

BACCHAE

Dionysus: Here I am in Thebes, Dionysus, Zeus's son; my mother was Semele, Kadmus's child, who gave me birth through a lightning-flash. A god, I come in human form to the streams of Dirke and Ismenus.

Look! Here is the memory of a mother struck by thunder – the ruins of her house, smoking with the still-living flame of Hera's insolence towards her. I honour Kadmus for making this consecrated ground, a shrine to Semele. I have covered it all over with tender vine-clusters.

I've left Lydia, rich in gold, Phrygia, the sun-baked plains of Persia, the Bactrian battlements, the perilous land of the Medes. I visited blessed Arabia and the whole of Asia, which extends along the salt sea, populated with both Greeks and barbarians, living cheek-by-jowl, its cities resplendent in their towers. I have come first to this Greek city. Those other places I set to dancing and worshipping me so that mortals might know me as a god. First in all of Greece, I filled Thebes with frenzied shouts, clothing the women in fawn-hides, placing a wand, their ivied weapon, in their hands. My mother's sisters – of all people! – said that I, Dionysus, was not Zeus's true-born son. No, they said, Semele was seduced by a god and then *claimed* that the results of the impious union was the spawn of Zeus. This was Kadmus's clever ruse, they said, and they insisted that, because she lied about the marriage, Zeus had killed her. That is why I have stung them with madness and driven them out of doors. They live on the mountain, out of their minds with frenzy, wearing what I have forced on them – the vestments of my orgiastic rites. Yes, all the females of Kadmus's line, driven mad from their homes by me! There they sit, with Kadmus's daughters, on the bare rocks beneath the dusky-green firs. The city must, willy-nilly, learn thoroughly that it is uninitiated into Bacchic rites and I, known as a god by mortals, born of Semele by Zeus, must speak on my mother's behalf. Kadmus gave the honour of kingship to his son-in-law Pentheus, who makes war against a god – me! – , rudely bars me from my rites and never names me in his prayers. So to him and all of Thebes I will prove my divinity. After I have settled matters thus, I will travel to another land to show my godhead there.. Should Thebes show anger by bringing the Bacchantes in arms from the mountain, I shall fight those forces and inflict frenzy on them too. That is why I have changed my appearance from god to man. Women, you have left Tmolus, Lydia's safeguard, you, my devotees, whom I delivered from the barbarians to be my travelling-companions; take up, in the Phrygian city, your country's drums, the invention of myself and Mother Rhea, go to King Pentheus's palace and beat them for Kadmus's city to see. I shall go to Kithaeron's glens with my Bacchantes and dance with them.

Dionysus: I come from sacred Tmolus on the shore
Of Asia, bustling in the sweetest chore
Of Bromius, a toil-less toil, and sing
Aloud 'Io' in Bacchic revelling.
Who's here? Who's in the halls? Let him remain
Apart, let every man always maintain
A pure and holy silence. To our lord
I'll sing his wonted songs. What sweet accord

Attends the man who, as an acolyte,
Performs with all his heart and soul each rite
And on the mountain with the purest glee
Carouses with the glorious Cybele
In lawful orgies, with her ivy crowned
And brandishing the thyrsus all around
Our Dionysus. Celebrants, draw near
And conduct god-born Dionysus here
To Greece's spacious, streets where we may sway,
From Phrygian peaks. Her mother, on the day
Of childbirth, lost her life when Zeus's bolt
Of thunder struck her with a mighty jolt
And, far from Hera's prying eyes, made room
Within his thigh and with a golden band
Secured him, then, just as the Fates had planned,
Birthed a bull-headed god, a coronet
Of snakes around him, wherefore even yet
The Maenads wreath themselves with snakes as well.
Thebes, Semele's nursemaid, with fresh bryony swell
With ivy and with oak and pine entwined
And clothed in hides of dappled fawns! Now bind
Yourselves with braided wool! Be sanctified!
Handle the wanton staves! Now far and wide
The land will dance, when Bromios leads the swarm
To the peak, to the peak, where he has raised a storm
Of madness in each female devotee –
They've left the loom, the shuttle's drudgery
And wait for them. O holy Crete, the site
Of Zeus's birth, where the drum, with skins stretched tight
And triple-crested, was fashioned for me.
And with that drum, in Bacchic revelry,
They mingled Phrygian pipes with their sweet noise
In rhythm with the Bacchants' boisterous joys,
Once placed into our Mother Rhea's hand.
This instrument the Satyrs' frenzied band
Got from the Mother Goddess so they may
Cavort upon the triple holiday
That Bacchus revels in. O what delight
To drop to earth up in the mountain's height
While scampering with the host, the holy hide
Of fawns around them, bent on capricide
And raw flesh, through the mountains wandering
In Phrygia and Lydia, our king,
Our Bromios leading. Euoi! Copiously
The plain runs with the food the honey-bee
Creates, with milk, with wine; the smoke soars high

Like Syrian incense; see the Bacchant fly,
Bright, pitchy flame upon the thyrsus' stem,
And rouse the wanderers, exhorting them
To run and dance while tossing to the skies
His delicate locks with riotous Bacchic cries:
Gold-flowing Tmolus' pride, on, Bacchae, on,
Warble of Bacchus, while in unison
The bass pipes roar; in his divinity
Exult in Phrygian shouts and revelry
When the sweet, holy pipe with sportive airs
Is heard – all rush to gain their mountain lairs.
Like a foal beside its mother, happily
The Bacchant skips with great rapidity.

Teiresias: Who's guarding the gate? Call Cadmus, Agenor's child, out here. He it was who left his Sidonian city and fortified this city of Thebes. Let someone go and tell him Teiresias is looking for him. He knows why I've come, he knows the covenant I, an old man, made with one older still – to wrap the staves in wool and ivy, to wear the hides of fawns and wreaths of ivy-shoots.

Kadmus: Dearest friend – yes, I recognized your voice, those wise words from a wise man, while I was still inside the palace. Here I am, ready with the god's accoutrements. Dionysus is my daughter's soon and has proved his divinity to mortals, and therefore we must magnify him to the best of our ability. Whither should we go to dance, to kick up our heels, shake our grey locks? Tell me, as one old man to another, Teiresias. You're wise. I'll not tire of beating the ground with the thyrsus both night and day. How delightful to forget that we are old!

Teiresias: My feelings exactly! I am young! I *will* dance!

Kadmus: Then shall we ride to the mountain?

Teiresias: Dionysus would be less glorified if we rode.

Kadmus: I will lead you to school, though you are old like me.

Teiresias: Our god will get us both there – no problem.

Kadmus: Will we be the only Thebans to dance for him?

Teiresias: Yes, we are reasonable, the rest are not.

Kadmus: We've lingered long. Take my hand.

Teiresias: There, take it, link it with mine.

Kadmus: I do not disdain the gods. I am mortal.

Teiresias: We practise no artfulness with the gods. The customs we inherited, as old as time – no reasoning can pull them down, not even if the truly gifted have gained wisdom. If anyone says I do not respect old age as I go off to dance, wreathed in ivy, I say "Nonsense!" The god did not distinguish the dancing of young and old – he wants adoration from us all. No-one is exempt.

Kadmus: Teiresias, since you are deprived of sight, I will be your mouthpiece. Pentheus, Echion's child, is hurrying towards us – I gave him dominion over this land. How excited he is! What's the news, I wonder.

Pentheus: I was away when I heard the bad news concerning the city – our women had fled, fraudulently inspired by Bacchus, dashing through the dark mountains, dancing in worship to the parvenu god Dionysus – whoever *he* is! Full mixing-bowls stand in their

midst as they slope off to various spots in the wilderness to bed with men. They claim to be Bacchant priests and to rate Aphrodite higher than Bacchus himself. Those I have caught are kept, their hands bound, in prison by my servants. Those still at liberty I will hunt down in the mountain – Ino and Agave, Echion’s wife, she who gave birth to me, and Actaeon’s mother – yes, it’s Antinoë I mean. I will fasten them in nets of iron and swiftly put an end to this immoral Bacchus-worship. They say some conjuring wizard has come from Lydia, some foreigner with perfumed yellow hair, dark-complexioned, with eyes like those of captivating Aphrodite. Night and day he consorts with the young women and offers them the Bacchic rites. If I catch him in the palace I will put an end to his thyrsus-beating, his shaking locks, I’ll slice his neck in two. Dionysus is a god, he says, ripped from Zeus’s thigh. No! Because Semele lied about her marriage to Zeus he was killed, along with her, by the fiery thunderbolt! He was consumed by fire! Is this not a hanging matter, for *any* foreigner to commit such impiety? And look! Another fine sight! Teiresias, the prophet, in his technicolour fawn-hide, and my mother’s father (o it’s laughable!) revelling with his fennel-stalk! Father, I’m ashamed to witness the witless dotage of the two of you! Shake off that ivy! Grandfather, abandon that thyrsus! You put him up to this, Teiresias. Are you introducing this new god so you may inspect birds’ entrails and profit from burnt offerings? If you weren’t protected by your greybeard status you’d be sitting in chains with your Bacchae for introducing your filthy rites. When women feast on those shining grape-clusters, there is nothing at all wholesome in your rites.

Chorus: O the sacrilege! Do you not respect the gods and Cadmus, who created men from the earth? You’re Echion’s son – do you scorn your kind? When a wise man has a just premise, it’s hard not to speak well, but you, though your words flow easily as though you too were wise, they make no sense. A powerful man with rhetorical skill becomes a bad citizen when he has nothing sensible to say. But this new deity at whom you snigger – I could not tell you the huge influence he’ll have throughout Greece. Young man, the two original goddesses for humankind are Demeter and Ge (call her what you will): Ge nurtured them on dry food, while Semele’s son, in contradistinction, discovered the moist nutrition of grapes and gave it to mortals. This kills the depression in them whenever poor wretches drink their fill from the flowing vine, and they give us sleep to banish our daily cares – there is no other cure for our distress. A god himself, he is poured in libation to the other gods and thereby benefits mankind. And you mock him because he was ripped from Zeus’s thigh? Let me tell you how good a thing this is. When Zeus snatched him from the fiery thunderbolt and took our child-god to Olympus. Hera was all for casting him out of heaven, but Zeus hatched a counter-plot, as indeed a god would. He broke off a piece of the air which surrounds the earth and gave it to Hera as a pledge while removing Dionysus from her brawling. For a time, mortals say, he was nurtured in Zeus’s thigh but his name was changed because, though a god, he was Hera’s pledge. Thus this story was invented. This god is a prophet. Frenzy and madness produce much prophetic skill. When the god enters one’s body with all his force he possess one and enables one to predict the future. He has something in common with Ares, too – fear has been known to panic an army standing in ranks before it has even touched a spear: this, too, is a madness from Dionysus. You will see him on the Delphic Rocks leaping with his pine-torches about the Plain of the Twin Peaks, throwing and shaking the Bacchic wand, and throughout mighty Greece. Listen to me, Pentheus: don’t be so confident that might

holds sway over men, don't think yourself wise if you get some idea (that idea may be a poor one). Receive our god here on earth, pour him libations, revel, don a garland. Dionysus will not force women to be chaste – chastity in all things lies in one's nature. Think about that. A moderate woman who revels in Bacchus, whatever others may do, will not be destroyed. See, you are happy when a multitude stands at your gates and praises the name of Pentheus. He, too, I think, is pleased to be extolled. Well then, Kadmus and I, whom you mock, shall crown ourselves with ivy and dance – greybeards both, yet dance we must. I will not take your advice and cross the gods. You're mad, completely mad – you can't cure your illness with drugs, in fact they have *made* you sick. Chorus: Old man, you don't dishonour Phoebus while showing wisdom in honouring Bromios, a mighty god.

Kadmus: Child, Teiresias has advised you well. Dwell with us, not outside the laws. Right now you are winging away from wisdom, you have abandoned sense. If this god does not exist, as you say, still say that he does. Make a good show of lying – *say* he is Semele's son so that she will appear to be the mother of a god, and honour will attach to our whole family. Think of Actaeon's terrible fate – torn to pieces by flesh-eating dogs which he had reared because he boasted in the meadows that he was abetter hunter than Artemis. Don't end up the same way – let me wreath your head with ivy. Join us in honouring our god.

Pentheus: There is no way you'll touch me! Off to your revels! You won't smear me with your idiocy. I'll bring vengeance on this didact for such senselessness. Someone go as fast as you can to where he sits and inspects birds' entrails! Take a crowbar and turn those seats upside-down! Pile everything up in a topsy-turvy heap! Cast those garlands to the boisterous winds! That's the way to really sting him. Roam the city, sniff out the effeminate stranger who brings a new plague to women and pollutes marriage-beds. If you catch him, bring him back in chains so he may be stoned to death and see his Bacchic revelry take a bitter blow.

Teiresias: Wilful man, you've no idea what you're talking about! You're insane – and not for the first time! Kadmus, let's go. Let's beseech the god for the good of this man, despite his recklessness, and of the city, to make no drastic moves. Come with me and bring your ivy wand. Try to hold me up while I do the same for you. It would be treacherous for two old men like us to fall down. But never mind. We must struggle on for Bacchus – he's Zeus's son. We must stop this man who reigns from bringing pains to the palace, Kadmus. I'm not using prophesy now, merely facts. Expect idiotic words from an idiot.

Chorus: O golden-winged queen, divinity,
Above us, hear Pentheus' inanity!
At Bromios he aims his foul conceit,
Semele's son, who, when the Bacchants meet
In wreathed festivities, is rated king
Of all the gods; he starts the capering,
The laughter, piping, puts an end to stress
When to the holy feast the lusciousness
Of grapes is brought. Amid the ivied glee
The bowl gives mortals sleep's tranquillity,
Unbridled mouths, wild folly at the last

Will bring ill luck. A wise life is steadfast,
Safeguarding kin. The gods, though, in the air
Far off in heaven, watch how mortals fare.
Thus to be wise beyond a mortal's scope
Shortens one's life. Therefore one who, in hope
Of greatness, aims that way should not achieve
What's near his grasp. Thus madness, I believe,
And failures act. To Cyprus I'd repair,
The isle of Aphrodite – that is where
The Loves charm men – and Paphos, fertilized
By the unraind-on foreign stream, comprised
Of a hundred mouths. Where is the beauteous site
Of the Pierian Muses, holy height
Of Olympus? Bromios, lead me to that place,
O Bacchic god! Evoe! There each Grace
Dwells, there Desire, there revelling is the right
Of Bacchants, there carouses in delight
Our god, the son of Zeus: he worships Peace,
Wealth-Bringer, who brings up the youth of Greece.
To rich and poor alike he gives the cheer
Of carefree wine; and those who don't hold dear
The good life night and day he hates. It's wise
To keep from those who intellectualize
One's mind and soul. What common folk agree
To live by is agreeable to me.

Servant: Pentheus, we're back from the hunt you sent us on. We were successful. Your prey is calm, he didn't try to escape but surrendered willingly. He didn't turn pale, his face is still wine-flushed. He laughed and ordered us to bind him and bring him here, and he waited – it was an easy task. I was ashamed and said, "Stranger, it's against my will that I lead you off – these are Pentheus's orders. The Bacchants you locked up, those you grabbed and bound in the public gaol – they're free. They've gone to their revels, skipping and calling upon their god Bromios. Their leg-irons slipped off of their own accord, without the help of mortal hand the key opened the door. This man has come to Thebes full of wonderment. The rest is up to you.

Pentheus: You're more lunatic than he is! He's in chains, hardly swift to escape. You're not physically unattractive, stranger, not to women – your reason for being in Thebes. Your hair is long – hardly a wrestler, are you? – hanging down your cheek, smacking of lust. You keep your skin white – it's not through the sun's rays but because of shade that you have the good looks to hunt Aphrodite. First tell me what family you're from.

Dionysus: I'm not boasting but that's easily said. You've heard, I'm sure, of flowery Tmolus.

Pentheus: I have – it surrounds Sardis.

Dionysus: I'm from there – Lydia is my native land.

Pentheus: Whence are these rites that you bring to Greece?

Dionysus: Zeus's son, Dionysus, initiated me.

Pentheus: Is there a Zeus who begets new gods?

Dionysus: No, this is the Zeus who married Semele here.
Pentheus: Did he force her in a dream or in a substantial form?
Dionysus: They could see one another, and he *did* import the rites.
Pentheus: What form do these rites take for you?
Dionysus: Such a thing the uninitiated are not allowed to hear.
Pentheus: How do they serve those who give the god sacrifices?
Dionysus: It's not lawful for you to hear but the knowledge is worthwhile.
Pentheus: Well counterfeited! Making me long to know!
Dionysus: The god's rites are enemies to the impious.
Pentheus: What did he look like? You say you saw him as clear as day.
Dionysus: Whatever he chose – I didn't instruct him.
Pentheus: Again, a fine diversion, saying nothing!
Dionysus: One who speaks wisely will seem otherwise to an ignoramus.
Pentheus: Did you bring the god here first?
Dionysus: Every barbarian dances in the rites.
Pentheus: Yes, because they are much more foolish than the Greeks.
Dionysus: Wiser, in fact, in this case, but their customs are different.
Pentheus: Do you fulfil these rites by night or day?
Dionysus: Mostly by night – there is solemnity in darkness.
Pentheus: Thus the women are deceived and debased.
Dionysus: One may detect debauchery by daylight too.
Pentheus: Wicked artifice must pay the price.
Dionysus: So must your ignorant impiety towards our god.
Pentheus: Presumptuous and a fine talker, your Bacchus!
Dionysus: Tell me what I should undergo. What horrible thing have you got planned for me?
Pentheus: Well, first I'll cut your luxuriant hair.
Dionysus: The hair is sacred – I grow it that way for our god.
Pentheus: Then give me that thyrsus!
Dionysus: Take it yourself. I carry it for Dionysus.
Pentheus: I'll throw you in prison.
Dionysus: The god himself will release me whenever I want.
Pentheus: Yes, when you call him when you're with your Bacchants.
Dionysus: He's here. He sees what is happening to me.
Pentheus: And where is he? My eyes certainly can't locate him.
Dionysus: Beside me. Your impiety forbids your seeing him.
Pentheus: Seize him – he scorns both me and Thebes.
Dionysus: I'm ordering you not to tie me up. I'm talking sense to the senseless.
Pentheus: I am more powerful than you. Bind him.
Dionysus: You don't know what your life is about, you don't see who you really are.
Pentheus: I am Pentheus, son of Agave and Echion!
Dionysus: Your name is suitable for misfortune.
Pentheus: Be off! Shut him in the stables nearby – let him see nothing but pitch-black.
There you can dance! Your partners-in-crime, whom you lead here, I shall either execute or, when I have stopped their drumming, keep them as slaves at the loom.

Dionysus: I'm happy to go. I'll undergo what I must. Dionysus, who you say doesn't exist, will punish you for your presumptuousness. In wronging us, you make a prisoner of him.

Chorus: O Dirce, queen, renowned for many a maid,
Achelous' child, who to your springs conveyed
The son of Zeus, who placed him in his thigh
That from the constant fire he might fly,
Intoning, "Dithyrambus, take your place
In my male womb. To Thebes I'll show your face,
O Bacchic one, that they may name you thus.
But, blessed Dirce, you're removing us
And our wreathed thyrsi. Why turn on us, why
Flee from us? One day, we can certify
By Dionysus' grape-vines, you will swear
By Bromios. Now Pentheus has laid bare
His earthly status: dragon-born is he,
Whom earthly Echio begat to be
A savage freak, no mortal, who will clash
With the gods, just like a giant, and soon lash
My arms with cables – I, a Bromian.
Already he's enclosed in Stygian
Obscurity within the house those who
Revel with me. Is this perceived by you,
O Bacchus, son of Zeus, a desperate fray
Fought by your prophets in a fierce melée
Against oppression? Come, your princeliness,
Down from Olympus so you may repress
This savage man's presumption as your rod
Of gold you shake. Where do you, Bacchic god,
In fertile Nysa lead your revelling throng
Or on Corycean peaks? Are you among
Olympus' tree-rich chambers where the lyre
Of Orpheus one time with its muse of fire
Convoked wild beasts and trees? He worships you,
O blessed Pieria, and with his crew
Of Bacchants he will come here, traversing
Swift Axios, his followers rollicking,
And Lydias, which gives prosperity
To men, and Father Haliaemon, he
Who (as I hear) with splendid waters feeds
The countryside abundant with swift steeds.

Dionysus: Io! Io! Hear me, Bacchants.

Chorus: Who's here, who's here? Whence the din of 'Euio's'?

Dionysus: Io! Io! I call once more, I, the child of Zeus and Semele.

Chorus: Io! Io! Bromios, join our band.

Dionysus: Make the earth shake o shaking spirit.

Chorus: Ah! Soon shall Pentheus' rafters shudder to pieces. Dionysus is here. Worship him as do we! Do you see these stone columns tottering? Bromios is here and will raise a shout within the house.

Dionysus: Apply the fiery torch of thunder! Burn, burn Pentheus' palace!

Chorus: Ah! Don't you see the fire, don't you perceive around Semele's holy shrine the flame of sacred thunder Which Zeus the Thunder-Striker left here long ago? Maenads, throw your trembling bodies to the ground! Our lord, Zeus' child, has caused great havoc and will be here.

Dionysus: Barbarian woman, have you fallen to the ground in great fear? I think you saw Bacchus shake Pentheus' palace to oblivion. Come, arise! Be of good cheer! Enough of this trembling!

Chorus: O mighty light! O Bacchic revelling! How glad I am to see you – I was so desolate!

Dionysus: Was your dismay at my being left inside? Did you think I was going to fall into Pentheus' gloomy snares?

Chorus: Of course! Who would have protected me if you had met disaster?

Dionysus: I free myself – it was easy, no trouble.

Chorus: Didn't he tie your hands in a noose?

Dionysus: No, I made a mockery of him – he thought he was binding me but he never even laid hands on me. He was merely fed with hopes. He found a bull in the stables where he had led and confined me. He tried to bind its knees and hooves, panting with rage, dripping sweat, biting his lips. I was sitting quietly nearby, watching. It was right then that Bacchus came, shook the house and set alight his mother's shrine. When he saw that, he thought the palace was on fire and, rushing this way and that, ordered his slaves to bring water. Every slave was engaged in this but his toil was in vain. He ceased his efforts, thinking I had escaped, and, drawing his sword, he rushed into the dark palace. Then Bromios, I believe (this is my impression), created a light in the hall. Rushing, he aimed at this bright light and lashed at it, as though slaying me. The Bacchic god continued to pile indignities on him. He razed the palace to the ground. Everything was destroyed and he saw a most bitter conclusion to my imprisonment. He threw down his sword and gave up. A man daring to confront a god! Surreptitiously I left the building and came to you, dismissing my thoughts about Pentheus. I believe he will be at the front door any time now – there is indeed the clatter of shoes in the palace. After all this what will he have to say? I'll easily deal with him even if he comes spitting nails. A wise man keeps an even temper.

Pentheus: I have gone through hell! The stranger has escaped my grasp. Just now I had him bound fast. Ha! Here he is! What *is* this? How can he be at my front door, free and at large?

Dionysus: Stop! Angry as you are, move quietly!

Pentheus: How did you escape your bonds and make it here?

Dionysus: Didn't I tell you that someone would free me? Or didn't you hear me?

Pentheus: Who? You're full of surprises!

Dionysus: He who grows clusters of grapes from the vine for mortals.

Pentheus: *****!!!!

Dionysus: You insult Dionysus for his wonderful gift.

Pentheus: Close up the battlements! Every door!

Dionysus: To what purpose! Cannot the gods scale walls?

Pentheus: You're wise enough – except where you *should* be wised.

Dionysus: Where I most need it I am inherently wise. First of all, listen and learn from the man who has come from the mountain with a message for you. We will remain here with you, we won't leave.

Messenger: Pentheus, ruler of Thebes, I come from Kithairon, where the white snowdrifts never melt.

Pentheus: And what urgent message do you bring?

Messenger: I saw the raging Bacchants madly shifting their white limbs from this land. I am here to tell you and your city, lord, that they are doing terrible things, things beyond wonder. I wish to hear whether I may tell these things frankly or curtail my words. For, lord, I fear your rapidity of thought, your quick temper, your excessive kingliness.

Pentheus: Speak – you're totally safe where I am concerned. One should not be angry at righteous men. The more terrible the things you tell me about the Bacchants, the more I will punish the man who has worked his wily will with these women.

Messenger: I was driving my herd of heifers to a rocky outcrop as the sun sent down his rays to warm the land when I saw three bands of Bacchic revellers. Autonoe led one, your mother Agave the second, Ino the third. They were all asleep, their bodies relaxed, some lying on their backs against a fir tree's foliage, others among an oak's leaves, their heads carelessly lolling down – chastely, not, as you say, drunk on wine and the sound of the pipe or sloping off to seek Cypris in the wood. Your mother stood among the Bacchants and howled to them to cast off slumber when she heard the lowing of the horned beasts. They shook the deep sleep from their eyes and rose up straight – a wonder of orderliness – young and old, and unwed maidens. First they unhooked their hair down to their shoulders, and those whose garments had come loose girded up their fawn-hides and festooned those dappled hides with snakes which licked the women's mouths and, cradling a gazelle or a wolf-cub, those who, having recently given birth and abandoned their babes, still possessed teeming breasts, fed them white milk. They donned wreaths of ivy and flowery holm-oak. Someone with a thyrsus struck a rock and dewy water sprang from it. Another plunged her fennel-rod into the earth and the god caused wine to gush forth therefrom. Those with a thirst for white liquid scraped away the earth with their fingertips and were rewarded with an abundance of milk. From their ivy wands dripped sweet honey. If you'd been there and seen this, you would have offered prayers to the god you now revile. We herdsmen and shepherds met up to rival each other in our accounts of the terrible wonderful things we had seen. Someone was wandering through the town, a skilled speaker, saying to everyone he met, "Holy mountain-dwellers, do you want us to hunt down Agave, Pentheus' mother, and take her from Bacchic revelling, thus doing our lord a kindness?" We thought he spoke well and were lying in wait, hidden in the bushes. But at a prearranged time they shook their thyrsi to start their revels, loudly calling on Iacchus, Zeus' son, and addressing him as Bromios. The whole mountain, even the wild beasts, joined in the Dionysiac revelry. Everything was stirred as they ran. Agave was leaping close by me – I jumped out, at pains to capture her, vacating the thicket where we were hiding. One yelled out, "My swift hounds, these men are hunting us. Follow me, follow, your thyrsi in your hands, and they, without the benefit of weapons, went after the cattle which were feeding on tender shoots. You would have seen one of their number ripping in two a heavy-uddered, lowing heifer, while others tore calves apart.

You would have seen flanks and cloven hooves scattered hither and yon, which were hung dripping, befouled with blood. Bulls which until then had been aggressive, focussing their rage through their horns, crashed to the ground, brought down by countless maidens. They pulverized the skin faster than you could have blinked your royal eyes. They ran like rising birds across the plains which beside the Asopus produce nourishing corn, across Hysiae and Erythrae, situated beneath the rocks of Kithairon, like an enemy host, attacking everything and scattering it far and wide. They snatched children from their homes, and those they bore on their shoulders were not held by any bonds, they did not fall to the black earth, no bronze, no iron was used. They carried fire in their hair and yet it not burn. Attacked by the Bacchants, the people angrily armed themselves. Then we saw a dreadful sight, lord. Their lances failed to bloody them. They flung their thyrsi, wounding them, assaulting them from the rear as they fled, women dominating men but not without the help of some god. Back they went whence they had come, back to the very springs the god had created for them. They washed away the blood while the snakes licked off the drops from their cheeks. Lord, receive this god, whoever he is, into the city, since he is great in all things else, especially, as I have heard it said, in his giving to mortals the vine that banishes care. If there were no wine, there would be no Cypris, nor anything else to delight mortals.

Chorus: I fear to speak freely to our lord, but nonetheless it will be said. There is no greater god than Dionysus.

Pentheus: This Bacchic insolence touches me deeply, like fire, a great shame to the Greeks. No delay! Go to the Electran Gates. Tell all the shield-bearers and the swift horsemen to meet, all the spearmen, all those who pluck the bowstring, that we may march against the Bacchants. It is unconscionable that we are thus treated by women.

Dionysus: You hear me yet you ignore my words, Pentheus. Although you have caused me pain, you must not rise up against the god. Do nothing. Bromios will not brook your rousing the Bacchants from their mountains of rejoicing.

Pentheus: You'll not teach me anything. Remember you have escaped your bonds or I shall reinforce your punishment.

Dionysus: I shall give the god sacrifices, not kick out in anger, a mortal facing a god.

Pentheus: Indeed I shall sacrifice – I shall stir up a great slaughter of women, as they deserve, in Kithairon's glens.

Dionysus: You will all run away. What a disgrace – to turn your bronze shields and flee the Bacchants' thyrsi.

Pentheus: I'm lumbered with an impossible stranger here. He's never silent, in chains or not.

Dionysus: Sir, these things may still be settled.

Pentheus: How? Slaving for me with my female slaves?

Dionysus: I will bring the women back without using any weapons.

Pentheus: Oh no! Now he's planning a trick on me.

Dionysus: How can that be if my plan is to save your skin?

Pentheus: They've arranged this so they may revel forever.

Dionysus: Yes, with the god – that's right.

Pentheus: Bring me the weaponry. You – shut up!

Dionysus: Ah! Do you wish to see them sitting together on the mountains?

Pentheus: Yes indeed – I would give a huge amount of gold to be able to see such a thing.

Dionysus: Why have you developed such a great longing for this?

Pentheus: I would be sad to see them in an intoxicated state.

Dionysus: Would it please you to see a sight that's bitter to you?

Pentheus: Believe me, yes, if I were sitting quietly under the fir trees.

Dionysus: They'll sniff you out even if you go secretly.

Pentheus: No, I'll go openly. That's good advice.

Dionysus: Should we lead you? Will you make the journey?

Pentheus: Lead me as quickly as you can. There's no time to waste.

Dionysus: Don robes of fine linen.

Pentheus: Why? You want me to appear to be woman?

Dionysus: Yes. If they see you're a man, they'll kill you.

Pentheus: Well advised again. You're wise after all.

Dionysus: Dionysus has taught us these things well.

Pentheus: How will your good advice be realized?

Dionysus: I'll go inside and deck you out.

Pentheus: What robe? A woman's robe? No, I'd be ashamed.

Dionysus: You are no longer keen to watch the maenads.

Pentheus: What robe do you say I should wear?

Dionysus: I shall make your hair hang down long from your head.

Pentheus: What fashion of dress is next?

Dionysus: Floor-length robes and, for your head, a band.

Pentheus: Anything else?

Dionysus: A thyrsus in your hand and a dappled fawn-hide.

Pentheus: I could never wear a woman's robe.

Dionysus: There will be bloodshed if you engage with the Bacchae.

Pentheus: Of course. First I must inspect them closely.

Dionysus: Well, yes, that is wiser than hunting evil with evil.

Pentheus: How shall I roam the city without Cadmus' subjects seeing me?

Dionysus: We will go through empty streets. I'll lead you.

Pentheus: Anything is better than that the Bacchae laugh at me. We will go into the palace and decide what to do.

Dionysus: Very well; I am entirely in your hands.

Pentheus: Let's go. Either I will take weapons or rely on your judgment.

Dionysus: Ladies, the trout is tickled. He will go to the Bacchae and pay with his death the penalty for his impiety. Dionysus, it is your job now – you are not far away. Let's punish him. First of all, drive him mad, instill him with a giddy frenzy. In his right wits, he'll be unwilling to put on feminine garments, but, driven from them, he won't. I want him to be made a laughingstock to the Thebans, paraded through the city in female form because of his earlier terrible impieties. I will put on Pentheus the attire he will take with him to Hades after his slaughter at his mother's hands. He will recognize Dionysus, son of Zeus, who has in the end proved to be both terrible and mild to mortals.

Chorus: Shall I again in nightlong jollity

Revel, and, like a deer upon the lea

In agile joy, toss in the dewy air

My head, escaping from the well-knit snare,

A trembling prey, while huntsmen urge their hounds

With shouts, while she along the river bounds
Across the plain in whirling, flying stress,
Luxuriating in the wilderness
Devoid of mortals and the dusky mane
Of woodland plants? What's wisdom? Who can gain
A better god-sent prize than mastery
Over his foes? What's fine will ever be
Most pleasing. You may trust in godly might
Although it may be slow. It sets aright
The wilful and those who don't glorify
The gods in madness, who astutely lie
Long hidden and hunt down impiety.
In neither thought nor action should one be
Beyond convention's brink. It costs not much
To think the power of any god can touch
Us deeply, and the laws which long have lain
In nature. What is wisdom? Who can gain
A better god-sent prize than mastery
Over his foes? What's fine will ever be
Most pleasing. He who reaches harbour when
He's fled a storm is happy, and, again,
Happy the man who conquers his distress.
One man will best in wealth and forcefulness
Another man. Ten thousand hopes reside
Within ten thousand souls: while some have died,
Others have earned great riches. He who can
Be glad each day I call a blessed man.

Dionysus: You, who are so anxious to see what you should not see, pursue what you should not pursue – I mean you, Pentheus – come out of the palace, let me see you in the garb of a female maenad so you may scout out your mother and her band. You have the appearance of Cadmus' daughters.

Pentheus: I think I see two suns. a double Thebes, our seven-gated city. I think there's a bull leading me, horns growing on its head. Were you once a beast? You resemble a bull.

Dionysus: The god walks beside you. He was previously your enemy, though an ally to us, but now it is permitted you to see what you see.

Pentheus: Not Ino, not my mother Agave?

Dionysus: Looking at you, I think I am seeing them. But this lock of hair has fallen out of place – no longer fastened with the headband I used.

Pentheus: With tossing it this way and that and my revelling it came undone.

Dionysus: I'll rearrange it – it's my duty. Hold your head up.

Pentheus: There, proceed. I rely on you.

Dionysus: Your girdle has come loose, and the folds of your robe trail untidily below your ankles.

Pentheus: Yes, I think so too – at least on the right side. On the other side my robe hangs well at the tendon.

Dionysus: You will consider me the best of your friends when you see how unexpectedly modest the Bacchae are.

Pentheus: Shall I hold my thyrsus in my right hand or my left? Which will make me more closely resemble a Bacchant?

Dionysus: Your right hand, moving in time with your right foot. I approve your change of heart.

Pentheus: Could I carry on my shoulders Kithairon's glens and the Bacchae too?

Dionysus: Yes, if you want to. Hitherto you were unhealthy in your thoughts. Now you think as you should.

Pentheus: Should we take crowbars or should I insert my arm or my shoulder beneath the mountain's peaks and tear it apart with my hands

Dionysus: Don't destroy the Nymphs' statues or the shrines of Pan, where he plays upon his pipes.

Pentheus: Well said. One should not overcome women with strength. I shall hide among the firs.

Dionysus: You will be conveniently hidden on your secret spying mission to the maenads.

Pentheus: Like birds in the thickets they seem caught in the delightful toils of love.

Dionysus: Surely you're trying to prevent such a thing. Perhaps you'll catch them if you're not caught first.

Pentheus: Take me through the centre of Thebes, the only Theban to venture there.

Dionysus: You're the only one to take the city's weight on your shoulders, the only one. The struggles you merit await you. Come with me. I shall go as your guide and protector. Someone else will bring you back...

Pentheus: Yes, my mother.

Dionysus: ...for all to see.

Pentheus; That's why I go.

Dionysus: You'll be carried back...

Pentheus: Luxury!

Dionysus: ...in your mother's arms.

Pentheus: You're determined to pamper me.

Dionysus: We'll see how.

Pentheus: It's a worthy act I perform.

Dionysus: Remarkable yourself, you'll suffer remarkably – your fame will establish you in heaven. Hold out your hands, Agave, and you, daughters of Cadmus. I take this young man to a great ordeal. I shall be victorious – I and Bromios. The event will reveal all else.

Chorus: Swift, raging dogs, go to the mountain where

The maids of Cadmus hold up in the air

Their thyrsi, sting that man in female dress

Who seeks the maenads in his furiousness.

His mother first will spy him as he lies

In wait on rock or pine and, with sharp cries,

Alert her Bacchants. Who's this, out to hound

Cadmus's maids who scamper all around

The mountains, Bacchants? Who's his mother? He

Came not from woman: no, his pedigree

Springs from a lioness or the Libyan
Gorgo. Clear Justice, go, punish that man
And run him through throat, that wicked one,
The godless, lawless son of Echion,
Earthborn. With his reckless insanity
And evil mind, the rites of Semele
And Bacchus he deplores – with wit insane,
With purpose quite deranged, he hopes to gain
A triumph over the unconquerable.
For mortals to attain a life that's full
Of happiness they must, with things divine,
Have constant modesty which should combine
With what becomes a man. Sagacity
I do not envy, but it pleases me
To seek great things and fine, whereby, each night
And day, one lives both pious and upright,
Ignoring laws which go beyond the span
Of right. Clear Justice, go, punish that man
And run him through the throat, that wicked one,
The godless, lawless son of Echion,
Earthborn. Take on a bull's shape, this appear,
Or be a lion causing mortals fear
Or else a many headed snake. Go, cast
A net, with smiling face, and make it fast
Upon the Bacchant-hunter just as he
Attacks the murderous maenads' company.

Messenger: House of old Sidonius, once so blessed throughout Greece –
Sidonius, who owed the earthborn harvest of the serpent in the earth – how I groan for
you, I, a mere servant, yet to good slaves their master's misfortunes...

Chorus: What is it? Some more news of the Bacchae?

Messenger: Pentheus, Echion's son, is dead.

Chorus: Lord Bromios, this proves your great power.

Messenger: What? Why do you say that? Do you rejoice at my master's downfall,
woman?

Chorus: I am not from here – I sing my joy in barbaric melody. No longer do I cower in
fear of fetters.

Messenger: Do you think Thebes is as cowardly as that?

Chorus: Dionysus, not Thebes, has power over me, Dionysus!

Messenger: One *may* forgive you for that but it is wicked to rejoice over others' distress.

Chorus: Tell me, come on, tell me how the evil man of evil deeds perished.

Messenger: Once we had left the farm-buildings of Thebes behind and passed Asopus'
streams, we sped to the hill of Kithairon, Pentheus and I – for I accompanied my master –
as well as a foreigner who acted as our official guide. First we rested in the glassy glade,
not speaking or making the sound of a single footfall so we could see and yet be invisible
ourselves. There was a ravine surrounded by cliffs and fed by water, shaded with pine
trees: this was where the maenads were, performing sweet tasks. Some were rewreathing

with ivy a dead thyrsus, others were singing Bacchic songs to each other like colts freed from the gaily-coloured yoke. Poor Pentheus, unaware of the female throng, said: "From where we stand, I cannot catch a glimpse of the faux Bacchantes. On the bank here, if I climb a lofty pine tree, I might be able to see clearly the maenads at their disgusting antics." At that point I saw the foreigner do amazing things. Grabbing the uppermost branch of the fir tree, he dragged it down, down to touch the black earth. It bent like a bow or like a wheel that is traced in a circle by its peg. In this way the stranger dragged the mountain branch to the ground – a task not of mortal proportions. Having set Pentheus on the fir's branches, he carefully allowed it to straighten upright, taking care not to unseat him. Straight up into the air it went, my master sitting on its back. Rather than his seeing the maenads, they saw *him*. As he sat on high, he was barely visible – the stranger could no longer be seen – when a voice was heard in the air (Dionysus, I suspect), saying: "Young ladies, I bring you the man who laughed at you, at me, at my rites. Punish him." As he said this, there flashed to heaven and earth the light of holy fire. The air went still, the leaves of the woody dell were silent, one couldn't hear the sound of any beast. They pricked up their ears at the sound, not hearing quite clearly, and cast their eyes in every direction. Again he ordered them, and, when Cadmus' daughter heard Bromios' clear command, they dashed with no less speed than that of a dove, speeding in their eagerness – Agave, her kinswomen and all the Bacchae. Through the glade swollen with mountain streams, through the cliffs, they leaped, frenzied with the god's spirit. When they saw my master sitting in the fir tree, they climbed a towering rock where they threw stones at him with great force and fir branches as if they were spears. Others threw thyrsi at Pentheus with deadly aim. But they did not succeed: the poor man was sitting too high up for all their eagerness – but could do nothing. Finally they violently tore off the oak-branches and ripped the tree up by its roots with levers not made of iron. But as they were not succeeding in their labour, Agave said: "Maenads, surround him and grab the branch, let's take this mounted wild beast: let him not give a report of our secret dancing. Countless hands took hold of the fir tree and ripped it from the earth. From his seat from on high he fell and flew to the ground to the accompaniment of multiple shrieks. He knew he was close to disaster. The priestess, his mother, began the slaughter, attacking him. He wrenched the band from his head so that the wretched Agave could recognize him and stay her hand and, touching her cheek, said: "Mother, it is I, Pentheus, the son you bore in the palace of Echion. Pity me, mother, do not kill your child for his offences. But she, exuding foam and rolling her eyes, was far from sane, held as she was in Bacchic thrall, and he did not prevail with her.. She took his left hand in her grip and, planting a foot against the unfortunate man's flank, she tore away his shoulder, not through her own strength but because the god have given her the manual dexterity. Ino managed the same manoeuvre on his other side, wrenching away the flesh. Autonoe and the entire horde set upon him. One huge cry went up, he shrieking, as long as breath was allowed him, and they ululating. One carried an arm, another a foot along with its shoe; his flanks were stripped of all flesh. Every one of them, hands bloody, tossed his flesh about like a ball. His body lay apart, parts under rugged rocks, parts deep in the wood's foliage, difficult to find. His mother took his pitiful head in her hands and fixed it on the end of her thyrsus like that of a mountain lion in the centre of Kithairon, leaving her sisters in the maenad throng. Exulting in her fateful prey, she goes inside the walls calling on Bacchus, her fellow-huntsman who helped her in the chase, gloriously triumphant,

winning for her nothing but tears. So I left this catastrophe before Agave reached the palace. It is best to exercise moderation and revere all things divine. I believe mortals who live thus are the wisest.

Chorus: Let's dance the Bacchic dance, the tragedy
Of Pentheus, of a dragon's pedigree,
Shout to the skies. With wand and female gear
(That leads to Hell) and thyrsus, held so dear,
He went behind a bull to his demise.
Cadmian Bacchants, victory's great prize
You've gained which leads to weeping and lament.
To kill your child – a splendid tournament!
A-dripping with his blood! Behold, I spy
Agave, Pentheus' mother, coming nigh,
Her eyeballs rolling; welcome her as she
Sings "Euios" to our god in revelry.

Agave: Asian Bacchants!

Chorus: Why do you call on me, madam?

Agave: I have come from the mountain to the palace with a new-cut tendril – it was a successful hunt.

Chorus: I see. I welcome my fellow-reveller.

Agave: I have caught this lion cub without the help of nets, as you see.

Chorus: Where in the wilderness was this?

Agave: Kithairon.

Chorus: Kithairon??

Agave: I killed him.

Chorus: Who struck the first blow?

Agave: That privilege was mine.

Chorus: Happy Agave!

Agave: So I am called among my women.

Chorus: Tell me more.

Agave: Cadmus's...

Chorus: Cadmus's what?

Agave: After me, after me my kin partook of the hunt.

Chorus: A blessed hunt!

Agave: Come, join us in the feast.

Chorus: Alas, why should I?

Agave: It's a young beast, his soft cheek just sprouting downy hair.

Chorus: Lord of the hunt!

Agave: You praise him?

Chorus: What? Of course I do.

Agave: Doubtless Cadmus' daughter...

Chorus: ...and Pentheus, your son, will give his mother...

Agave: ...praise for capturing this beast...

Chorus: ...this wonderful lion...

Agave: ...in wonderful fashion.

Chorus: You rejoice?

Agave: I have indeed rejoiced at my great and glorious deed in capturing this beast.
Chorus: Poor lady, show your citizens this prey you have gained as your prize and brought hither.

Agave: Citizens of the four-walled city of Thebes, come, see the beast which we daughters of Cadmus hunted, not with curved Thessalian bows, not with nets but with our own white hands. Why hurl javelins, why use the spearmaker's supplies – pointless! With this hand I captured it and tore its limbs apart. Where is my aged father? Let him come hither. Where is my child Pentheus? Tell him to bring sturdy ladders to the palace and climb them so he can fix the head of the lion I slew on the triglyph.

Cadmus: Follow me, follow, servants, here in front of the palace with the sad weight of Pentheus' body which, after endless toilsome searching, I found torn to shreds in Kithairon's glens and brought hither. No part of him was in the same spot as he lay scattered in the high-impenetrable wood. Someone told me of my daughter's enterprise. I was already safe inside the palace with Teiresias, separate from the Bacchae. I turned around and went back to the mountain and brought back my son slain by the maenads. I saw Autonoe, Aristaios' wife, who gave birth to Actaeon, and, with her, Ino: they were still in wretched frenzy's grip among the thickets. Someone told me Agave was returning, dancing in Bacchic style. My information was not incorrect – I see her, a far from happy sight.

Agave: Father, you have the very greatest cause for rejoicing – I left the shuttle and the loom to achieve greater fame in hunting wild beasts with my bare hands. I bring in my hands, as you see, the victor's prize; I bring it to the palace so you may hang it up there. Take it, father. Rejoice in my hunting, call your friends to a feast. You are blessed, blessed because of my deeds.

Kadmus: O grief beyond measure, unbearable to see, the slaughter at your wretched hands, a fine sacrifice to strike down and deliver to the gods. And now you invite Thebes and myself to a feast! I grieve first for your wretched state, then for my own. Lord Bromios, my kin, has destroyed us – justly yet excessively.

Agave: How sullen and gloomy old men are! Would that my son were a skilled hunter with his mother's technique when he attempted the hunt with the Theban youths. But all he can do is fight the gods. Reprimand him, father. Where is he? Someone call him here that he may see my good fortune.

Kadmus: Oh no! Realize what you have done and grieve the dreadful act. If you remain forever in your present state you will not recognize the misery you're in.

Agave: What is the matter? What is amiss?

Kadmus: Raise your eyes.

Agave: There! Why do you urge me to look up?

Kadmus: Is the sky the same or do you believe it has changed?

Agave: It's clearer, brighter.

Kadmus: Are you still in a distracted state?

Agave: I don't know what you mean. But I have my senses now, I've changed.

Kadmus: Will you listen and answer clearly?

Agave: I've forgotten what I said before, father.

Kadmus: What palace received you after your marriage?

Agave: You gave me to Echion, the Sown Man, they call him.

Kadmus: What child was born to you both in that palace?

Agave: Pentheus – he blessed our union.

Kadmus: Whose head do you carry in your arms?

Agave: It's a lion's, as my hunter told you.

Kadmus: Look closely, the action of a moment only.

Agave: Ah, what am I seeing? What am I carrying?

Kadmus: Look at it. Learn the truth.

Agave: I see an immensity of grief. Oh!

Kadmus: Does it really resemble a lion, do you think?

Agave: No, I am - oh no! – carrying Pentheus' head.

Kadmus: He was mourned before you recognized him.

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

Kadmus: Dreadful truth, you are here in an unhappy time.

Agave: Tell me – my heart is thumping at what you will say.

Kadmus: You and your sisters killed him.

Agave: Where did he die? At home? Where?

Kadmus: Where, earlier, dogs had torn Actaion to pieces.

Agave: Why did the poor wretch go to Kithairon?

Kadmus: He went to deride the gods and your Bacchants.

Agave: How did we harbour there?

Kadmus: You were in a frenzy, the entire city was Bacchus-mad.

Agave: Dionysus has destroyed us - I know that now.

Kadmus: Yes, you committed a profanity. You did not acknowledge his godhead.

Agave: Father, where is my precious son's body?

Kadmus: After much searching, I found it and have brought it here.

Agave: Have you collected all the fragments? What part of my frenzy undid Pentheus?

Kadmus: He resembled you – he did not revere the god, and so he brought the same loss to all, and to you and Pentheus, and this destroyed the royal line and myself (now bereft of sons). God help me, I see this seed of your womb horribly and hideously killed. Our kin looked up to you, child, you held the palace together, son of my child. You were an object of awe to the city. No-one would insult this old man when they saw you – if they did he would mete out worthy punishment. But now great Kadmus will be banished from the palace, bereft of honour – Kadmus who created the Theban race and reaped a splendid harvest. Dearest of men, no longer will you be numbered among my precious children, never again will you touch my chin with your hand. No longer will you speak to your mother's father, clasp him to your bosom, child, and say: "Who wrongs you, who insults you, old man, who upsets you and causes you grief? Tell me that I may punish the miscreant, father." Now my state is wretched, you have died a dreadful death, your mother is pitiable, our kin is lost. Anyone shunning the gods must believe in them when he looks at your demise.

Chorus: I feel your pain, Kadmus. A just punishment for your son, but how grievous for you!

Dionysus: You shall be transformed into a snake, your wife, now hunted down, will assume the shape of a serpent – your Harmonia whom you, a mortal, received at Ares' hands. As decreed by Zeus' oracle, you will drive a heifer-drawn cart, you and your wife, leading a barbarian horde. You will destroy many cities with a massive army but when you plunder the seat of Apollo's oracle, you will experience a calamitous return home.

Ares will protect you and Harmonia and establish you in the land of the blessed. That is my edict – I, Dionysus, born not of a mortal but of Zeus. Knowing the necessity of wisdom yet rejecting it, you should have revered the son of Zeus and accepted him as an ally.

Agave: Dionysus, we beseech you – we have sinned.

Dionysus: You knew me too late – when you should have, you would not see.

Agave: This I know. But your punishment is excessive.

Dionysus: You insulted me, a god.

Agave: Gods should not exhibit anger equal to that of mortals.

Dionysus: My father Zeus agreed to this long ago.

Agave: Then it is decided, old man – unhappy exile.

Dionysus: Why, then, hesitate over the inevitable?

Kadmus: Child, our fate is a dreadful one, you, your kin, myself, everyone. I shall live as an ancient immigrant among barbarians. It is my destiny to lead an army of mixed nations to Greece. My wife Harmonia, Ares' child, in the shape of a wild serpent, I, a serpent myself, shall take around the altars and tombs of Greece, leading my spearsmen, and, sailing the down-plunging Acheron, I shall find no peace.

Agave: Father, I shall be a fatherless exile.

Kadmus: Why do you embrace me, poor child, like a white swan embraces its helpless parent?

Agave: Whither must I turn, deprived of my native land?

Kadmus: I do not know, child – your father is of little help.

Agave: Farewell, palace, farewell, native city. I leave the palace halls a wretched fugitive.

Kadmus: Go to Actaion's house, child.

Agave: I grieve for you, father.

Kadmus: And I for you, child, as I have wept for your sisters.

Agave: In dreadful manner has Lord Dionysus brought this oppression upon your house.

Kadmus: That's because he suffered indignities at your hands, dishonoured as he was in Thebes.

Agave: Farewell, father.

Ladmus: Farewell, my poor daughter, though 'faring well' will indeed be hard for you.

Agave: Lead me, servants, that I may find my wretched sisters, my fellow-exiles. Let me go where polluted Kithairon may not see me, nor I Kithairon, where there will be no reminders of the thyrsus. Let other Bacchae be their concern.

Chorus: The gods take many forms, they perform many unexpected deeds. The expected had not happened, our god goes the way of the unexpected, and that is how things have turned out.