cry, like "Who is in the street?" (68); it recurs at 152-53.

88-98 *Zeus' two male pregnancies:* Besides giving birth to Dionysus from his thigh, Zeus gave birth to Athena from his head.

99 The Fates: The three spinning sisters who regulated each individual's life.

113 *Potential violence of the thyrsus:* Of this paradoxical sentence Dodds (82) writes: "The startling conjunction of *holiness* and *violence (hybris)* expresses the dual aspect of Dionysiac ritual as an act of controlled violence in which dangerous natural forces are subdued to a religious purpose. The thyrsus is the vehicle of these forces; its touch can work beneficent miracles (704 ff.), but can also inflict injury (762)...."

Immediately the whole land will dance  
whenever the roaring Bromios leads the bands of revellers 115  
to the mountain, to the mountain °  
where the female mob waits  
driven away from their looms and shuttles  
stung by the goad of Dionysus.

## ANTISTROPHE 2

O secret chamber of the Kouretes ° 120  
and holy haunts of Crete,  
haunts where Zeus was born,  
where in their caves the triple-crested Korybantes  
invented for me this cylinder  
covered with tightly stretched hide. 125  
During the intense bacchic dancing they mixed its sound  
with the sweet-humming breath of Phrygian reed-pipes  
putting the drum into Mother Rhea's hands  
to beat out time for the joyous cries of the Bacchae.  
From the divine Mother the frenzied Satyrs ° 130  
won the instrument for themselves  
and joined it to the dances  
of the biennial festivals  
in which Dionysus delights. °

## EPODE

Sweet is the pleasure the god brings us in the mountains ° 135  
when from the running revellers  
he falls to the ground clad in his sacred fawnskin. Hunting  
the blood of slaughtered goats for the joy of devouring raw flesh  
he rushes through the mountains of Lydia, of Phrygia.  
Hail to the Roaring God, Bromios our leader! Euoi! 140  
The ground flows with milk,  
flows with wine,

116 *Mountain as the place for the activity of the Maenads: 'To the mountain, to the mountain'* is another cultic formula (cp. 68, 83); it recurs at 165, 977, 987.

120 Kouretes: The male devotees of Rhea Cybele; similarly the Korybantes of line 123.

130 Satyrs: Immortal fertility spirits of the wild who were hybrids of man and beast.

134 Every other year at Delphi, in the uplands of Mt. Parnassus, a night festival in mid-winter was held in which women danced under torch-light in honor of Dionysus

135-39 *The three key elements of Dionysiac ritual*: a) going to the mountain to dance (*oreibasia*), which took place only in the winter; b) tearing-to-pieces an animal's body (*sparagmos*); c) devouring the animal's raw flesh (*omo-phagia*).

flows with the nectar of bees.  
The Bacchic One, ° lifting high  
the bright-burning flame of the pine-torch, 145  
like the smoke of Syrian frankincense,  
springs up and rushes along with his wand of fennel.  
Running and dancing he incites any wanderers,  
shakes them with shouts of joy  
tossing his luxuriant locks to the wind. 150  
Amidst the cries of "euoi" he roars out:  
"Onward you Bacchae,  
Onward Bacchae,  
glittering pride of gold-flowing Mt. Tmolus. °  
Sing and dance for Dionysus 155  
as the rumbling drums roar!  
Glorify him joyously!  
"Euoi, euoi!" Yes, sing out  
your Phrygian incantations.  
As the holy flute 160  
roars holy hymns,  
glorify him, maenads,  
as you climb  
to the mountain,  
to the mountain!" 165  
Sweetly rejoicing, then,  
like a filly grazing with her mother,  
the bacchant leaps  
swift and nimble on her feet.

## ACT I °

*Enter Tiresias slowly and without escort, stage right; he wears a white mask and is dressed like a bacchant, carrying a thyrsus and sporting a fawnskin cloak.*

144 "The Bacchic One" is Dionysus himself.

154 'Gold-flowing Mt. Tmolus' refers to the gold dust carried down Tmolus into the Pactolus, a tributary of the Hermus River in central Asia Minor.

ACT I (170-369): Thebes' two most prominent authorities, the old "believers" Tiresias and Cadmus (city seer and city founder), encounter the young sceptic Pentheus (king). Act I sets the stage for the main event, the fierce power struggle of Acts II, III, and IV (434-976). The two outer scenes (170-214 = 45 lines, 330-369 = 40 lines) frame the longer center episode (215-329 = 115 lines) which features the contest between the young prince and Apollo's blind old prophet.

**TIRESIAS** (*knocking at the palace door*)

Who is at the gates? Call Cadmus from the palace, 170  
Agenor's son, who, after leaving the city of Sidon,<sup>o</sup>  
fenced this citadel of Thebes with ramparts.

*The door opens and a servant appears.*

Let someone go and announce that Tiresias is looking for him.  
He knows why I have come and what arrangements I have made. 175  
Though I'm an old man and he still older, we will twine together thyrsi  
and wear fawnskin cloaks and crown our heads with shoots of ivy.

*Enter Cadmus from the palace, also dressed like a bacchant.*

**CADMUS**

O dearest friend, how delighted I was to hear the wise voice  
of a wise man when I was in the palace.  
I have come prepared, wearing these trappings of the god. 180  
As vigorously as we can we must exalt Dionysus to greatness  
since he is my daughter's son [who has revealed himself as a god among  
men.]

Where must we go to dance?  
Where ply our feet?  
Where shake our grey heads? 185  
Old man to old man, instruct me, Tiresias. You're the expert.  
I won't tire, day or night,  
striking the ground with my thyrsus.  
Gladly we've forgotten that we're old men.

**TIRESIAS**

Then you experience the same excitement I do.<sup>o</sup>  
For I, too, feel young and will try to dance. 190

**CADMUS**

Then shall we not take a chariot to the mountain?

**TIRESIAS**

But if we don't go on foot, the god wouldn't be honored in the same way.

**CADMUS**

Shall I lead you, one old man guiding another, like a tutor does a child?

171 Sidon: A major port city of Phoenicia (modern Syria) ruled by Agenor.

189-214 *Opening dialogue of Tiresias and Cadmus.* The point here is "to exhibit a Dionysiac miracle of rejuvenation: by the magic of the god they are filled for a time with 'a mysterious strength and exaltation'.... If the old men are filled with power, it should be because they are filled with faith. But Cadmus at least is not filled with faith, only with a timid worldliness. His real creed is 'the solidarity of the family.'" (Dodds 90)

**TIRESIAS**

The god will lead us there without toil.

**CADMUS**

And will we be the only men in the city to dance in honor  
of Bacchus? 195

**TIRESIAS**

Yes, since only we reason well. The rest are fools!

**CADMUS** (*finally yielding*)

We're tarrying too long. Come on, take hold of my hand.

**TIRESIAS** (*stretching out his hand*)

Here, then. Let's join hands so we make a pair.

**CADMUS**

Since I'm a mortal, I'll not despise the gods.

**TIRESIAS** (*taking Cadmus' hand*)

We don't use clever subtleties on the gods. 200  
For there is no argument that throws down the ancestral traditions,  
those we received from our fathers, possessions as old as time itself.  
No, not even the cleverness schemed up by the sharpest minds!

**CADMUS**

Will someone say that I show no respect for old age  
just because I intend to dance all decked out in ivy wreaths? 205

**TIRESIAS**

No! For the god has not determined whether it is the young  
or the old who must dance. On the contrary,  
he wishes to receive honors in common from everyone  
counting nobody out in his desire to be exalted.

*Enter Pentheus, stage left, in a hurry; he is dressed in his royal robes and attended by guards.<sup>o</sup>*

**CADMUS**

Since you can't see this light of day, Tiresias, 210  
my words will proclaim for you what is going on.  
Here comes Pentheus, Echion's son, running towards the house.  
It is to him that I have entrusted the power of this land.  
How flustered he is! What calamity, I wonder, will he report?

**PENTHEUS<sup>o</sup>** (*at first not noticing Cadmus and Tiresias*)

While I happened to be out of the country 215

215 *Pentheus' age:* About 18-20 years; he is "a young man" at 274, 974.

215-62 *Pentheus' monologue as a second prologue,* "a counter-manifesto to the first (prologue) - having heard the god's programme of action, we now listen to man's." (Dodds 97)

I heard about strange new evils throughout the city —  
 that our women have abandoned their homes  
 for the sham revelries of Bacchus  
 frisking about on the dark-shadowed mountains  
 honoring with their dances the latest god, Dionysus, whoever he is. 220  
 They've set up their mixing bowls brimming with wine  
 amidst their cult gatherings and each lady slinks off in a different  
 direction  
 to some secluded wilderness to service the lusts of men.  
 They pretend to be maenads performing sacrifices  
 but in reality they rank Aphrodite's pleasures before Bacchus! 225  
 I've shackled with chains all those I captured  
 and thrown them into the public jails where my soldiers keep guard.  
 And all those who remain at large, I'll hunt down from the mountains°  
 [Ino and Agave, who bore me to Echion,  
 and Actaeon's mother, I mean Autonoe.] 230  
 After fastening them tight in nets of iron  
 I'll put a stop quickly to their destructive bacchic revelry.  
 They say, too, that some stranger has come here  
 a quack dealer in spells from the land of Lydia  
 his long locks and golden curls all sweet-smelling 235  
 his cheeks dark as wine, his eyes full of Aphrodite's charms.  
 Day and night he surrounds himself with young girls  
 alluring them with his mysteries of joy.  
 But if I capture him within this land  
 I'll put a stop to his beating the thyrsus and tossing his hair. 240  
 In fact I'll cut his head right off his body!  
 This is the guy who claims that Dionysus is *a god*.  
 Indeed he claims that Dionysus was once sewn into Zeus' thigh.  
 The truth is that Dionysus was incinerated by fiery lightning  
 along with his mother Semele because she had lied about her union  
 with Zeus. Aren't these terrible slanders worthy of hanging? 245  
 What outrageous acts of hybris this stranger commits, whoever he is!  
*Pentheus, as he turns to enter the palace, finally notices Cadmus and Tiresias.*  
 But here's another wonder. I see the sign-reader,  
 Tiresias, outfitted in dappled fawnskins  
 and my own mother's father. How completely laughable, 250  
 revelling about with his thyrsus like a bacchant!  
 I am ashamed, sir, to see your old age so devoid of common sense.  
 Won't you shake off that ivy!

228 *Pentheus as a hunter*: The image is frequent (e.g. 839, 871, 960, 1022).

Won't you get your hands free of that thyrsus, grandfather?  
*Turning abruptly from Cadmus to Tiresias.*  
 It's you, Tiresias, who have persuaded him to this folly. 255  
 By introducing yet another new divinity to mankind, you hope  
 for more augury from the birds and more money from reading the omens  
 in the sacrificial fires.° If hoary old age weren't protecting you  
 you'd be sitting in chains with the rest of the Bacchae  
 for importing these sinister rituals. For whenever the liquid joy° 260  
 of the grape comes into women's festivals, then, I assure you,  
 there's nothing wholesome in their rites.  
**CHORUS LEADER**  
 What impiety! Don't you respect the gods, stranger?  
 Don't you respect Cadmus who sowed the earth-born crop?°  
 Are you, the son of Echion, going to shame his race? 265  
**TIRESIAS** (*letting go of Cadmus' hand*)  
 Whenever a wise man sets out to argue an honest case  
 it's no great undertaking to argue well.  
 Your tongue runs smooth like a wheel, as if you were a man of reason,  
 but your words reveal no reason.  
 If he behaves recklessly, an able and articulate man 270  
 turns out to be a bad citizen because he lacks good sense.  
 Now as for this new god whom your laughter mocks  
 I couldn't describe his greatness and how powerful he'll be  
 throughout Greece. For there are two things, young man,  
 that are the primary elements among humans. First there's the goddess  
 Demeter. 275  
 She's the earth but you can call her by whatever name you wish.°  
 She nourishes mortals with dry foods. But he who came afterward,  
 Semele's offspring, invented the wet drink of the grape  
 as a counter-balance to Demeter's bread. He introduced it°  
 to mortals to stop their sorrow and pain. 280  
 Whenever men are filled with the stream of the grape-vine  
 they can sleep and forget the evils of the day.

257 That money motivated prophets is a common charge in tragedy.

260-61 Pentheus implies that the maenads intoxicate themselves with wine. This insinuation is not true (686-88); the maenads preferred water and milk (704-10).

264 *Cadmus and the myth of the Sown Men*: Cadmus slew the dragon guarding Thebes and sowed its teeth, from which, miraculously, sprang earth-born warriors ("the sown men") with whose help he founded the city.

276 Demeter as Earth Goddess: Tiresias is referring here to the fact that many Greeks derived the name "De-meter" from *ge meter* which means "earth mother."

279-80 *Dionysus as the inventor of wine*: Bread and wine, the two staples of the ancient Mediterranean diet, were the gifts of Demeter and Dionysus respectively.

No other medicine alleviates human suffering.  
 Dionysus, being a god, is poured out as a libation to the gods  
 so that it is through him that men receive blessings. 285  
 Furthermore, why do you laugh at him and the story  
 that he was sewn into Zeus' thigh? I'll teach you how elegant this is.  
 When Zeus snatched the infant from the fiery thunderbolt and carried  
 him  
 up to Mt. Olympus as a god, Hera wanted to throw the child out of  
 heaven.  
 But Zeus contrived a counter-scheme such as only a god could devise.  
 Breaking off a part of the sky that encircles the earth he fashioned one  
 piece 291  
 into a dummy Dionysus. Using this as an offering of peace  
 Zeus palmed off the dummy as the real thing to Hera, thus pacifying  
 her hostility.<sup>o</sup> Over time humans, changing the word sky,  
 have come to say that he was sown in Zeus' thigh. 295  
 This story was invented because people couldn't believe  
 that Dionysus, a god, had once been held hostage to Hera, a goddess.  
 This god is a mantic prophet too. For Bacchic revelry  
 and mania produce much mantic power:<sup>o</sup>  
 whenever this god comes into the body in full force 300  
 he makes the frenzied foretell the future.  
 He also shares some of Ares' bellicose spirit;  
 for fear and mania spread panic through a marching militia  
 dispersing the battle formation before it ever even touches the spear:  
 this, too, comes from Dionysus. 305  
 One day you will even see him on the cliffs of Delphi  
 bounding with pine torches across the plateau between Parnassus' twin  
 peaks  
 brandishing and shaking his Bacchic wand.  
 He shall be made mighty throughout Greece. So obey me, Pentheus.  
 Don't be so sure that force is what dominates human affairs 310  
 nor if you have an opinion but that opinion is sick, imagine that your  
 opinion

294 Tiresias appears as a kind of 'theological sophist.' His string of puns here ("piece...peace, sky...thigh") is the most remarkable etymological argument in the 350 year span of archaic and classical Greek literature (Stanford 175). Despite Tiresias' claim (200) that he is not using cleverness (*sophia*) on the gods, he does present himself as the worst sort of sophist, combining a certain religious conservatism with a flare for relativism that was so popular in the late fifth century.

299 Tiresias again makes an etymological connection, this time between 'madness' (*mania*) and "mantic" (*mantis*, "seer"). The mantic "sees" because he is driven mad by some higher power.

makes you somehow wise. Accept the god into this land and pour libations to him!  
 Become a bacchant and crown your head with a wreath!  
 It is not Dionysus who will force women to be self-controlled<sup>o</sup>  
 in Aphrodite's realm. No, their chastity resides in their nature.<sup>o</sup> 315  
 [Self-control in all things always depends on character.]  
 Just consider the facts. For even in the revelries of Bacchus  
 the self-controlled woman, at least, will not be corrupted.  
 You see how you rejoice whenever the crowds gather  
 at the palace gates and the city glorifies the name of Pentheus. 320  
 Dionysus too, I am sure, takes delight in receiving honor.  
 So I, for one, and Cadmus, whom your laughter mocks,  
 both of us will crown ourselves with ivy and dance,  
 a grey-haired old pair. But still we must dance.  
 Nor will I fight against the gods because I've been pressured 325  
 by your words. For you are most painfully mad so that  
 neither with drugs nor without them could you cure your disease.

CHORUS LEADER

Old man, you do not shame Apollo by your words.  
 Indeed, by honoring the great god Bromios, you reveal your wisdom.

CADMUS

My son, Tiresias has advised you well. 330  
 Live with us rather than outside the law.  
 For now you flutter about and think without thinking well.  
 Even if this god does not exist, as you claim,  
 let him be considered a god in your eyes. Lie for a good cause,  
 say that he *is* Semele's child. In this way she might seem 335  
 to have given birth to a god and honor might accrue to our entire family.<sup>o</sup>  
 You see the horrific death of Actaeon,<sup>o</sup>  
 how the dogs he bred ripped him to pieces  
 and ate his raw flesh after he boasted in the mountain meadows

314-18 *Dionysus as beyond good and evil?* Tiresias is responding to Pentheus' charge (at 222-25) of the maenads' sexual immorality. As Dodds (111) observes, "Dionysus is not immoral; he is non-moral—morality is irrelevant to religion of the Dionysiac type...."

315 *What determines human ethics?* "It is *physis* [personal character], not *nomos* [social convention] that determines conduct.... Here once more Teiresias speaks the language of the fifth century and thinks in terms popularized by the Sophistic movement." (Dodds 111).

336 It is family pride, not truth, that motivates Cadmus, thus calling to mind Plato's observation: "There are many who carry the thyrsus but few who are devotees of Bacchus." (*Phaedo* 69c)



that he was better than Artemis at hunting with hounds. 340  
Don't let that happen to *you*.

*Holding an ivy wreath out for Pentheus.*

Come here. Let me crown you with ivy.  
Join us in giving honor to the god.

**PENTHEUS** (*pulling back quickly*)

Get your hand away from me! Go play the revelling bacchant  
but don't wipe that folly of yours off on me!  
I'm going to punish this teacher of your mindlessness. 345

*Turning to his attendants.*

Guard, off quickly!  
Go to the seat where this seer here reads his birds.  
Tear it up with crowbars.  
Turn the whole place upside down!  
Toss his sacred woolen wreaths to the blowing winds. 350  
Then he'll really feel my sting!

*Exit a guard down one of the side-ramps.*

And you other guards, go up through the city  
and track down this effeminate looking stranger  
who brings a new disease to the women and dishonors their beds.  
And if you capture him, lead him here in chains 355  
so that he's brought to justice by being stoned to death°  
and sees a bitter bacchic revelry in Thebes!

*Exit other guards down the other side-ramp.*

**TIRESIAS**

O wretched man, how ignorant you are of what you're saying!  
Now you're completely mad whereas before you had only momentarily  
lost your mind.

Let's go, Cadmus, and on behalf of this man, 360  
even though he is savage, and on behalf of the city,  
let us beseech the god to do nothing sinister.

Come with me and bring your ivy staff.  
You try to support my body and I'll try to support yours.  
It is a shameful thing for two old men to fall. 365

337-40 *Actaeon as a negative role model*: Actaeon is the paradigm of the hunter who becomes the hunted on account of his *hybris*. Actaeon boasted that he was a better hunter than Artemis, goddess of hunting. For this offense Artemis transformed the young man into a stag. He was then torn apart by his own hounds who did not recognize their master. Actaeon was Pentheus' first cousin.

356 First Pentheus threatened decapitation (240-41), then hanging (246), now stoning (356-57).

Still, let come what may, since we must be slaves to Bacchus, Zeus' son.  
But beware, Cadmus, lest Pentheus bring the pain pent up in his name°  
into your house. I don't say this by any prophetic skill but rather  
on account of the facts. For Pentheus is a fool and says foolish things.

*Exit Cadmus and Tiresias, stage left, propping one another, using their thyrsi as canes, heading off to Mt. Cithaeron; Pentheus stays on stage.*

**CHORUS OF ASIAN BACCHAE**°

**STROPHE 1**

O Holiness, queen of the gods!° 370

O Holiness, as you make your way  
on golden wings across the earth,  
do you hear these words of Pentheus?

Do you hear his *hybris*,  
blaspheming Bromios, Semele's son, 375

he who is first among the blessed divinities  
at the banquets decked with bright bouquets?  
For Dionysus has the power  
to join in the Bacchic dances of the cult group,  
to laugh as the reed-pipe sings, 380

to put an end to anxieties  
whenever the liquid joy of the clustered grapes  
visits the feasts of the gods,  
whenever the goblet casts sleep over men  
during the ivy-wreathed festivities. 385

**ANTISTROPHE 1**

Misfortune is the result°  
of unbridled mouths  
and lawless folly.

The tranquil life and prudent thinking° 390  
remain untossed by storms and hold the house together.  
For although the dwellers of heaven

367 *Meaning of Pentheus' name*: *Pentheus* as bringer of *penthos*, "pain." This is Tiresias' third and most charged pun on Pentheus' name as "Man of Pain."

**SECOND CHORAL SONG (370-433)**: One of Euripides' most famous escape prayers; it responds to the preceding action by denouncing Pentheus' impiety and appealing to the spirit of Reverence.

370 "Holiness" (*Hosia*), apparently a cult word, is invoked as the opposite of Pentheus' *hybris*.

386-91 The chorus is alluding to the present quarrel between Pentheus and his grandfather Cadmus.

390 *Tranquility and prudence*: The two key Dionysiac virtues for the chorus.

inhabit the upper sky far away,  
 still they look down on human affairs.  
 So cleverness is not wisdom° 395  
 nor is it wise to think thoughts unfit for mortals.°  
 Life is short. Given such brevity  
 who would pursue ambitious ends  
 and lose what lies at hand?  
 These, in my opinion at least, 400  
 are the ways of madmen and evil counsellors.

## STROPHE 2

If only I could go to Cyprus  
 island of Aphrodite°  
 home of the Love gods  
 those erotic bewitchers of mortal minds 405  
 inhabitants of Paphos°  
 which the hundred mouths  
 of a foreign river°  
 fertilize without rain!  
 If only I could go to exquisite Pieria° 410  
 home of the Muses°  
 sacred slope of Olympus!°  
 Take me there, Bromios, roaring spirit  
 who leads the Bacchic throng amid shouts of joy.  
 There the Graces live, and there Desire.°  
 And there it is lawful for the Bacchae to celebrate your mysteries. 415

395 *The clever sophist's wisdom is folly*: From the chorus' point of view Pentheus' "cleverness" (*to sophon*) is the opposite of their own Dionysiac "wisdom" (*sophia*), which consists of reasoning well.

396 *Nothing in excess*: Violators of this adage inevitably suffer.

403 Cyprus: birthplace of Aphrodite, goddess of sexuality, who was born from Cronus' severed penis.

406 Paphos: a town of Cyprus, famous for its temple of Aphrodite.

408-9 The "foreign river" that fertilizes Paphos is the Nile.

410 Pieria: The Muses' birthplace, a hilly area of Macedonia near Mt. Olympus.

411 Muses: The nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory), goddesses of music and the arts. This connected them with Dionysus, god of music and theater. One tradition says they nursed baby Dionysus.

412 Olympus: a mountain range on the coast of Thessaly.

414 Graces (*Charites*): three daughters of Zeus who personified life's joys and all the pleasures of domain of Dionysus, with whom their cult was long associated.

## ANTISTROPHE 2

The god who is the son of Zeus  
 delights in festivities  
 and loves Peace, the goddess  
 who bestows bliss and nourishes youths.°  
 In equal measure he has given 420  
 to the rich and the humble°  
 so that mankind now possesses wine,  
 bringer of joy, banisher of care.  
 He hates the man whose concern is not this —  
 by day and by friendly night° 425  
 to live to the end a life of blessedness.  
 It is wise to keep one's heart and mind  
 at a distance from men of excess.  
 Whatever beliefs the common folk  
 have come to adopt and still practice, 430  
 these I would accept.

## ACT II°

*Enter Soldier, stage left, with several guards leading the captured Stranger (Dionysus disguised); his hands are bound.*

## SOLDIER

Pentheus, we stand before you having captured this prey  
 after which you sent us; our mission has been accomplished. 435  
 We found this wild beast tame. He didn't try to escape  
 but gave his hands to us willingly.  
 He didn't even turn pale or change his wine-flushed complexion.  
 Rather, laughing, he bid us to bind and carry him off.  
 He even stood still so as to make my task easy. 440  
 Feeling ashamed I said to him: "Stranger, not willingly  
 do I arrest you but by the orders of Pentheus who sent me."  
 Now as for the Theban Bacchae whom you shut up  
 and seized and bound in chains at the public jail,°

419 Peace (*Eirene*) is associated with Dionysus because she, too, enriches human life.

421 *Dionysus as the democratic god par excellence*: He gives wine to all.

425 Night is "friendly" because Dionysus' mysteries are celebrated mostly in nocturnal darkness (485-86).

ACT II (434-518): *The apparent defeat of the Stranger* is presented in three phases (bound, un-bound, and re-bound): a] 434-450: he is brought on stage in chains b] 451-502: Pentheus temporarily releases his prisoner c] 503-518: Pentheus, in anger, chains the Stranger again, sending him off to prison.

444 The reference is to the Theban maenads whom Pentheus had jailed at 226-27.

those women are gone, let loose and skipping off, 445  
 off to the mountain meadows, calling out to Bromios as their god.  
 The chains, of their own accord, came loose from the women's feet  
 and the keys unlocked the jailhouse doors without a human hand.  
 This man has come here to Thebes full of many miracles;<sup>o</sup>  
 but what happens next must be your concern, not mine. 450

**PENTHEUS** (*To his guards*)  
 Release this man's hands. Now that he's in my net  
 he won't be swift enough to escape me.  
*The guards remove the chains.*

Well, stranger, your body is indeed quite shapely, at least  
 for enticing the women. And that's why you came to Thebes, isn't it?  
 Those long side-curls of yours show for sure you're no wrestler, 455  
 rippling down your cheeks, infected with desire.  
 And you keep your skin white by deliberate contrivance,  
 not exposed to the sun's rays but protected by the shade,  
 hunting Aphrodite's pleasures with your beauty.  
 First, then, tell me who you are and from what family. 460

**THE STRANGER**  
 I have no hesitation about this. It's easy to tell.  
 Surely you've heard of the flowering mountains of Tmolus.

**PENTHEUS**  
 I have. They circle round the city of Sardis.<sup>o</sup>

**THE STRANGER**  
 I am from there and Lydia is my fatherland.

**PENTHEUS**  
 And from what source do you bring these rites to Greece? 465

**THE STRANGER**  
 Dionysus himself, the son of Zeus, sent me.

**PENTHEUS**  
 And does some local Zeus exist there, one who begets new gods?

**THE STRANGER**  
 No, we have the same Zeus who yoked Semele here in Thebes.

449 *Bacchae* as a miracle play: Tiresias had attempted to prove Dionysus' existence by using rational arguments (272-318). Pentheus rejected them. Now he will be confronted with a series of miracles, first physical (449; cp. 667, 693, 716), then psychological, which present a different (i.e. non-rational) kind of proof of Dionysus' existence. The effect of the miracles on Pentheus is summarized by Dionysus at 787.

463 Sardis: Capital of Lydia (in Asia Minor) and a famous seat of Cybele's worship.

**PENTHEUS**  
 And was it in a dream or face to face in daylight that he forced you into  
 his service?

**THE STRANGER**  
 It was face to face. He looked at me, I at him.<sup>o</sup> And he gave me his sacred  
 rites freely. 470

**PENTHEUS**  
 And those rites—in your view, what form do they take?

**THE STRANGER**  
 That is forbidden knowledge for any mortals who are not Bacchae.

**PENTHEUS**  
 And what benefit does it hold for those who sacrifice?

**THE STRANGER**  
 It is unlawful for you to hear but the benefit is worth knowing.

**PENTHEUS**  
 You coined that answer cleverly so that I might wish to hear. 475

**THE STRANGER**  
 On the contrary. For the rites of the god hate the man who practices  
 impiety.<sup>o</sup>

**PENTHEUS**  
 Since you say that you saw the god clearly, what form did he take?

**THE STRANGER**  
 Whatever form he wanted. It wasn't for *me* to dictate that!

**PENTHEUS**  
 Very clever, these empty-worded evasions of yours.

**THE STRANGER**  
 To the ignorant man any speaker of wisdom will seem foolish. 480

**PENTHEUS**  
 Did you come here first to introduce your god?

**THE STRANGER**  
 No, every one of the foreigners dances these rites.

**PENTHEUS**  
 That's because they're much more foolish than the Greeks.

470 *The Stranger's initiation into Dionysus' rites*: In this face to face encounter the initiate becomes a virtual mirror of the god, an incarnate visual double, which indeed, as we know, the Stranger is.

476 Impiety is a charge made three times (490, 502) by the Stranger against Pentheus. In 399 B.C. the same accusation was brought against Socrates and led to his death (Plato *Apology* 35d).

- THE STRANGER**  
In this case, at least, they're wise though their customs are different.
- PENTHEUS**  
Do you celebrate these sacred rites at night or in the day? 485
- THE STRANGER**  
At night mostly, since darkness induces devotion.
- PENTHEUS**  
No, darkness is devious and corrupts women.
- THE STRANGER**  
Even in the day someone could devise shameful deeds.
- PENTHEUS**  
You'll pay a penalty for your evil sophistries.
- THE STRANGER**  
And you for your ignorance and impiety toward the god. 490
- PENTHEUS**  
How bold this bacchus!° What a gymnast with words!
- THE STRANGER**  
Tell me what I must suffer. What terrible deed you will inflict on me?
- PENTHEUS**  
First I'll cut off those luxurious curls of yours.
- THE STRANGER**  
My hair is sacred. I'm grooming it for the god.
- PENTHEUS**  
And furthermore, hand over that thyrsus you're holding. 495
- THE STRANGER**  
If you want it, you take it. This wand I carry belongs to Dionysus.
- PENTHEUS** (*apparently backing off the challenge*)  
And we'll lock you up in prison.
- THE STRANGER**  
The god himself will set me free whenever I wish.
- PENTHEUS**  
Yes, when you call him, that is, from your jail cell beside the other Bacchae!
- THE STRANGER**  
Even now he is nearby and sees what I am suffering. 500
- PENTHEUS**  
Well, where? To *my* eyes, at least, he's invisible.

491 "How bold this bacchus!" A fine (unconscious) irony since "this bacchus" before Pentheus is indeed Bacchus (cp. 622, 1020). But he has no clue.

- THE STRANGER**  
Right where I am. But because you're so impious you can't see him.
- PENTHEUS** [*to his soldiers*]  
Guards, seize this man. He insults me and Thebes.
- THE STRANGER**  
From a wise man to fools, I order them not to bind me.
- PENTHEUS**  
And I order them to bind you. I have more power than you! 505
- THE STRANGER**  
You don't know what your life is—neither what you're doing nor who you are.°
- PENTHEUS**  
I am Pentheus, son of Agave and of my father Echion.°
- THE STRANGER**  
Indeed you are and that name spells your misfortune.
- PENTHEUS** (*To his soldiers*)  
Get out of here! Lock him up near the horse stables so that he sees only pitch darkness. 510
- (*To the Stranger*)  
Do your dancing there!
- The choristers start beating on their drums as the guards handcuff the Stranger.*
- And as for these women you've brought as collaborators in your evil deeds, either we'll sell them or I'll keep them as family possessions, slaves at my looms, after, that is, I've stopped their hands from banging out that rat-a-tat-tat on their drums.
- THE STRANGER**  
I'm ready to go. For whatever is not fated, I'm not fated to suffer. 515  
But know well that as a punishment for these insults Dionysus will pursue you — the very god you claim doesn't exist. Since when you wrong us, it is him you throw into chains.
- The Stranger is lead off by the soldiers into the palace, followed by Pentheus.*

506 *Limits of knowledge*: Dionysus' riddle-like accusation recalls the all-too-accurate jab of the seer Tiresias at another proud Theban king: "Though you have eyes, you see neither where you are in evil nor where you live nor with whom you share your house!" (*Oedipus the King* 412)

507 *Pentheus' blindness*: The literalness of his response (i.e. giving his own name and his parents') underscores the king's striking ignorance of what he is doing (by binding the Stranger) and of who he is as a man (by thinking he has power over the Stranger).

## CHORUS OF ASIAN BACCHAE°

## STROPHE 1

Hail, daughter of Achelous,°  
venerable Dirce,° happy maiden, 520  
since you once washed Zeus' infant son  
in your streams  
when Zeus, his sire, snatched him  
from the undying flame and hid the child  
in his own thigh, shouting out 525  
"Go, Dithyrambus,°  
enter this male womb of mine.  
I hereby reveal you to Thebes, Bacchic child,  
where you shall be called Dithyrambus from the manner of your  
birth."  
But you, O blessed Dirce, reject me 530  
though you have my ivy-crowned  
bands of revellers on your banks.  
Why do you spurn me? Why do you flee?  
Yet one day soon — I swear by the grape-clustering  
delights of Dionysus' vine — 535  
one day soon you will take heed of Bromios.

## ANTISTROPHE 1

Pentheus reveals  
his earth-born descent,  
sprung from the serpent,  
Pentheus whom earth-born Echion, 540  
the Snake-Man, begot  
as a fierce-faced monster  
not a mortal man  
but like a murderous Giant who wrestles the gods.°

*THIRD CHORAL SONG (519-75):* Reacts to the preceding action and registers the growing wrath of the Bacchae at Pentheus and his threat to imprison them (which could not be carried out since stage conventions virtually dictated that the chorus remain in the orchestra). Dionysus' wilder aspects, which had been largely ignored in the first two odes, begin to emerge here.

519 Achelous: A large river in west central Greece.

520 Dirce: The small river in the western quarter of Thebes.

526 "Dithyrambus": A sacred name for Dionysus. The dithyramb was Dionysus' special song, performed by choruses at revelries of wine, music, and wild abandonment.

544 The chorus compare Pentheus' earth-born descent to the chthonic descent of the giants who fought against the Olympian gods. Like the monstrous Giants, Pentheus is a symbol of *hybris*.

Soon he will bind me, 545  
Bromios' servant, in a noose.  
Already he detains my fellow-reveller  
inside the palace  
hidden in a dark prison.  
Son of Zeus, Dionysus, 550  
do you see this, how your proclaimers  
struggle against oppression?  
Come down from Mt. Olympus, lord,  
brandishing your golden thyrsus!  
Restrain the hybris of this murderous man! 555

## EPODE

Where, then, on beast-nourishing Mt. Nysa,°  
are you, Dionysus, leading with your thyrsus  
the revelling bands?  
Or where on the Corcycian peaks of Mt. Parnassus?° 560  
Or perhaps in the thickly-wooded lairs  
of Mt. Olympus where once°  
Orpheus playing the lyre  
gathered together the trees with his music,  
gathered together the wild animals?  
O blessed Pieria, 565  
Euiois° worships you and will come  
to dance together with bacchic revelries.  
He will lead his whirling maenads  
after crossing the swift-flowing Axios  
and the river Lydias, father of happiness 570  
and bestower of prosperity to mortals.°  
It is Lydias' sparkling waters,  
so I've heard, which fertilize  
that land and make it famed for horses.° 575

556 Nysa: A mystical mountain that traveled wherever the god's cult did.

559 Parnassus: A mountain near the Gulf of Corinth, towering over Delphi.

561-64 Orpheus' magical music. This famous Thracian singer enchanted both the animate and inanimate worlds. Like Dionysus, he brought joy and unity.

566 *Euiois* is a ritual name for Dionysus; see 67n.

572 Axios and Lydias: two Macedonian rivers running into the Thermaic Gulf in the northwest Aegean Sea.

575 Macedonia was famous for breeding fine horses.

## ACT III°

*The stage is completely empty and silent. Suddenly from offstage:*

**THE VOICE** (*of Dionysus*)

Io!  
Hear my voice, hear it!<sup>o</sup>  
Io Bacchae, io Bacchae!

**CHORUS LEADER** (*in the orchestra*)

Who is here, who is it?  
From where does the voice of Euios summon me?

**THE VOICE**

Io! Again I speak, 580  
the son of Semele, the son of Zeus!

**CHORUS LEADER**

Io! Master, master!  
Come into our revelling band,  
O Bromios, Bromios!

**THE VOICE**

Shake the very foundation of this world, august Goddess  
of Earthquakes! 585

**CHORUS LEADER**

Ah, ah!  
Look how quickly Pentheus' palace  
will be shaken to its fall!  
Dionysus is in the palace.  
Worship him! 590

**PART OF THE CHORUS** (*in response*)

We worship him.  
Didn't you see the stone lintels reeling, breaking apart

*ACT III (576-861): Structural and thematic center of the Bacchae. Three main parts: a) 'palace miracles' (576-641); b) first messenger scene (660-786); c) tempting of Pentheus (787-861). The famous first episode contains a series of supernatural events which constitute the 'palace miracles'; a) the earthquake which shakes the palace (583-93, 623); b) Pentheus' hallucinations about the bull, the burning palace, and the light (615-31); c) the blazing of Zeus' lightning at Semele's tomb (594-99, 623-24); d) the (off-stage) collapse of the stable in which Dionysus had been jailed (633-34).*

576 *Voice of god:* "Nowhere else in Greek tragedy is a god heard calling from off-stage, let alone accompanied by thunder and lightning." (Taplin 120)

576-603 *Lyric Dialogue #1:* The *Bacchae* features three *sung* dialogues (cp. 1024-42, 1168-99). All three immediately follow a choral ode and are intensely emotional sequences which alternate between an actor *singing* from the stage and the chorus (or chorus-leader) *singing* from the orchestra. Here the theme is Dionysus' liberation of his band of maenadic worshippers from Pentheus.

there on the columns?° Bromios, the roaring lord of thunder, is here,  
raising his ritual shout of triumph in the palace.

**THE VOICE** (*calling on the Earthquake goddess*)

Fire up the blazing torch of lightning!  
Burn it, burn the palace of Pentheus! 595

**ANOTHER PART OF THE CHORUS**

Ah, ah! Don't you see the fire, don't you see it  
around Semele's sacred tomb,  
the thunder-hurled flame  
that long ago Zeus' bolt left behind?  
Throw your trembling bodies to the ground! 600  
Maenads, throw your bodies down!  
For the king, Zeus' son, will come rushing  
upon this house, turning it upside down.

*The terrified chorus throw themselves onto the orchestra floor; perhaps a crash is heard. Enter the Stranger from the palace.*

**THE STRANGER**

Women of Asia, are you so paralyzed with fear  
that you've fallen to the ground? It seems you felt 605  
the Bacchic god shaking apart Pentheus' house.  
Come on, lift up your bodies! Take courage! Cast off your trembling!

**CHORUS LEADER**

O greatest light of our bacchic revelry! Eui!  
How delighted I am to see you! Before I felt such a deep loneliness.°

**THE STRANGER**

Had you reached despair when I was summoned, 610  
thinking I would fall in Pentheus' dark dungeons?

**CHORUS-LEADER**

Indeed we had. Who would have protected us if you had met misfor-  
tune?  
Tell me, how were you freed after meeting that impious man?

**THE STRANGER**

I saved myself easily and without any toil.

592-93 *Was the earthquake represented on stage?* Given the simplicity of fifth century stage mechanisms, this scene was probably meant to be conjured in the mind's eye.

609 *Choral reaction to the liberation of the Stranger.* The *Bacchae* move from fear (604), trembling (607), loneliness (609) and despair (610) — all the result of the earthquake and fire at Semele's tomb — to joy (609) at seeing the great *light* (608) which they identify with the god. Their experience of the initiation-like ritual into the Dionysiac mysteries stands in stark contrast to Pentheus' experience at 616ff.

## CHORUS LEADER

But didn't he bind your hands in tight nooses? 615

## THE STRANGER

In just this I mocked him. He thought he had bound me°  
when in fact he never even laid a hand on us but fed on his hopes.  
Finding a bull° in the stables where he had led me as a prisoner  
he threw nooses around its knees and hooves,  
breathing out fury, sweating profusely from his body, 620  
gnashing his teeth into his lips. But I, sitting calmly nearby,  
just watched. In the meantime Bacchus came  
and shook the palace, kindling a flame on his mother's tomb.  
When Pentheus saw this, thinking the palace was burning,  
he rushed to and fro, ordering his servants to bring water. 625  
Every slave helped in the task but they all labored in vain.°  
Imagining that I had escaped, he gave up this toil  
and darted into the dark house with his dagger drawn. Then Bromios,  
as it seems to me at least, since I speak only my opinion, made a light  
in the courtyard.° Chasing eagerly after it, Pentheus rushed forward 630  
and tried to stab the shining [image], thinking he was slaying me.  
Besides these humiliations, Bacchus outraged him in other ways too.  
He smashed the building to the ground. Everything lies shattered  
so that now he sees the most bitter consequences of trying to chain me.  
From weariness he has dropped his sword and lies exhausted. 635  
Though only a man, he dared to fight a god. Calmly leaving the palace,  
I have come to you, giving no thought to Pentheus.

Hush! I hear a trampling of boots in the palace. Soon, I think,  
he'll be at the door. What in the world will he say after all this?  
No matter. I'll remain calm even if he comes out breathing fury.° 640  
For it is the part of a wise man to employ a controlled and gentle temper.

616-37 *Pentheus' failed initiation into the Dionysiac mysteries*: The king's ordeals as he tries to tie up the bull resemble those of the initiand.

618 *Bull imagery* recurs at 100, 920, 1017, 1159; Dionysus is god of the bull. Compare the frightening apparition of the bull (symbol of male sexuality) at *Hippolytus* 1214.

626 They labored in vain; the house was *not* on fire; Pentheus only *thought* so.

630 *Why does Pentheus mistake 'a light' for his prisoner?* Because in ancient initiation ritual the mystic light appearing in the (Hades-like) darkness seems to have been identified with the god himself. So here Pentheus rushes from the *dark* house to the courtyard where he sees the *light* created by the god, which light he mistakes for a man—just as he mistook the bull for a man at 619-22. This young king “embodies not only the ordeals of the initiand, but also, as the god's enemy, the negation of the desired ritual process. He rejects and attacks even the light in the darkness, and persists in his hostile and confused ignorance.” (Seaford 1981, 256-57)

640 For the third time in this speech Dionysus' calmness is contrasted with Pentheus' tempestuousness.

*Enter Pentheus from the palace, panting heavily.*

## PENTHEUS

I have suffered terribly! The stranger has escaped me  
even though I had just forced him into chains.

Hey! Hey!

He is right here. What is this? 645

*Turning to the Stranger.*

What are you doing in front of my house? How did you get outside?

## THE STRANGER

Slow down. Calm your anger.

## PENTHEUS

How did you escape those chains? How did you get out here?

## THE STRANGER

Didn't I say, or didn't you hear — that someone will set me free?°

## PENTHEUS

Who? The answers you give are always strange. 650

## THE STRANGER

He who grows the rich-clustering vine for mortals.

## PENTHEUS

.....[one or several lines missing]

## THE STRANGER

Look, now you've insulted Dionysus for what he's right to be proud of.

## PENTHEUS [turning to his guards]

I command you to lock every gate in the encircling rampart!°

*Exit two guards, one down each side-ramp.*

## THE STRANGER

But why? Don't gods scale even walls?

## PENTHEUS

Clever, very clever indeed, except in what you should be clever!° 655

## THE STRANGER

In whatever I must be especially clever, in that I am indeed naturally so.

First, however, listen to this messenger here and learn from him.°

649 The Stranger had said at line 498 that “the god himself” would free him.

653 Pentheus' purpose is to prevent the Stranger from joining the Theban maenads on Mt. Cithaeron.

655-56 The fourfold repetition of “clever” (*sophos*) highlights the opposing opinions about “wisdom.”

657 *Plot changes direction*: At this point the first main action, Dionysus' escape and liberation, has come to an end and the second action, Dionysus' vengeance on Pentheus, begins.

He has come from the mountains to bring you news.<sup>o</sup>  
Don't worry. We will stay right here; we won't try to escape.

*Enter the first messenger, a herdsman from Mt. Cithaeron, hastily from stage left.*

**MESSENGER #1**

Pentheus, ruler of this Theban land, 660  
I have come from Mt. Cithaeron  
where the bright shafts of white snow fell incessantly.

**PENTHEUS**

What message have you come to deliver with such urgency?

**MESSENGER #1**

I have just seen the august Bacchae. Stung with frenzy 665  
they shot forth from this land bare-footed.  
I have come desiring to tell you and the city, my lord,  
what strange feats they do, greater than miracles.  
But I want to know whether I can speak freely to you  
about what happened there or whether I must reef in my report.  
For I fear the swiftness of your mind, my lord; 670  
it is quick to anger and too much that of a king.

**PENTHEUS**

Speak openly since you won't be punished by me  
no matter what your story. [It isn't fitting to be angry with just men.]  
The more frightening your account of the Bacchae  
the more severe will be the punishment 675  
of the man who taught his wiles to those women.

**MESSENGER #1<sup>o</sup>**

Our herds of young cattle were just climbing  
towards the upland pastures.  
As the sun let loose its rays to warm the earth  
I see three bands of female choruses. 680  
Autonoe was the leader of one group,  
your mother Agave of another, and Ino of a third.  
They were all sound asleep, relaxed in their bodies,  
some leaning their backs on fir-tree foliage,

others resting their heads on oak leaves, 685  
scattered on the ground haphazardly but modestly  
and not, as you claim, drunk with wine and flute music,<sup>o</sup>  
and hunting down Aphrodite's delights on solo missions in the forest.

Then your mother, standing up amidst the Bacchae,  
shouted a ritual cry and roused their bodies from sleep 690  
after she had heard the bellowing of my horned oxen.  
Throwing off the fresh sleep from their eyes

they sprang to their feet, a miracle of discipline to behold,  
women young and old, and girls still unmarried.<sup>o</sup>

First they let their hair flow loose onto their shoulders 695  
and tied up their fawnskins — those whose knot fastenings  
had come undone — and bound tight the dappled hides  
with snakes that licked their cheeks.

Some, holding in their arms a fawn or wild wolf cubs,  
offered them white milk — those who had just given birth 700  
and whose breasts were still swollen,  
having left their new-born at home.

They crowned themselves with wreaths of ivy  
and oak and flowering evergreen creepers.  
One woman, taking her thyrsus, struck it against a rock<sup>o</sup>  
and from it a spring of fresh water leaps out. 705

Another struck her fennel wand against the ground  
and for this woman the god sent forth a stream of wine.  
As many as had a desire for white drink,  
scraping through the earth with their sharp fingers  
they got springing jets of milk. And from the ivy thyrsi 710  
sweet streams of honey dripped.

So that if you had been present to see these things,  
the very god you now censure you would have pursued with prayers.

We came together, cowherds and shepherds, 715  
to wrangle with one another in our accounts  
[debating their uncanny and miraculous deeds.]  
Then some wanderer from the city with a knack for words  
spoke to us all:

658 *Dionysus as director within the play*: "How does Dionysus know that this is a messenger from the mountains? The hint is sown that Dionysus himself has 'arranged' this messenger-speech as an opportunity for Pentheus to see the truth, in fact one of a series of opportunities." (Taplin 57)

677-774 *First Messenger speech*: Laden with an air of mystery, it describes the magical powers of the Theban Bacchae on the mountain. Its main purpose is to persuade Pentheus to accept Dionysus and his female devotees (769-74).

687 Pentheus had made his claims about the drunkenness and lechery of the Bacchae at 221-25 (cp. 236-38); the messenger will correct Pentheus again at 712-13.

694 These are the women whom Dionysus had earlier (35-38) driven mad and onto Mt. Cithaeron.

704-11 *Dionysus as god of liquid nature*: "Dionysus is a miraculous wine-maker and his power is transmitted to those possessed by him when they wield his magic rod." (Dodds 163). The miracle of water, wine, milk, and honey was foreshadowed at 141-43.



"O you who dwell in the holy uplands  
 of the mountains, do you wish to hunt Agave,  
 Pentheus' mother, out from her bacchic revelry  
 and gain the king's favor?" 720  
 His suggestion seemed reasonable  
 so we lay in ambush in the thickets, concealing ourselves  
 in the foliage. At the appointed hour each woman  
 began to wave her thyrsus in the bacchic dancing,  
 calling out with multitudinous voice on Bromios as "Iacchus,"<sup>o</sup> 725  
 Lord of Cries, the son of Zeus. The whole mountain  
 and all its wild creatures  
 joined the Bacchic revelry and everything was roused to running.  
 Agave happens to jump close by me  
 and I leapt out hoping to seize her,  
 deserting the thicket where I was hiding myself. 730  
 But she shrieked:  
 "O my running hounds,  
 we are being hunted by these men here. Follow me!  
 Follow me, armed like soldiers with your thyrsi at hand!"  
 Only by fleeing did we avoid  
 being torn to pieces by the Bacchae;<sup>o</sup> 735  
 but they attacked our grazing calves and not with swords in their hands.  
 You could have seen one of them, apart from the others, mauling with  
 both hands  
 a young heifer with swelling udders, bellowing all the while;  
 and other women were ripping apart mature cows, shredding them up.  
 You could have seen ribs or a cleft hoof 740  
 being tossed up and down. Hanging from the fir trees  
 the ribs and hooves dripped bloody gore.  
 Bulls previously aggressive and tossing their horns in rage  
 now tumbled to the ground, their bodies dragged down  
 by the myriad hands of young women. 745  
 Their garments of flesh were ripped off  
 faster than you could have winked your royal eyes.  
 Like birds the women rose, racing in rapid flight  
 over the outstretched plains where Thebes' fruitful crop grows  
 along the streams of the Asopus river.<sup>o</sup> 750

725 Iacchus: A mystic name of Dionysus at Athens and Eleusis.

735 "Being torn to pieces" (*sparagmos*): The appearance of this important noun here (735, 739) foreshadows a much more gruesome *sparagmos* (cp. 1127, 1135, 1220).

750 Asopus: A small river in Boeotia originating on Cithaeron near Plataea and flowing into the Gulf of Euboea.

Attacking Hysiae and Erythrae,<sup>o</sup>  
 nestled in the low hill country of Cithaeron,  
 like enemy soldiers they scattered things in every direction,  
 turning it all upside down. They snatched children from their homes.  
 And whatever they carried on their shoulders 755  
 was held fast without being fastened and didn't fall [to the black earth,  
 not bronze, not iron.] On their locks of hair  
 they carried fire but it did not burn them. And the villagers,  
 enraged at being plundered by the Bacchae, took to arms.  
 That was indeed a dreadful spectacle to behold, my lord. 760  
 For the men's sharp-pointed spears drew no blood from the maenads,  
 neither bronze nor iron [...], but the women, hurling thyrsi from their  
 hands,  
 were wounding the villagers and turning them to flight.<sup>o</sup>  
 Women routed men, though not without some god's help.  
 Back to that spot whence they had set out the Bacchae returned, 765  
 I mean to the very streams that the god had made spring up for them.  
 They washed off the blood while the snakes with their tongues  
 were licking from their skin the drops on their cheeks.  
 So this god — whoever he is — receive him, master,<sup>o</sup>  
 into our city since in other matters, too, they say 770  
 he is great but especially in this, so I hear,  
 because he gave to mortals the vine that stops pain.  
 If there were no more wine, then there is no more Aphrodite  
 nor any other pleasure for mankind.

*Exit messenger, stage left.*

**CHORUS LEADER**

I am afraid to speak freely to the tyrant 775  
 but still it shall be said once and for all.  
 Dionysus is inferior to none of the gods!

**PENTHEUS**

Already it blazes up nearby like fire,  
 this insolent hybris of the Bacchae, a huge humiliation to Greeks.  
 But I must not hesitate.<sup>o</sup> 780

751 Hysiae and Erythrae: Boeotian villages in the Asopus river valley.

763 *Thyrsus as offensive weapon*: Once an instrument of worship, it here becomes an instrument of war. This duality expresses well the ambiguity of Dionysus' cult as practiced by the maenads.

769 The messenger's third and final warning to Pentheus to accept the god.

780 *Effect of messenger speech on Pentheus*: It shifts his wrath to the Theban maenads whereas before it was focused on the Stranger (674-76).

*Turning to an attendant.*

You there, go to the Electran gates.  
Order all the shield-bearing foot-soldiers  
and riders of swift-footed horses to meet me there.  
Call up my light infantry, too, and the archers.  
We're going to march against the Bacchae  
since this is too much to bear, that we suffer  
what we suffer at the hands of women.<sup>o</sup> 785

*Exit attendant, stage right.*

**THE STRANGER**

You do not obey me at all, Pentheus, even though you have heard my  
words.<sup>o</sup>  
I have suffered badly at your hands  
but still I say you ought not take up arms against a god.  
Keep calm. Bromios will not endure any attempts to drive  
his Bacchae 790  
from the mountains that ring out with cries of joy for him.

**PENTHEUS**

Don't lecture me! Since you've escaped despite being bound  
won't you guard your freedom? Or shall I punish you again?

**THE STRANGER**

I would sacrifice to him rather than rage on,<sup>o</sup>  
kicking against the pricks, a man at war with god. 795

**PENTHEUS**

Yes, I'll sacrifice but it will be the women's slaughter.<sup>o</sup> That's what they  
deserve.  
I'll stir up plenty of it in the valleys of Cithaeron.

**THE STRANGER**

You will be the ones fleeing, each and every one of you. And what a  
disgrace,  
to turn your bronze-forged shields before the wands of women.

786 *Humiliation by women*: A common fear of males in tragedy (*Antigone* 484-85). It is Pentheus' masculine pride that provokes his call to arms.

787 *The Stranger's various "proofs" of Dionysus' divinity*: Thus far Pentheus remains unpersuaded. At 789-809 the Stranger presents one last chance by offering to bring the maenads peacefully from Cithaeron to Thebes.

794 *Perils of anger*: Pentheus is being warned about the dangers of his anger (*thumos*). Earlier the messenger had feared the suddenness of Pentheus' *thumos* (671). This problem of reason being blinded by emotion occurs elsewhere in Euripides. It is mainly because of her fierce *thumos* that Medea murders her two sons (*Medea* 1079-80).

796 It will indeed be "the women's slaughter," but *by* them, not *of* them (see 1114).

**PENTHEUS**

Troublesome indeed is this stranger with whom we're entangled. 800  
Whether tied up or not, he just won't keep quiet.

**THE STRANGER**

Sir, it is still possible to arrange these things well.<sup>o</sup>

**PENTHEUS**

By doing what? Being a slave to my slaves?

**THE STRANGER**

I'll bring the women here without using the force of weapons.

**PENTHEUS**

Alas! Now you're devising some trick against me! 805

**THE STRANGER**

What sort of trick, if I want to save you by my wiles?

**PENTHEUS**

You've made this compact with the Bacchae so you can revel with them  
forever.

**THE STRANGER**

I have indeed made a compact — you can be sure of that — but it is with  
the god.

**PENTHEUS** (*turning to one of his guards*)

You there, bring my weapons out here.<sup>o</sup>

*Exit guard into palace; Pentheus turns to the Stranger.*

And you, stop talking!

**THE STRANGER**

Ah! <sup>o</sup> 810

Do you want to see those women sitting together in the mountains?<sup>o</sup>

**PENTHEUS**

Indeed I would. I'd give a vast weight of gold for that.

802 Is Dionysus' offer to resolve the conflict genuine or a sinister mockery? If genuine, it emphasizes Pentheus' stubbornness.

809 Pentheus, frustrated, breaks off negotiations and again turns to force as a solution (similarly 503, 653).

810 "Ah": *The play's "monosyllabic turning point"* (Taplin 158). This uncanny moment marks the beginning of the end for Pentheus who now comes under the god's power and loses much of his ability to reason. Pentheus' obstinacy has forced Dionysus to shift gears and, as line 811 indicates, to initiate a new strategy, outlined more fully at 847-61.

811-48 *Dionysus' new plan*: He initiates now a second "device" to prove his divinity; the first (driving the Theban women into a frenzy) has failed to convince Pentheus. The second will be to punish Pentheus by driving him into a frenzy. The scheme has two parts: a) getting Pentheus to go to the mountain and *look at* the maenads (811, 819); b) agreeing to lead Pentheus to the mountain, if he will *dress up* as a maenad (821 ff).

## THE STRANGER

But why have you fallen into so great a passion for seeing them?°

## PENTHEUS

I would be pained to see them drunk with wine.

## THE STRANGER

But still you would see with pleasure things that are bitter to you? 815

## PENTHEUS

Certainly I would — but in silence and sitting under the fir trees.

## THE STRANGER

But they will track you down even if you go secretly.

## PENTHEUS

Good point. I'd better go openly.

## THE STRANGER

Shall we lead you then? Will you really venture on the journey?

## PENTHEUS

Lead me as quickly as possible. I begrudge the time you're wasting. 820

## THE STRANGER

Then put on this long dress of fine oriental linen.

## PENTHEUS

What are you saying? Instead of being a man shall I join the ranks of women?

## THE STRANGER

Yes. I fear they would kill you if you were seen as a man there.°

## PENTHEUS

Another good point. You're a pretty clever fellow and have been right along.°

## THE STRANGER

Dionysus instructed us fully in these matters. 825

## PENTHEUS

How could your advice be successfully carried out?

## THE STRANGER

I myself will dress you up once we've gone into the house.

## PENTHEUS

In what kind of costume? A woman's? But I would be ashamed.

813 *Pentheus' passion to see the maenads*: The word for "passion" here is *eros*, the strongest Greek noun for sexual desire.

823-24 *Why does Pentheus disguise himself as a woman?* Here the primary reason is physical safety; he must look like a maenad lest he be killed.

824 *Pentheus' sudden change of mind*: In the space of just fourteen verses (811-824) the Stranger virtually transforms Pentheus from a man into a woman.

## THE STRANGER

Are you no longer so eager to be a spectator of the maenads?

## PENTHEUS

This costume — what exactly do you propose to dress me in? 830

## THE STRANGER

First I'll stretch out long the hair on your head.

## PENTHEUS

And the second feature of my adornment, what is that?

## THE STRANGER

A dress down to your feet. And for your hair we have a headband.°

## PENTHEUS

Will you add anything else to my outfit?

## THE STRANGER

Yes, a thyrsus for your hand and a spotted fawnskin. 835

## PENTHEUS

I couldn't bear to put on a female costume.

## THE STRANGER

But you will spill blood if you engage the Bacchae in battle.

## PENTHEUS

Good point. I must first go and spy them out.°

## THE STRANGER

That is certainly wiser than to hunt down evil by means of evil.

## PENTHEUS

But how will I avoid the notice of the Cadmeans as I pass through the city? 840

## THE STRANGER

We will take the deserted streets. I'll lead you.

## PENTHEUS

Anything is better than being laughed at by the Bacchae.

## THE STRANGER

Once we've gone into the house, [we'll make the necessary arrangements.]

833 The headband, associated with Lydia and usually worn by women to bind their hair, consisted of a piece of cloth wrapped around the head. It seems to have been part of Dionysiac ritual dress, possibly a sign of dedication to the god's service. (Dodds 177)

838 *Pentheus' change of mind*: Pentheus had intended to spill the blood of the Bacchae (796, 809) but now he will *spy* on them instead. As Seaford (1996, 215) notes, "it is psychologically apt that it is by a military intention that Pentheus overcomes his reluctance to wear female dress."

## PENTHEUS

[Hold on!] I'll do the deciding about what seems best.

## THE STRANGER

Very well. Whatever you decide, *my* course of action is prepared.

## PENTHEUS

I think I'll go in. For either I will march with weapons° 845  
or I'll obey your advice.

*Exit Pentheus into palace.*

## THE STRANGER°

Women, the man stands within the cast of our net.  
He will come to the Bacchae and pay the penalty of death!  
Dionysus, now the deed is yours — for you are not far off.  
Let us punish him! First put him outside his mind. 850  
Instill a light-headed frenzy. Since, if he reasons well,  
he definitely won't be willing to dress in a woman's costume.  
But if he drives off the road of reason, he will dress up.  
I want the Thebans to mock him°  
as we parade him through the city in his dainty disguise,° 855  
after those terrifying threats of his.  
I'll go and dress Pentheus up in the very adornments  
he'll wear to Hades after being slain by his mother's hands.  
He will come to know Dionysus, the son of Zeus,  
that he is, in the ritual of initiation,° a god most terrifying, 860  
but for mankind a god most gentle.°

*Exit the Stranger into the palace.*

- 
- 845 Pentheus' third and final threat to take by force the maenads on Mt. Cithaeron.  
847-61 *Thematic prologue to second half of play.* This fifteen line speech summarizes the god's plan of revenge — a plan that will drive the rest of the action.  
854 *Laughter as a weapon:* Greek "shame culture" dictated that one man's victory came at another's expense. Being mocked meant "losing face" and was to be avoided at all costs.  
855 *Pentheus' female disguise:* Why does he cross-dress? For reasons of safety (821-23) and because transvestism is a well-known feature of initiation rites, depriving the initiand of his previous identity so he can assume a new one.  
856 Earlier Pentheus had mocked Dionysus' "girlish shape" (353); now Dionysus returns the favor, mocking Pentheus' "womanly shape."  
860 *The terror of Dionysus in ritual initiation.* Dionysus is for mankind "most gentle" but for his initiands "most terrifying" because they must undergo the terrors of ritual death that preceded the spiritual rebirth of the Dionysiac mysteries. [I have translated the important and controversial phrase *en telei* in 860 as "in the ritual of initiation." (Seaford 1996, 217)].  
860-61 *The god's elusive doubleness:* This powerful conclusion to Act III underscores the god's frightening ambiguity (i.e., gentility *and* terror).

## CHORUS OF ASIAN BACCHAE°

## STROPHE 1

Shall I ever move  
my white feet in the all-night dances  
breaking forth into Bacchic frenzy  
tossing my neck back 865  
into the night's dewy air  
like a fawn sporting amid the green delights of the meadow  
when it has escaped the fearful hunt  
eluding the ring of watchmen  
beyond their well-woven nets 870  
as the shouting hunter  
incites his speedy hounds?  
Swift as a storm-wind the fawn toils, races,  
bounds toward the plain alongside the river  
delighting in the wilderness devoid of men 875  
delighting in the young shoots of the leaf-shaded forest.

## REFRAIN

What good is mere cleverness? Or, rather, what god-given gift  
brings more honor to mortals  
than to hold the hand of mastery  
over the head of the enemy?° 880  
Whatever is honorable is dear always.°

## ANTISTROPHE 1

It starts out slowly  
but still the strength of the gods  
is trustworthy. And it punishes  
those mortals who honor foolish arrogance 885  
and those who, in the madness

- 
- FOURTH CHORAL SONG (862-911):* This passionate ode expresses the chorus' restored hope that, as a result of the palace miracles, they will be free to honor Dionysus without fear of Pentheus, who must be punished. The hymn separates the Stranger's preceding prediction of victory from the victory itself.  
879-80 *The head of the enemy:* Foreshadows Pentheus' fate and also alludes to the main tenet of Greek moral thought, namely "to help one's friends and harm one's enemies."  
881 "What is honorable is dear always." An old proverb; here it bitterly affirms the validity of Dionysus' vengeance on Pentheus. The chorus' delight in this revenge becomes ever stronger as the play proceeds (cf. 991-96 = 1011-16, 1020-23, 1156-68). For a different version of what is honorable see 1150-52.

of their opinions, do not extol things divine.  
 The gods cunningly conceal  
 the long foot of time  
 and hunt down the impious man. 890  
 One must never, in thought and deed,<sup>o</sup>  
 rise above the laws.  
 For it is a light expense to believe  
 that these things have power: first, the divine, whatever that  
 may be; and second, the laws which the long stretch of time 895  
 has codified forever and which are grounded in nature.

## REFRAIN

What good is mere cleverness? Or, rather, what god-given gift  
 brings more honor to mortals  
 than to hold the hand of mastery  
 over the head of the enemy? 900  
 Whatever is honorable is dear always.

## EPODE

Happy the man<sup>o</sup> who escapes  
 the storm at sea and reaches harbor.  
 Happy, too, is he who overcomes  
 his toils. And in different ways one man 905  
 surpasses another in prosperity and power.  
 Besides, countless are the hopes  
 of countless men. Some of those hopes  
 end in prosperity for mortals, others vanish.  
 But I count him blessed whose life, 910  
 from day to day, is happy.

891-96 *Reconciliation of man-made law (nomos) and natural law (physis)*: Whatever exists "over the long ages" is not just human law (*nomos*) but natural law (*physis*) since the former is grounded in the latter. The target of this choral wisdom is Pentheus who, they imply, violates the unwritten law of worshipping the gods. But Pentheus nowhere professes atheism; he just does not see that this new god *is* a god. (Kirk 99, Leinieks 248-51)

902-11 "*Happy the man*": This "pronouncement of happiness" gradually builds to an impressive climax: Happy is he who a) escapes danger; b) overcomes toils; c) prospers materially; d) nourishes hopes. But most blessed is he who e) enjoys happiness in the here and now of daily life.

ACT IV<sup>o</sup>

*Enter the Stranger from the palace.*<sup>o</sup>

## THE STRANGER

You there — the one eager to see what you ought not to see<sup>o</sup>  
 and seeking things not to be sought, I mean you Pentheus —  
 come out in front of the house. Be seen by me  
 wearing your costume of a woman, a maenad, a bacchant,<sup>o</sup> 915  
 spying on your mother and her troop.

*Enter Pentheus from the palace; his new costume resembles the Stranger's.*

Well, you look very much like one of Cadmus' daughters.<sup>o</sup>

## PENTHEUS

And truly I seem to myself to see two suns<sup>o</sup>  
 and a double Thebes, that fortress of seven mouths.  
 And you seem to be a bull leading us in front 920  
 and horns seem to have sprouted on your head.  
 But *were* you a beast before? Because certainly you are a bull now.

## THE STRANGER

The god accompanies me. Although initially ill-disposed  
 he is in alliance with us. So now, at last, you see what you ought to see.<sup>o</sup>

*ACT IV, mirror of Act II*: In Act II (434-518 = 85 lines) the Stranger (physically bound) is ushered in and out by Pentheus. Act IV (912-76 = 65 lines) reverses the situation of Act II; now Pentheus (mentally bound) is ushered in and out by the Stranger. Act IV can be divided structurally according to the several manifestations of Pentheus' delusion, moving from the physical (the changed perceptions of his eyes) to the psychological (the changed perceptions of his mind).

912: Why does Dionysus enter before Pentheus? "It is dramatically more effective but also because he is acting as his mystagogue," i.e. his initiator into the Dionysiac mysteries. (Seaford 1996, 223)

912: *Pentheus as "Peeping Tom"*? To describe him as such (Dodds xliii) is to suggest that his behavior is sexually perverted. That is too strong.

915 *The physical resemblance between the Stranger and Pentheus*. Both have long hair (235, 455, 493; 831), both look like maenads (491; 835-36, 915), and both carry a thyrsus (495; 835, 941). All of which means that Pentheus looks like his mother too.

917 *Clothes and power*: Pentheus' act of disrobing divests him not only of his regalia but symbolizes the physical dissolution of his kingship and the psychological dissolution of his identity.

918-19 *Two suns and two cities*: Why does Pentheus see two suns and two seven-gated cities of Thebes? At least two reasons, one physical, one religious. Dionysus has sent "a light-headed frenzy" (851) upon him which may well have caused distorted vision. Furthermore, Pentheus, as a new initiand into the Dionysiac cult group (*thiasos*), is assuming a new identity.

924 An allusion to 502 where the Stranger told Pentheus that his impiety prevented his *seeing* Dionysus.

- PENTHEUS**  
How do I look, then? Don't I carry myself like Ino° 925  
or like Agave, my mother?
- THE STRANGER**  
Seeing you I seem to see those very women.  
But this braid of hair here is out of place,  
not as I had arranged it under your headband.
- PENTHEUS**  
While I was inside the palace I shook my head forward° 930  
and shook it back, revelling like a bacchant, and jostled it out of place.
- THE STRANGER**  
Well, we'll set it back in place since it is our concern  
to serve you. Now, then, straighten up your head.
- PENTHEUS**  
There — you fix it since I give myself up to you.
- THE STRANGER**  
Your girdle, too, is loose and the pleats of your dress 935  
hang crooked below your ankles.
- PENTHEUS**  
Yes, at least around the right foot they do indeed seem out of order.°  
*Checking over his shoulder at the situation in the rear.*  
But on the left side my dress holds straight along the heel.
- THE STRANGER**  
Surely you will consider me the first of your friends  
when, contrary to expectation, you see the Bacchae chaste and sober. 940
- PENTHEUS**  
Will I look more like a bacchant if I hold the thyrsus  
in my right hand or here, in my left?
- THE STRANGER**  
You must lift it in your right hand to keep time with the right foot.  
I congratulate you that you've changed your mind.

925-44 *Transvestite scene as meta-theater* (i.e. theater conscious of itself as theater). The costume items mentioned at 830-36 are now being proudly worn by Pentheus as instructed by his fashion designer. Wolff (1982, 263) notes that Dionysus "plays the part, within his play, of the play's director making backstage preparations and conducting a rehearsal. The theatrical process itself... has become part of the play's subject. This is a mark of a late, self-conscious stage in the history of an art form."

930-33 These lines reverse the situation of 492-94 where it was Dionysus' hair that was the center of attention.

937-38 *Tragic comedy*. The sight of the maenads' arch-enemy, himself dressed as a maenad intently adjusting his feminine costume, has a comic element.

- PENTHEUS**  
Could I carry the glens of Mt. Cithaeron, 945  
Bacchae and all, on my shoulders?
- THE STRANGER**  
You could if you wanted. Before you had a mind that was unhealthy  
but now you have just the one you need.
- PENTHEUS**  
Shall we bring levers? Or should I tear the glens up with my own two  
hands,  
jacking the peaks up with my shoulders or arms? 950
- THE STRANGER**  
No, please don't destroy the shrines of the Nymphs  
and the haunts of Pan where he plays his pipes.
- PENTHEUS**  
Good point. Our victory over the women must come not by strength.  
I'll hide my body among the fir trees.
- THE STRANGER**  
You will be hidden in a hiding place perfect for hiding!° 955  
From there you can do your crafty spying on the maenads.
- PENTHEUS**  
Yes indeed. Like birds in a bush, I reckon they are in the thickets  
held fast in the sweetest snares of love-making.°
- THE STRANGER**  
Isn't this the very thing you're being sent to guard against?  
You will catch them perhaps unless you are caught first. 960
- PENTHEUS**  
Escort me through the main streets of Thebes.  
For I am the only man of all the Thebans to dare this.
- THE STRANGER**  
Indeed you are the only one who toils for this city, the only one!  
Therefore the contests you deserve await you.  
So follow me. I will go as the escort who brings you salvation 965  
but another will lead you back from there.
- PENTHEUS**  
Yes, my mother.
- THE STRANGER**  
You will be conspicuous to all.°

955 The repetition "hidden...hiding...hiding" highlights the secretive nature of Pentheus' activity and foreshadows the ominous events at this "hiding" place.

958 Pentheus returns to his notion of the maenads as obsessed with sex (cp. 223).

967 Pentheus will indeed be conspicuous. See 1139-43.

PENTHEUS  
For this very reason I am going.

THE STRANGER  
You will be *carried* home.

PENTHEUS  
You mean in the lap of luxury.<sup>o</sup>

THE STRANGER  
You will indeed be in your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS  
You'll actually force me to be broken by pampering!

THE STRANGER  
And *what* a pampering it will be! 970

PENTHEUS  
I am taking hold of what I deserve.

THE STRANGER  
You are wondrous, wondrous and you are going to wondrous sufferings  
so that you will find your fame towering as high as heaven.  
*Turning toward distant Cithaeron to address the Bacchae there.*  
Stretch out your hands, Agave, and you, her sisters,  
daughters of Cadmus. I am leading this young man here  
into a great contest and the victor will be myself and Bromios.<sup>o</sup> 975  
The event itself will show the rest.<sup>o</sup>  
*The Stranger escorts Pentheus off, stage left, towards Cithaeron.*

CHORUS OF ASIAN BACCHAE<sup>o</sup>

STROPHE 1  
Go forth, swift hounds of Frenzy,<sup>o</sup> go to the mountain  
where the daughters of Cadmus convene their congregation.

968 Pentheus proudly imagines he will be carried home in a chariot.

975 *The distinction between the Stranger and Dionysus is dissolved here.* The expression "the victor will be" is emphatically singular and so points to just one victor. This indicates that "the fiction that the Stranger and Dionysus are different entities, which they still were at line 849, has finally been given up." (Rijksbaron 123; Seaford 1996, 227).

976 "The tying of the plot is now complete, the untying about to begin." (Dodds 197) See Aristotle *Poetics* 1455 b24-32.

FIFTH CHORAL SONG (977-1023): Inspired by the Stranger's preceding words, this excited song of revenge covers an imagined interval of many hours—the time needed for the disastrous offstage action to transpire (i.e. Pentheus' ten mile trip to Cithaeron, his death, and the messenger's return to Thebes).

977 *The goddess Frenzy (Lyssa):* The chorus here picks up the Stranger's injunction to them at 851 about frenzy (*lyssa*).

Sting them with frenzy  
against the man in his woman-miming costume, 980  
the deluded spy of the maenads.  
First his mother, unseen, from a smooth rock  
will see him playing the spy  
and call out to the maenads:  
"O Bacchae, who is this searcher 985  
of the mountain-running daughters of Cadmus  
who has come, has come to the mountain, to the mountain?  
Who gave him birth? For he was not born  
from the blood of women. No, his birth was from some lioness  
or from the Libyan Gorgons." <sup>o</sup> 990

## REFRAIN

Let justice go openly!  
Let sword-bearing justice go forth,  
slaying him  
right through the throat —  
the godless, lawless, unjust, 995  
earth-born offspring of Echion.

## ANTISTROPHE 1

Since he, with unjust thought and unlawful rage  
concerning your secret rites, Bacchus,  
and those of your mother,  
sets forth with a maddened mind and insane purpose 1000  
believing he will overpower by force the unconquerable,  
that is to say, sensible judgment.  
But death is unhesitating where divine things are concerned  
and to behave as a mortal entails a life free of pain.  
I do not begrudge cleverness. But I rejoice 1005  
in hunting down these other things that are great and manifest  
— for they lead a man's life towards the good —  
namely to be pure and reverent throughout the day and  
into the night and, by rejecting customs  
outside the sphere of justice, to honor the gods. 1010

990 Gorgons: three monstrous sisters with snakes in their hair (like the Bacchae). Their gaze turned any lookers to stone. Medusa, the most famous Gorgon, suffered a fate similar to Pentheus, i. e. decapitation.

## REFRAIN

Let justice go openly!  
 Let sword-bearing justice go forth,  
 slaying him  
 right through the throat —  
 the godless, lawless, unjust, 1015  
 earth-born offspring of Echion.

## EPODE

Appear as a bull  
 or a many-headed snake  
 or a fire-blazing lion to behold.  
 Go, Bacchus, beast, and with a laughing face 1020  
 cast the noose of death  
 on the hunter of the Bacchae  
 as he falls under the herd of maenads.

## ACT V°

*Enter Messenger #2, stage left; he is Pentheus' personal attendant.*

## MESSENGER #2

O house, you that once were fortunate throughout Greece,  
 [house of the old man from Sidon° who sowed in the soil 1025  
 the earth-born crop of the serpent-dragon]  
 how I lament for you!  
 Though I am only a slave, still I lament.

## CHORUS LEADER

What is the matter? Have you some news to reveal from the Bacchae?

## MESSENGER #2

Pentheus is dead — the son of Echion, his father. 1030

CHORUS LEADER (*singing*)

O lord Bromios, you have revealed yourself a mighty god!

## MESSENGER #2

What do you mean? Why do you say this? Do you truly rejoice,  
 woman, in the misfortunes of one who was my master?

## CHORUS LEADER

I am a foreigner. I cry "euoi" in ecstasy with my barbarian songs.  
 No longer do I cower under the fear of chains. 1035

*Act V (1024-1152) has two sections: a) 1024-1042 = lyric dialogue #2 = announcement of, and choral reaction to, Pentheus' death; b) 1043-1152 = narrative description of Pentheus' death at hands of Bacchae.*

1025 The old man from Sidon, capital of Phoenicia, is Cadmus.

## MESSENGER #2

Do you deem Thebes so devoid of men  
 [that you will go unpunished for rejoicing in Pentheus' death]?

## CHORUS LEADER

Dionysus, it is Dionysus, not Thebes  
 who has power over me.

## MESSENGER #2

That, indeed, is pardonable but it is not honorable, women,  
 to rejoice at the evils that have been done. 1040

## CHORUS LEADER

Tell me, speak! By what doom did he die,  
 the unjust man, contriver of unjust deeds?

## MESSENGER #2°

When we had left behind the last settlements of this Theban land  
 and gone beyond the streams of Asopus°  
 we were striking into the hill country of Cithaeron 1045  
 both Pentheus and I, for I was following my master  
 and the stranger who was our escort for the viewing.°

First, then, we stop and sit in a grassy glen  
 silencing the sounds of our feet and tongues  
 so as to see but not be seen.° 1050

There was a hollow, surrounded by high cliffs,  
 watered by streams, thickly shaded by pines.  
 In that very spot the maenads sat plying their hands in tasks of delight.  
 For some of them were crowning anew their worn-out thyrsi  
 making them long-haired with ivy. 1055  
 Others, like fillies set free from their painted yokes,  
 were singing bacchic songs to one another.

1043-1152 *SECOND MESSENGER SPEECH* (110 lines): In the first messenger speech (677-774) a herdsman (714) had described the miracles of the Theban Bacchae on Mt. Cithaeron, including the tearing apart (*sparagmos*) of bulls. In the present speech one of Pentheus' slaves (1028, 1046), who was apparently on stage with Pentheus earlier (cp. 1043-47) and departed with him and the Stranger at 965-76, describes the tearing apart of his master.

1044 The Asopus River separated Thebes from Mt. Cithaeron (cp. 750n.).

1047 *Pentheus as Olympic victor*: The messenger refers to the Cithaeron mission as a *theoria* ("a viewing"), i.e. a sending of state ambassadors to the games. In this part of the play Pentheus is thought of as Thebes' champion competitor (963), her ace horse jockey (1074, 1108) who is going to a contest (*agon*, 964) to achieve fame (*kleos*, 972). But Dionysus, his official escort (*pompos*, 965, 1047), will end up as "the triumphant victor" (1146). (Leinieks 172-75)

1050 This messenger, like the first one, emphasizes three times (1050, 1063, 1077) that he was an eye-witness to the events he is reporting.



But the wretched Pentheus, not seeing the mob of women,  
spoke the following words:  
"Stranger, from where we stand  
my eyes cannot discern the maenads in their sick frenzy. 1060  
But on the banks of the ravine, by climbing a high-necked fir,  
I could see more clearly the shameful deeds of the maenads."  
Just then I see miraculous deeds from the stranger.  
Seizing hold of the sky-high branch of a fir tree  
he kept tugging, tugging, tugging it down to the black ground.° 1065  
The fir was arched like a bow being strung  
or like a bulging wheel being chiselled on a revolving lathe.  
In this way the stranger, tugging on this mountain branch  
with both hands, was bending it to the earth, doing deeds not mortal.  
And seating Pentheus on the fir's branches 1070  
he lets the sapling go straight up through his hands  
without shaking it, taking care not to throw the rider.  
High up into the high sky the fir towered,°  
my master saddled on its back.°  
But rather than seeing the maenads from above he was seen by them.  
For he was just becoming visible on his lofty perch 1076  
when the stranger completely vanished from sight  
and some voice from the air— I would guess Dionysus' —  
shouted out:  
"Young women, I bring him  
who made you and me and my holy rites 1080  
a laughing-stock. But take revenge on him!"  
And while he was speaking these words  
a light of holy fire was towering up between heaven and earth.  
The high air fell silent, and silent, too, were the leaves  
of the forest meadow; nor could you hear the cry of beasts. 1085  
Not hearing the voice clearly with their ears  
the Bacchae bolted straight up and cast their heads about.  
Again he commanded them. And when the daughters of Cadmus

1065 "tugging, tugging, tugging": "The threefold repetition, unique in tragic dialogue, suggests the slow descent of the tree-top." (Dodds 210)

1073 Dionysus' prophecy that Pentheus would find his fame *rising to the sky* (972) has now come true.

1074 *Fir tree as phallic symbol of Dionysus*: "The fir tree has become a thyrsus with Pentheus in maenadic attire crowning its tip as the ivy does the narthex [fennel stalk].... Dionysus has manifested himself in this enormous symbol of his power, the tree-thyrsus.... The scene may represent an erection, not of Pentheus, but of the god himself and therefore a manifestation of his power, just as phalli are raised in the Dionysiac procession as symbols of his power of fertility." (Kalke 416-17)

recognized clearly the command of Bacchus they darted forth  
with the speed of a dove [their swift feet impetuously  
carrying them — 1090  
his mother Agave and her kindred sisters] and all the Bacchae.  
They were leaping through the valleys  
swollen by winter torrents and over jagged cliffs,  
frenzied by the god's breath.°  
But when they saw my master sitting on the fir tree 1095  
first they kept hurling hard-hitting stones at him,°  
climbing upon a rock that towered on the opposite ravine  
and he was bombarded by their javelins of fir.  
Others sent their thyrsi through the air at Pentheus.  
Theirs was a cruel targeting but they missed the mark. 1100  
For the poor wretch sat too high, beyond the reach  
of their zeal, though still captive to helplessness.  
Finally, blasting some branches of oak with the force of a thunderbolt,  
the Bacchae set about tearing up the tree's roots with these unforged  
levers.  
But when they failed to accomplish the goals of their toiling 1105  
Agave spoke:  
"Come, stand round in a circle, maenads,  
and let each of us take hold of a branch  
so we can capture the mounted beast °  
lest he report the god's secret dances."  
And the women put a thousand hands to the fir tree and tore it 1110  
out of the earth. High up Pentheus sat and from that height  
he falls, crashing to the ground with a thousand wailing cries.  
He understood that he was near evil.  
It was his own mother who first, as sacred priestess, began the  
slaughter  
and falls upon him. He threw the headband from his hair 1115  
hoping that the wretched Agave, recognizing her son, might not kill him.

1094 *The god's breath*: Dionysus breathes upon the soul of each member in the cult group and thereby controls them; thus each "becomes part of the cult group (*thiasos*) in his soul (*psyche*)" (75). "The divine breathing upon not only results in divine control of the human subject, but it also makes the human subject divinely empowered (*en-theos*).... That does not mean that one has a god within him, but rather that one has within him power originating from a god." (Leinieks 92-97).

1096 Earlier in the play (356-57), Pentheus had imagined that Dionysus would be brought to justice by being stoned to death at Pentheus' command. Now the tables have turned.

1108 *First indication of Agave's delusion about her son*: At 1215 and 1278 the "beast" of 1108 becomes further defined as a "lion" (cp. chorus at 989-90).

Touching her cheek, he spoke:  
 "It is I, mother, your son  
 Pentheus to whom you gave birth in the house of Echion.  
 Take pity, mother, and do not, 1120  
 because of my errors,<sup>o</sup> kill your son."  
 But Agave, foaming at the mouth and rolling her protruding eyeballs,<sup>o</sup>  
 not thinking what she ought to think,  
 was held fast by the Bacchic god nor was Pentheus persuading her.  
 Seizing his left arm with her forearms 1125  
 and pressing her foot against the doomed man's ribs  
 she tore off his shoulder, not by her own strength —  
 no, the god gave a special ease to her hands.  
 Ino completed the job, tearing off his other shoulder,  
 ripping pieces of flesh while Autonoe and the entire mob of Bacchae 1130  
 continued to press upon him. Every kind of shout was mingled together,  
 and for as long as he had breath he screamed in pain  
 while the maenads were crying out in triumph. One was carrying an  
 arm,  
 another a foot still in its hunting boot. The ribs were laid bare  
 by the tearing apart. All the women, with blood-spattered hands, 1135  
 were playing ball with Pentheus' flesh.  
 His body lies scattered, one part beneath rugged rocks,  
 another in the thick foliage of the forest,  
 not easily sought out. But the pitiful head, the very one  
 which his mother just then happened to take with her hands, 1140  
 she impales on the tip of her thyrsus and carries it,<sup>o</sup>  
 as if it were the head of a mountain lion,<sup>o</sup> through the middle of  
 Cithaeron,  
 leaving behind her sisters in the choruses of dancing maenads.  
 Rejoicing in her ill-fated prey she comes inside these city walls

1121: *Pentheus' recognition of the truth?* For the first time he confesses to "errors" but what he means, beyond the fact of his physical danger, is unclear.

1122 *Agave's foaming mouth and protruding eyeballs:* Well-known symptoms of abnormal mental states and, in particular, of epilepsy. Mother becomes like son to the degree that she confuses "what she ought to think" just as Pentheus had confused "what he ought to see" (924).

1141 *Impaling of Pentheus' head:* The second climax of this speech, even more harrowing than the first (cp. 1114). "Euripides creates a Pentheus who is transformed visually into a symbol of Dionysus. Pentheus becomes the thyrsus of the god: first he is crowned with long hair and a *mitra* [headband], then he himself crowns the tip of a fir tree raised by the maenads on the mountain, and finally he becomes the literal crown of the thyrsus carried by his mother." (Kalke 410)

1142 *Pentheus' head as that of a lion* (another one of Dionysus' animal manifestations): Such is Agave's consistent perception: 1196, 1215, 1278; cp. 1142, 1183, 1210, 1237.

calling upon the Bacchic god as her 'fellow huntsman,' 1145  
 her 'comrade in the chase,' the 'triumphant victor'  
 in whose honor she carries off tears as a victory-prize.

So I will depart out of the way of this disaster  
 before Agave returns to the palace.  
 Moderation and reverence for things divine, 1150  
 this is the best course. And it is also, I think,  
 the wisest possession for those mortals who use it.<sup>o</sup>

*Exit Messenger #2, stage right.*

**CHORUS OF ASIAN BACCHAE<sup>o</sup>**

Let us lift up our feet and dance for Bacchus!  
 Let us lift up our voices and shout for the doom of Pentheus,  
 descendant of the serpent. 1155  
 He took the clothes of a woman<sup>o</sup>  
 and the fennel-rod fashioned into a beautiful thyrsus,  
 a sure warranty of death in Hades,  
 having a bull as his leader to doom.<sup>o</sup>  
 Cadmean Bacchae, you have made your victory hymn renowned, 1160  
 but it ends in a dirge of wailing, of tears.  
 A fine contest — to plunge your hands  
 in the blood of your child so that they drip with his blood!

1150-52 *Moral of messenger's story:* "Moderation and piety toward the gods are man's wisest possessions." This traditional but powerful platitude restates the answer to the crucial question asked by the chorus twice earlier (877-81 = 897-901) about the nature of wisdom. (Dodds 219)

*SIXTH CHORAL ODE (1153-64):* A celebration of Pentheus' death and Agave's homecoming, as if she was a victor returning from the Olympic games (1160). It is the play's only astrographic ode (a single stanza with no metrically responding counterpart) and is sung in an excited meter. This last ode is the play's shortest because "as the action hurries to its climax there is time only for a brief song of triumph.... The opening words suggest a joyful accompanying dance; but as the thoughts of the singers turn from Pentheus to Agave horror, if not pity, creeps in. The last lines prepare the audience for what their eyes must now meet." (Dodds 219; cp. Leinieks 278)

1156-58 *Hades and Dionysus:* By dressing like the maenads and taking up their main instrument, the thyrsus, Pentheus assured his own death (cp. 857-59, 1141). The irony, then, is that what should have been Pentheus' means of initiation into Dionysus' cult group has become instead his means of initiation into Hades' house. Hence the apparent opposites, Hades (death) and Dionysus (exuberant life) turn out to be one and the same.

1159 The chorus is referring to Pentheus' vision of Dionysus as a bull at 920-22.

## EXODUS°

CHORUS LEADER (*interrupting the song, addressing her companions*)  
 Stop! I see Pentheus' mother, Agave, 1165  
 rushing toward the house, her eyes rolling wildly.  
 Receive this reveler of the god of ecstasy!

*Enter Agave alone, stage left, excitedly dancing (cp. 1230-31) in her maenad costume; she carries Pentheus' blood-stained head (i.e. mask) atop her thyrsus.*

## LYRIC DIALOGUE°

## STROPHE 1

AGAVE  
 Asian Bacchae...

CHORUS LEADER  
 Why do you call out on me, woman?

AGAVE  
 We bring from the mountains to the palace  
 a freshly cut tendril, 1170  
 a blessed prey!

CHORUS LEADER  
 I see it and will accept you as a fellow-reveller.

AGAVE  
 I captured him without any snares,  
 this young whelp [of a mountain lion]  
 as you can see for yourself. 1175

CHORUS LEADER  
 Where in the wilderness did you capture him?

AGAVE  
 Cithaeron...

CHORUS LEADER  
 Cithaeron?

AGAVE  
 ...slaughtered him.

EXODOS ("a going out," with reference to the chorus' departure, as at the end of most Greek tragedies). This epilogue presents the play's tragic "reversal" which Aristotle defined as "a change of the action to its opposite...which must conform to probability or necessity." (*Poetics* 1452a 22-24). That reversal had been foreshadowed at 1147 where the messenger told of "she who carries off tears as a victory-prize."  
 1168-99 *Lyric Dialogue* #3: (cp. 576-603, 1024-42). The singing here continues the swift and excited choreography of the preceding song. There are two stanzas which respond to one another metrically: *strophe* (1168-83): chorus asks Agave about her hunting of a lion cub (= Pentheus) on Cithaeron; *antistrophe* (1184-99): Agave, in her frenzy, invites the chorus to share in a feast of her "catch."

CHORUS LEADER  
 Who was the woman who struck him?

AGAVE  
 First honors belong to me.  
 'Blessed Agave' is what the worshippers call me.° 1180

CHORUS LEADER  
 Who else struck him?

AGAVE  
 Cadmus'...

CHORUS LEADER  
 Cadmus' what?

AGAVE  
 His daughters,  
 but only after me. Only after me did they lay their hands  
 on this beast here. Lucky indeed is this catch!

## ANTISTROPHE 1

AGAVE (*gently caressing Pentheus' head*)  
 Share in the feast, then.

CHORUS LEADER  
 What? Am I to share in this, wretched woman?°

AGAVE  
 The bull is still young:° 1185  
 beneath his crest of soft hair  
 his cheeks are just now blooming with down.

CHORUS LEADER  
 Yes, with his mane he resembles a beast of the wild country.

AGAVE  
 The Bacchic god, being a clever hunter,  
 cleverly urged his maenads 1190  
 against this beast.

1180 One of the play's most bitter ironies—that Agave should call herself "blessed" (*makar*) when she is carrying the head of Pentheus whose name ("Man of Pain") means the opposite of "blessed."

1184 *Agave as cannibal*: She still thinks Pentheus' head is the head of a lion, hence she suggests feasting on it. The idea of eating Pentheus' remains raw (= *omophagia*, see 135-39n.) repels even Dionysus' most ardent worshippers. Animals might eat humans, as did Actaeon's dogs (see 337-41n.), but humans eating humans goes beyond the pale. Agave, in her delusion, ignores their reaction of pity (cp. 1200-1). She will reiterate her invitation to Cadmus at 1242 and will receive a similar response.

1185 *Agave's changing perception of Pentheus*: Her most consistent delusion is that he is a young lion (1142, 1196, 1215, 1278); at 1170 he seems like a shoot of ivy; here, at 1185, a young bull.

## CHORUS LEADER

For our king is a hunter.

## AGAVE

Do you praise me?

## CHORUS LEADER

I do praise you.

## AGAVE

And soon the Cadmeans...

## CHORUS LEADER

and your son Pentheus, too, ...

1195

## AGAVE

will praise his mother  
for capturing this lion-like prey.

## CHORUS LEADER

So extraordinary a catch!

## AGAVE

Caught in such an extraordinary way!

## CHORUS LEADER

Do you exult in him?

## AGAVE

I do indeed rejoice  
since, in capturing this prey, I have accomplished  
a great deed, a great deed for all to see.

## CHORUS LEADER

Show, then, poor wretch, show to the citizens the prey  
that brought you victory and that now you have brought to us.

1200

## AGAVE

O you dwellers of Thebes, city of beautiful ramparts,  
come so you can see this prey of a beast that we,  
the daughters of Cadmus, have hunted down  
not with thonged Thessalian javelins,  
not with nets, but with the sharp white blades  
of our hands. So who would brag  
that he owns the weapons of spear-makers? They are useless!  
With our very own hands we captured this one here  
and piece by piece tore to shreds the limbs of the beast.

1205

1210

Where is my father, the old man? Let him come near!  
And Pentheus, my son, where is he? Let him take and raise  
a sturdy ladder against the palace

so he can climb up and nail to the triglyphs°  
this lion's head that I have hunted and brought here.

1215

*Enter Cadmus, stage left, followed down the side entry ramp by a slow procession of mute pallbearers carrying a bier with the covered remains of Pentheus' corpse.*

## CADMUS°

Follow me as you carry the sad weight of Pentheus.

Follow me, attendants, in front of the house.

I bring this body here after toiling in a thousand searches,

having found him in the folds of Cithaeron,

torn to pieces, [taking] not one limb in the same part

1220

of the ground [lying in that impenetrable forest].

For I heard from someone the daring deeds of my daughters  
just as I got back inside the city walls.

With the old man, Tiresias, I was returning from the Bacchae.°

So I bent my way back to the mountain

1225

where I recovered the child slain by the maenads.

I saw Autonoe, who once mothered Actaeon to Aristaeus,°

and Ino with her, still in the thickets,

poor wretches, and still stung with madness.

But the other, Agave, was said to be returning home

1230

with the frenzied step of a Bacchic dancer. Nor was this idle gossip  
since I see her now and she is not a happy sight.

*AGAVE (who has, by now, taken Pentheus' head from her thyrsus and cradles it in her arms)*

Father, now you can boast most proudly

that you, of all mortals, have sown by far the best daughters.

I mean all your daughters but especially me.

1235

For it was I who left behind the spindles at the loom

to come to greater tasks, the hunting of wild beasts with my own hands.°

1214 Triglyph: a slightly projecting, three-grooved rectangular block occurring at regular intervals in a Doric frieze; between each triglyph was a plain square area called a metope.

1216 Cadmus' entrance answers Agave's question (1211). His final words before his last previous exit (369) had been a warning to Pentheus lest he suffer Actaeon's fate of being ripped apart by his own hounds (338-41). Now, ironically, Cadmus must relate how Pentheus has been ripped apart by his own mother.

1224 Earlier Cadmus had accompanied Tiresias to Mt. Cithaeron to celebrate Bacchus' rites (cp. 360 ff.).

1227 Aristaeus was the son of Apollo and the nymph Cyrene.

1236-37 Sex role reversal: Agave abandons her domestic role (as weaver; cp. 118) in the house (the female's normal place in Greek society) to pursue the "greater task" of being a hunter in the wild.

I carry here in my arms, as you see, this prize of valor<sup>o</sup>  
that I captured to be hung up as a dedication  
in your house. Receive it, father, in your hands! 1240

*Offering the head to him.*

Rejoice in the spoils I captured in the hunt!  
Invite your friends to a feast! For you are blessed,  
blessed by the deeds we have done!

CADMUS

[O sorrow beyond measure nor able to see.  
Murder — that's what you've done with those pitiable hands.] 1245  
A fine victim is this you have struck down as a sacrifice for the gods.  
And now you invite this Thebes here and me to a feast.  
Alas the pain of these evils, first yours, then mine.  
How the god has destroyed us — justly, yes, but too severely  
given that lord Bromios was born within our family.<sup>o</sup> 1250

AGAVE

How crabbed is old age for men!  
How it scowls in the eyes!  
Would that my son were a skilled hunter, resembling the ways  
of his mother whenever he joined the young Theban men  
and aimed at the beasts! But all that boy can do 1255  
is fight against the gods. He must be scolded, father, by you.  
Who will call him here before me  
so that he might see my blessed state?

CADMUS

Alas, alas! When you come to your senses and realize  
what you have done you will feel pain, terrible pain. 1260  
But if you remain forever in your present state  
you will imagine yourself fortunate, though in reality you are most  
unfortunate.

AGAVE

But in all this, what is not well? What is so painful?<sup>o</sup>

1238-40 *Pentheus' death as an animal sacrifice*: The climax of a long series of details in the play's second half which suggest that Euripides saw Pentheus' death as following the pattern of a Greek *animal sacrifice*.

1250 As the son of Semele, Dionysus was Cadmus' grandson.

1263-1300 *Famous "psychotherapy scene" and its historical importance*: The alternating single line dialogue allows Cadmus, by the healing art of persuasion, to coax his daughter out of her delusion. Here we have "an important document in the history of human culture...the first surviving account of an insight-and-recall oriented psychotherapy.... Such an innovation is the natural consequence of the basic outlook of a poet who...systematically substituted psychological explanations of human motivation for traditionally supernatural ones." (Devereux 42)

CADMUS

First turn your eyes this way, up toward the sky.

AGAVE (*looking skyward*)

There. But why did you advise me to look at the sky? 1265

CADMUS

Does it still appear the same to you or has it undergone a change?

AGAVE

It is brighter than before and more translucent.

CADMUS

Is this fluttering sensation still in your soul?

AGAVE

I don't understand your question. But somehow...

(*pausing for a moment*)

somehow I am coming to my senses, changed from my previous state of  
mind. 1270

CADMUS

Could you, then, hear a question? And could you answer it clearly?

AGAVE

Yes, but I have completely forgotten what we just said, father.

CADMUS

To whose house did you come when you got married?<sup>o</sup>

AGAVE

You gave me to Echion, one of the Spartoi, the Sown Men, as they call  
them.

CADMUS

And who in this house is the son of your husband? 1275

AGAVE

Pentheus, by my union with his father.

CADMUS

Well then, whose face do you hold folded in your arms?<sup>o</sup>

1273-84 *Role of memory in Agave's recognition*: "Cadmus skillfully leads up to the *anagnorisis* (recognition), appealing to the older memories that have not been repressed. She remembers her husband? Her son? Then at 1277 he shoots the crucial question at her. With averted eyes she answers 'A lion's—or so they told me in the hunt.' Gently but relentlessly he forces her from this last refuge: 'Come, you must look properly: it is only a moment's effort.' Then she knows; but she will not or cannot speak the name until he drags it from her. The whole dialogue is magnificently imagined." (Dodds 230)

1277 The word for "face" here (*prosopon*) might also mean "mask"; it is Pentheus' mask, of course, that Agave is carrying. The mother's dance with her son's severed head, her ritual rejoicing over her "bestial" victim, must have been a shocking spectacle for Euripides' audience.

- AGAVE  
A lion's head — at least that's what the women hunters told me.
- CADMUS  
Look again, straight at it. The toil of looking is brief.
- AGAVE  
Ah! What do I see? What is this I am carrying in my hands? 1280
- CADMUS  
Look again closely so you can learn more clearly.
- AGAVE  
I see the greatest pain, wretched woman that I am.
- CADMUS  
Surely it doesn't resemble a lion, does it?
- AGAVE  
No. Wretch that I am, this is Pentheus' head that I am holding!°
- CADMUS  
Much lamented by me long before you recognized him. 1285
- AGAVE  
Who killed him? How did he come into my hands?
- CADMUS  
Cruel truth, how untimely is your presence!°
- AGAVE  
Speak! How my heart leaps in fear about what is coming.
- CADMUS  
You killed him, you and your sisters.
- AGAVE  
But where did he die? In the house? Tell me, where? 1290
- CADMUS  
In the very place where the hounds once tore Actaeon to pieces.°
- AGAVE  
Why did he go to Cithaeron, this doomed boy?
- CADMUS  
He went to mock the god and your Bacchic rites.
- AGAVE  
And in what manner did *we* get there?

1282-84 *Agave's moment of truth*: She finally realizes that the head she holds does not belong to a lion. Her recognition induces her to begin to ask the questions, thereby switching roles with Cadmus.

1287 The first and only time in the play that the word "truth" (*aletheia*) occurs.

1291 Actaeon, the son of Autonoe, was Pentheus' first cousin; 337-40n.

- CADMUS  
You all were mad and the entire city was frantic with Bacchic frenzy. 1295
- AGAVE  
Dionysus has destroyed us. Only now do I realize this.°
- CADMUS  
Yes, he was insulted by our insolent hybris. For you all refused to believe he was a god.
- AGAVE  
And the most beloved body of my son, father, where is it?
- CADMUS  
With great difficulty I searched it out and am carrying it here.
- AGAVE  
Have all the limbs been fitted into their sockets in a decent way? 1300
- CADMUS  
*No, not all the limbs have been reassembled; the head is still missing.°*
- AGAVE  
*Who is this one whom I hold in my hands as a corpse?°  
And how shall I, wretch that I am, tenderly  
hold him to my breast? In what manner shall I sing a dirge?  
Would that I might embrace every limb, son,  
kissing the pieces of flesh, the very ones which I myself nourished.  
In what kind of grave could I bury your body  
and with what shrouds shall I cover your corpse?  
And how shall I sing the native songs for you?  
Come, old man, let us put back the head of the thrice-blessed boy  
in a proper way and make the whole well-fitting.  
Let us arrange the body as best we can.  
O dearest face, o youthful cheek,  
behold, with this veil I cover your head.*

1296 Agave, like Pentheus (cp. 1113, 1121), understands her error.

*Text in italics*: Cadmus' reply to Agave as well as most of Agave's subsequent speech and other portions of the dialogue in this part of the Greek manuscript are lost and have been reconstructed from various sources; the reconstructed portions are printed here in italics.

*Agave's lament over Pentheus*: "The enactment of a funerary ritual at this point...moves the violent and disturbing action toward closure and also helps the audience achieve a cathartic experience of the horror they had seen. But it is, of course, a grotesquely intensified version of a normal ritual. Instead of a mother washing, laying out, and caressing the body of a son...this mourning mother actually has to handle and position the pieces of her son's body—a body that she herself dismembered. Thus this most intimate role of the mother in the last offices to a child here appears in this ugly and horrible form." (Segal 1994, 15-16)

*Your blood-stained and furrowed limbs  
and parts I cover with new shrouds,  
and your ribs, too, all pierced and bloody.*

## AGAVE

And what share had Pentheus in my folly? 1301

## CADMUS

He proved himself like all of you, showing no reverence to the god.  
Therefore the god joined everyone together in one ruin,  
all of you and Pentheus here, so as to destroy my house and me.  
And I am indeed destroyed since I was born childless, without any male  
offspring. 1305  
So now, wretched woman, I look upon this young shoot of your womb,  
he who has been slain so shamefully and so evilly.  
Through him the house was recovering its sight.°

*Turning to Pentheus' corpse.°*

It was you, child, who held my palace together, you, my daughter's son,  
who were such a terror to the city. No one was willing 1310  
to commit hybris against the old man, at least not in your presence;  
for you would have exacted the proper penalty.  
But now I will be thrown out of my palace, dishonored,  
Cadmus the great who sowed the race of Thebans  
and reaped a most beautiful harvest. 1315

O most beloved of men — for though you are dead  
still you will be counted, child, among those I love most —  
no more will you touch this chin of mine with your hand,  
no more will you call me "grandfather" as you embrace me, son —  
no more will you ask, 1320

"Who wrongs you, old man, who dishonors you?

Who upsets your heart and causes you pain?

Speak up so I can punish whoever wrongs you, father."

But now I am wretched and you are miserable  
and your mother pitiful and your sisters miserable.  
So if there is anyone who disdains the gods 1325  
let him look at the death of this man here and let him believe that gods  
exist.°

1308 Since Cadmus had no sons (1305), his grandson was the only hope for the future,  
his shining light.

1309-22 *Cadmus' funeral oration*: "Cadmus' lament is almost a parody of a funeral oration.  
It is delivered in private rather than in public and has more praise for Pentheus'  
domestic than civic actions.... Nor does Cadmus mention the traditional topic of  
fame or lasting memory." (Segal 1994, 16)

1326 Pentheus had refused to believe any of Dionysus' series of proofs of his existence.  
In retribution the god has made the death of the unbeliever himself the crowning  
proof of his divinity.

## CHORUS LEADER

I am pained by your fate, Cadmus. But your grandson,  
he has received just punishment, though painful to you.

## AGAVE

Father, since you see how greatly my fortunes have changed 1329  
*and how wretched I am who exulted proudly just moments ago,  
what hands, child, will bury you?*  
*Would that I had not taken my own pollution into my own hands!°*

## CADMUS

*Take courage. Though the labor is painful  
be assured that I will carry Pentheus' furrowed and blood-stained limbs  
from this place and give them a proper burial.*

[Enter Dionysus as a god atop the palace roof.°]

## DIONYSUS°

*Whoever of mortals has seen these things  
let him be taught very well:  
Zeus is the one who sowed the god Dionysus.  
In light of the deeds done,  
know clearly that he is a god....  
The Cadmeians spoke indecent words about me  
that [Semele] was born from some mortal; all of them said this  
[but Pentheus here is especially culpable.]  
And it was not enough for me to be treated with hybris in these things alone  
[but he himself, though a mortal, stood against us.]  
He tried to chain and abuse me.  
[And then, mounted on disaster, he went to the mountain  
and dared to spy upon the secret rites of the maenads.]  
Accordingly he died at the hands of those who least of all should have murdered  
him.*

*Text in italics.* Again, as at 1301 ff., the text has been reconstructed from various sources.

The reconstructed portions are printed here in italics. Brackets indicate lines that  
have been made up by C. Willink for the purpose of suggesting the kind of verse  
that would have made sense in the particular context.

*Dionysus' epiphany*: For the first time the god appears in his divine form (*deus ex machina*,  
"god out of the machine"). Earlier he was, like a Homeric god, disguised. The ancient  
*hypothesis* (plot summary) is our main evidence for the missing part of the god's  
speech: "Dionysus, having appeared, announced [initiation rituals?] to everyone.  
To each one he made clear what would happen in deeds so that he would not be  
despised in words as a man by one of those outside [Dionysiac religion]."

*Dionysus' physical appearance*: The actor probably did not change his mask; no firm  
evidence exists for mask changing. Costume changing is also not common. It  
would be the place of his entry (i.e. atop the palace) which would immediately  
signal that 'the Stranger' was now revealing himself as a god.

And he suffered these things [justly].  
 Furthermore I will not conceal the evil sufferings which the people must endure,  
 for you will learn that you have come upon the suffering that you deserve.  
 You must yield your city to foreigners after it has been sacked by the spear,  
 and endure many evils,  
 and visit many cities submitting to the yoke of slavery at the hands of the  
 Argives.

[It is not at all necessary to exile this man in dishonor,  
 but as for the daughters of Cadmus, who killed him]  
 Ino and Agave who gave him birth  
 and Autonoe, the mother of Actaeon,  
 I say that they must leave the city, by their exile paying  
 the penalty for their unholy pollution of the man whom they killed  
 and no longer look upon their fatherland.

For it is impious for them to remain as sacrificers at the graves of the slain.  
 And you, wretched Agave, last of all on this day,  
 holding in your hands the most miserable corpse,  
 in your madness, Agave, you planned these things.  
 I save those who are pure but I hate those who dishonor me,  
 and as a doer of the most impious murder  
 your blood pollution prevents you from seeing  
 the day of homecoming.

What calamities you are destined to fulfill I will tell.  
 You, Cadmus, will be changed into a serpent and your wife, 1330  
 turned into a beast, will take the form of a snake, I mean Harmonia,<sup>o</sup>  
 Ares' daughter, whom you, though a mortal, took as your wife.

And as the oracle of Zeus says, you and your wife  
 will drive a wagon of oxen, leading foreigners.  
 You will sack many cities with your army of countless men. 1335  
 But when they plunder the oracle of Apollo  
 your foreigners will get a disastrous homecoming.  
 But Ares will rescue you and Harmonia  
 and in the land of the blessed<sup>o</sup> establish your life.

I say these things as Dionysus, born not from a mortal father 1340  
 but from Zeus. If you had known how to behave wisely

1331 Harmonia: the idealized personification of marriage, uniting the opposite principles of her father and mother, namely Ares (War) and Aphrodite (Sex); she was the mother of Agave, Semele, Autonoe, and Ino. All the gods attended the wedding of Cadmus and Harmonia at Thebes.

1339 *The land of the blessed*: a Greek version of paradise. Located at the ends of the earth, it was an Olympus-like place of afterlife which Zeus reserved for a very few select heroes (Menelaus; Helen; Cadmus).

when you chose otherwise, you would now be happy  
 and have the son of Zeus as an ally.

CADMUS  
 Dionysus, we beg you, we have wronged you.

DIONYSUS  
 You were late to understand us.<sup>o</sup> When you ought to have known us,  
 you did not. 1345

CADMUS  
 We have realized our mistakes now. But your punishment is too severe.

DIONYSUS  
 Yes, but I am a god and was treated with *hybris* by you.

CADMUS  
 Gods ought not be like mortals in their passions.<sup>o</sup>

DIONYSUS  
 Long ago Zeus, my father, assented to these things.<sup>o</sup>

AGAVE  
 Alas, old man, it has been decreed — miserable exile. 1350

DIONYSUS  
 Why, then, do you delay what necessity mandates?  
 Dionysus probably disappears from the palace roof at this point.<sup>o</sup>

CADMUS  
 O child, what a dreadful evil we have come to,  
 all of us — you in your misery, and your sisters,  
 and I in my misery. I will arrive among foreigners

1345 *Theme of late learning*: The relationship between time and knowledge is important in tragedy; often, characters only "learn by suffering" (*Agamemnon* 177).

1348 *The passions and wrath of the gods*: "Cadmus pleads with Dionysus, as the old servant in the *Hippolytus* with Aphrodite (*Hipp.* 120)—"The gods ought to be wiser than mortals.' And both plead in vain: for such gods as these the human 'ought' has no meaning. We need not conclude that the poet denies their title to worship; to do so is to confuse the Greek with the Christian conception of deity." (Dodds 238) For the thought compare Virgil *Aeneid* 1.11: "Can wrath so grievous dwell in the minds of the gods?"

1349 *Is this a weak evasion of responsibility by Dionysus?* Only "so long as we think of gods as personal agents having moral responsibility for their acts. Other Euripidean gods fall back in the same manner upon 'Destiny' or 'the Father's will' to justify their own actions and the fate of the human characters. 'The appeal to Zeus is an appeal to ultimate mystery, to a world structure in which the forces Dionysus represents are an inescapable element. With that there is no quarrelling, and Agave recognizes that this word is final.' [Winnington-Ingram]." (Dodds 238)

1351 *Does Dionysus exit now?* It seems unlikely that he would remain a silent spectator for the last 40 lines of the play. The focus now is on the two humans and their compassion toward each other.



as an old and alien settler. And still for me there is an oracle 1355  
 that I must lead into Greece a motley army of foreigners.  
 Against the altars and tombs of the Greeks  
 I will lead Harmonia, Ares' daughter and my wife —  
 both of us as savage snakes — and I will lead the way  
 with my troop of spearmen. Nor will I have any respite from evils, 1360  
 miserable man that I am, nor will I come to peace and quiet  
 when I sail across the downward-plunging Acheron.°

AGAVE (*embracing Cadmus*)

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

CADMUS

Why do you embrace me with your hands, wretched child,  
 like a swan protecting its white-haired, helpless drone of a parent? 1365

AGAVE

Where shall I turn after having been banished from my fatherland?

CADMUS

I do not know, child. Your father is a weak ally.

AGAVE°

Farewell, O palace, farewell, O city of my fathers.  
 I leave you in misfortune  
 an exile from my own bed-chambers. 1370

CADMUS

Go, then, child, to Aristaeus' [house...]  
*[one line is missing from the text]*

AGAVE (*slowly beginning to exit*)

I mourn for you, father.

CADMUS

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

AGAVE

For lord Dionysus has brought  
 this terrible brutality 1375  
 into your house.

CADMUS

Yes, because he suffered terribly at your hands:  
 his name received no honor in Thebes.°

1362 Acheron (literally = "flowing with sorrow"): a river in northwest Greece said to flow into the underworld.

1368-92 The meter changes to marching anapests, appropriate for departures.

1378 This theme of being punished for not honoring the god is emphasized by Cadmus throughout the end of the play; but he also stresses the excessiveness of the god's punishment.

AGAVE

Farewell, my father.

CADMUS

Farewell, my sorrowing daughter,  
 though only with difficulty could you fare well. 1380

AGAVE

Escort me, O friends, to where we will gather  
 my sisters, companions in exile and in sadness.  
 May I go to where  
 neither polluted Cithaeron [can see me]  
 nor I polluted Cithaeron, 1385  
 nor where any memorial of the thyrsus is dedicated.  
 Let these — Cithaeron and the thyrsus — be the care of other Bacchae.°

*Exit Cadmus and his attendants, stage right, carrying the bier of Pentheus; exit Agave, stage left, into exile.°*

CHORUS

Many are the shapes of divinity,  
 many the things the gods accomplish against our expectation.  
 What seems probable is not brought to pass, 1390  
 whereas for the improbable god finds a way.  
 Such was the outcome of this story.°

1387 Future maenadism at Thebes will be left to others. Agave's rejection of Dionysus and his devotees could not be more emphatic and in this final rejection she carries on the spirit of her son.

"The play ends with the heavy departures, in opposite directions, of Cadmus, the heroic founder of a great city, and of Agave, daughter and mother of kings—departures away from the palace, scene of their greatness, and off into the empty, friendless outside. One only has to contrast the end of *Ion*. We see here the dispersal of a great house, a house great enough to breed a god: so dangerous is it to be mortal kin to the immortals. Thus Euripides uses the necessary clearance of the stage to demonstrate the frailty of human exaltation." (Taplin 56-57)

1388-92: *Are these final five lines genuine?* Scholars are sharply divided. If they are spurious, the chorus could have exited silently after 1387 or even after 1351, with their god Dionysus, if (as seems probable) he exited then. (Seaford 1996, 258)