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# **The Bacchantes**

## **Euripides**

**TRANSLATED BY EDWARD P. COLERIDGE**

**THE BACCHANTES**

**CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY**

Dionysus

Cadmus

Pentheus

Agave

Teiresias

First Messenger

Second Messenger

Servant

Chorus of Bacchantes

(Before the Palace of Pentheus at Thebes. Enter DIONYSUS.)

## Dionysus

Lo! I am come to this land of Thebes, Dionysus, the son of Zeus, of whom on a day Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, was delivered by a flash of lightning. I have put off the god and taken human shape, and so present myself at Dirce's springs and the waters of Ismenus. Yonder I see my mother's monument where the bolt slew her nigh her house, and there are the ruins of her home smouldering with the heavenly flame that blazeth still-Hera's deathless outrage on my mother. To Cadmus all praise I offer, because he keeps this spot hallowed, his daughter's precinct, which my own hands have shaded round about with the vine's clustering foliage.

Lydia's glebes, where gold abounds, and Phrygia have I left behind; o'er Persia's sun-baked plains, by Bactria's walled towns and Media's wintry clime have I advanced through Arabia, land of promise; and Asia's length and breadth, outstretched along the brackish sea, with many a fair walled town, peopled with mingled race of Hellenes and barbarians; and this is the first city in Hellas I have reached. There too have I ordained dances and established my rites, that I might manifest my godhead to men; but Thebes is the first city in the land of Hellas that I have made ring with shouts of joy, girt in a fawn-skin, with a thyrsus, my ivy-bound spear, in my hand; since my mother's sisters, who least of all should have done it, denied that Dionysus was the son of Zeus, saying that Semele, when she became a mother by some mortal lover, tried to foist her sin on Zeus—a clever ruse of Cadmus, which, they boldly asserted, caused Zeus to slay her for the falsehood about the marriage. Wherefore these are they whom I have driven frenzied from their homes, and they are dwelling on the hills with mind distraught; and I have forced them to assume the dress worn in my orgies, and all the women-folk of Cadmus' stock have I driven raving from their homes, one and all alike; and there they sit upon the roofless rocks beneath the green pine-trees, mingling amongst the sons of Thebes. For this city must learn, however loth, seeing that it is not initiated in my Bacchic rites, and I must take up my mother's defence, by showing to mortals that the child she bore to Zeus is a deity. Now Cadmus gave his sceptre and its privileges to Pentheus, his daughter's child, who wages war 'gainst my divinity, thrusting me away from his drink-offerings, and making no mention of me in his prayers. Therefore will I prove to him and all the race of Cadmus that I

am a god. And when I have set all in order here, I will pass hence to a fresh country, manifesting myself; but if the city of Thebes in fury takes up arms and seeks to drive my votaries from the mountain, I will meet them at the head of my frantic rout. This is why I have assumed a mortal form, and put off my godhead to take man's nature.

O ye who left Tmolus, the bulwark of Lydia, ye women, my revel rout! whom I brought from your foreign homes to be ever by my side and bear me company, uplift the cymbals native to your Phrygian home, that were by me and the great mother Rhea first devised, and march around the royal halls of Pentheus smiting them, that the city of Cadmus may see you; while I will seek Cithaeron's glens, there with my Bacchanals to join the dance.

(Exit DIONYSUS.)

(Enter CHORUS.)

Chorus

From Asia o'er the holy ridge of Tmolus hasten to a pleasant task, a toil that brings no weariness, for Bromius' sake, in honour of the Bacchic god. Who loiters in the road? who lingers 'neath the roof? Avaunt! I say, and let every lip be hushed in solemn silence; for I will raise a hymn to Dionysus, as custom aye ordains. O happy he! who to his joy is initiated in heavenly mysteries and leads a holy life, joining heart and soul in Bacchic revelry upon the hills, purified from every sin; observing the rites of Cybele, the mighty mother, and brandishing the thyrsus, with ivy-wreathed head, he worships Dionysus. Go forth, go forth, ye Bacchanals, bring home the Bromian god Dionysus, child of a god, from the mountains of Phrygia to the spacious streets of Hellas, bring home the Bromian god! whom on a day his mother in her sore travail brought forth untimely, yielding up her life beneath the lightning stroke of Zeus' winged bolt; but forthwith Zeus, the son of Cronos, found for him another womb wherein to rest, for he hid him in his thigh and fastened it with golden pins to conceal him from Hera. And when the Fates had fully formed the horned god, he brought him forth and crowned him with a coronal of snakes, whence it is the thyrsus-bearing Maenads hunt the snake to twine about their hair. O Thebes, nurse of Semele! crown thyself with ivy; burst forth, burst forth with blossoms fair of green convolvulus, and with the boughs of oak and pine join in the Bacchic revelry; don thy coat of dappled fawn-skin, decking it with tufts of silvered hair; with reverent hand the sportive wand now

wield. Anon shall the whole land be dancing, when Bromius leads his revellers to the hills, to the hills away! where wait him groups of maidens from loom and shuttle roused in frantic haste by Dionysus. O hidden cave of the Curetes! O hallowed haunts in Crete, that saw Zeus born, where Corybantes with crested helmets devised for me in their grotto the rounded timbrel of ox-hide, mingling Bacchic minstrelsy with the shrill sweet accents of the Phrygian flute, a gift bestowed by them on mother Rhea, to add its crash of music to the Bacchantes' shouts of joy; but frantic satyrs won it from the mother-goddess for their own, and added it to their dances in festivals, which gladden the heart of Dionysus, each third recurrent year. Oh! happy that votary, when from the hurrying revel-rout he sinks to earth, in his holy robe of fawnskin, chasing the goat to drink its blood, a banquet sweet of flesh uncooked, as he hastes to Phrygia's or to Libya's hills; while in the van the Bromian god exults with cries of Evoe. With milk and wine and streams of luscious honey flows the earth, and Syrian incense smokes. While the Bacchante holding in his hand a blazing torch of pine uplifted on his wand waves it, as he speeds along, rousing wandering votaries, and as he waves it cries aloud with wanton tresses tossing in the breeze; and thus to crown the revelry, he raises loud his voice, "On, on, ye Bacchanals, pride of Tmolus with its rills of gold! to the sound of the booming drum, chanting in joyous strains the praises of your joyous god with Phrygian accents lifted high, what time the holy lute with sweet complaining note invites you to your hallowed sport, according well with feet that hurry wildly to the hills; like a colt that gambols at its mother's side in the pasture, with gladsome heart each Bacchante bounds along."

(Enter TEIRESIAS.)

Teiresias

What loiterer at the gates will call Cadmus from the house, Agenor's son, who left the city of Sidon and founded here the town of Thebes? Go one of you, announce to him that Teiresias is seeking him; he knows himself the reason of my coming and the compact I and he have made in our old age to bind the thyrsus with leaves and don the fawnskin, crowning our heads the while with ivy-sprays.

(Enter CADMUS.)

Cadmus

Best of friends! I was in the house when I heard thy voice, wise as its owner. I

come prepared, dressed in the livery of the god. For 'tis but right I should magnify with all my might my own daughter's son, Dionysus, who hath shown his godhead unto men. Where are we to join the dance? where plant the foot and shake the hoary head? Do thou, Teiresias, be my guide, age leading age, for thou art wise. Never shall I weary, night or day, of beating the earth with my thyrsus. What joy to forget our years?

Teiresias

Why, then thou art as I am. For I too am young again, and will essay the dance.

Cadmus

We will drive then in our chariot to the hill.

Teiresias

Nay, thus would the god not have an equal honour paid.

Cadmus

Well, I will lead thee, age leading age.

Teiresias

The god will guide us both thither without toil.

Cadmus

Shall we alone of all the city dance in Bacchus' honour?

Teiresias

Yea, for we alone are wise, the rest are mad.

Cadmus

We stay too long; come, take my hand.

Teiresias

There link thy hand in my firm grip.

Cadmus

Mortal that I am, I scorn not the gods.

Teiresias

No subtleties do I indulge about the powers of heaven. The faith we inherited from our fathers, old as time itself, no reasoning shall cast down; no! though it were the subtlest invention of wits refined. Maybe some one will say, I have no respect for my grey hair in going to dance with ivy round my head; not so, for the god did not define whether old or young should dance, but from all alike he claims a universal homage, and scorns nice calculations in his worship.

Cadmus

Teiresias, since thou art blind, I must prompt thee what to say. Pentheus is coming hither to the house in haste, Echion's son, to whom I resign the government. How scared he looks! what strange tidings will he tell?

(Enter PENTHEUS.)

Pentheus

I had left my kingdom for awhile, when tidings of strange mischief in this city reached me; I hear that our women-folk have left their homes on pretence of Bacchic rites, and on the wooded hills rush wildly to and fro, honouring in the dance this new god Dionysus, who'er he is; and in the midst of each revel-rout the brimming wine-bowl stands, and one by one they steal away to lonely spots to gratify their lust, pretending forsooth that they are Maenads bent on sacrifice, though it is Aphrodite they are placing before the Bacchic god. As many as I caught, my gaolers are keeping safe in the public prison fast bound; and all who are gone forth, will I chase from the hills, Ino and Agave too who bore me to Echion, and Actaeon's mother Autonoe. In fetters of iron will I bind them and soon put an end to these outrageous Bacchic rites. They say there came a stranger hither, a trickster and a sorcerer, from Lydia's land, with golden hair and perfumed locks, the flush of wine upon his face, and in his eyes each grace that Aphrodite gives; by day and night he lingers in our maidens' company on the plea of teaching Bacchic mysteries. Once let me catch him within these walls, and I will put an end to his thyrsus-beating and his waving of his tresses, for I will cut his head from his body. This is the fellow who says that Dionysus is a god, says that he was once stitched up in the thigh of Zeus-that child who with his mother was blasted by the lightning flash, because the woman falsely said her marriage was with Zeus. Is not this enough to deserve the awful penalty of hanging, this stranger's wanton insolence, who'er he be?

But lo! another marvel. I see Teiresias, our diviner, dressed in dappled fawn-skins, and my mother's father too, wildly waving the Bacchic wand; droll sight enough! Father, it grieves me to see you two old men so void of sense. Oh! shake that ivy from thee! Let fall the thyrsus from thy hand, my mother's sire! Was it thou, Teiresias, urged him on to this? Art bent on introducing this fellow as another new deity amongst men, that thou mayst then observe the fowls of the air and make a gain from fiery divination? Were it not that thy grey hairs protected thee, thou shouldst sit in chains amid the Bacchanals, for introducing knavish mysteries; for where the gladsome grape is found at women's feasts, I deny that their rites have any longer good results.

#### Chorus

What impiety! Hast thou no reverence, sir stranger, for the gods or for Cadmus who sowed the crop of earth-born warriors? Son of Echion as thou art, thou dost shame thy birth.

#### Teiresias

Whenso a man of wisdom finds a good topic for argument, it is no difficult matter to speak well; but thou, though possessing a glib tongue as if endowed with sense, art yet devoid thereof in all thou sayest. A headstrong man, if he have influence and a capacity for speaking, makes a bad citizen because he lacks sense. This new deity, whom thou deridest, will rise to power I cannot say how great, throughout Hellas. Two things there are, young prince, that hold first rank among men, the goddess Demeter, that is, the earth, call her which name thou please; she it is that feedeth men with solid food; and as her counterpart came this god, the son of Semele, who discovered the juice of the grape and introduced it to mankind, stilling thereby each grief that mortals suffer from, soon as e'er they are filled with the juice of the vine; and sleep also he giveth, sleep that brings forgetfulness of daily ills, the sovereign charm for all our woe. God though he is, he serves all other gods for libations, so that through him mankind is blest. He it is whom thou dost mock, because he was sewn up in the thigh of Zeus. But I will show thee this fair mystery. When Zeus had snatched him from the lightning's blaze, and to Olympus borne the tender babe, Hera would have cast him forth from heaven, but Zeus, as such a god well might, devised a counterplot. He broke off a fragment of the ether which surrounds the world, and made thereof a hostage against Hera's bitterness, while he gave out Dionysus into other hands; hence, in

time, men said that he was reared in the thigh of Zeus, having changed the word and invented a legend, because the god was once a hostage to the goddess Hera. This god too hath prophetic power, for there is no small prophecy inspired by Bacchic frenzy; for whenever the god in his full might enters the human frame, he makes his frantic votaries foretell the future. Likewise he hath some share in Ares' rights; for oft, or ever a weapon is touched, a panic seizes an army when it is marshalled in array; and this too is a frenzy sent by Dionysus. Yet shalt thou behold him e'en on Delphi's rocks leaping o'er the cloven height, torch in hand, waving and brandishing the branch by Bacchus loved, yea, and through the length and breadth of Hellas. Hearken to me, Pentheus; never boast that might alone doth sway the world, nor if thou think so, unsound as thy opinion is, credit thyself with any wisdom; but receive the god into thy realm, pour out libations, join the revel rout, and crown thy head. It is not Dionysus that will force chastity on women in their love; but this is what we should consider, whether chastity is part of their nature for good and all; for if it is, no really modest maid will ever fall 'mid Bacchic mysteries. Mark this: thou thyself art glad when thousands throng thy gates, and citizens extol the name of Pentheus; he too, I trow, delights in being honoured. Wherefore I and Cadmus, whom thou jeerest so, will wreath our brows with ivy and join the dance; pair of grey beards though we be, still must we take part therein; never will I for any words of thine fight against heaven. Most grievous is thy madness, nor canst thou find a charm to cure thee, albeit charms have caused thy malady.

Chorus

Old sir, thy words do not discredit Phoebus, and thou art wise in honouring Bromius, potent deity.

Cadmus

My son, Teiresias hath given thee sound advice; dwell with us, but o'erstep not the threshold of custom; for now thou art soaring aloft, and thy wisdom is no wisdom. E'en though he be no god, as thou assertest, still say he is; be guilty of a splendid fraud, declaring him the son of Semele, that she may be thought the mother of a god, and we and all our race gain honour. Dost thou mark the awful fate of Actaeon? whom savage hounds of his own rearing rent in pieces in the meadows, because he boasted himself a better hunter than Artemis. Lest thy fate be the same, come let me crown thy head with ivy; join us in rendering homage to



the god.

Pentheus

Touch me not away to thy Bacchic rites thyself! never try to infect me with thy foolery! Vengeance will I have on the fellow who teaches thee such senselessness. Away one of you without delay! seek yonder seat where he observes his birds, wrench it from its base with levers, turn it upside down, o'erthrowing it in utter confusion, and toss his garlands to the tempest's blast. For by so doing shall I wound him most deeply. Others of you range the city and hunt down this girl-faced stranger, who is introducing a new complaint amongst our women, and doing outrage to the marriage tie. And if haply ye catch him, bring him hither to me in chains, to be stoned to death, a bitter ending to his revelry in Thebes.

(Exit PENTHEUS.)

Teiresias

Unhappy wretch! thou little knowest what thou art saying. Now art thou become a raving madman, even before unsound in mind. Let us away, Cadmus, and pray earnestly for him, spite of his savage temper, and likewise for the city, that the god inflict not a signal vengeance. Come, follow me with thy ivy-wreathed staff; try to support my tottering frame as I do thine, for it is unseemly that two old men should fall; but let that pass. For we must serve the Bacchic god, the son of Zeus. Only, Cadmus, beware lest Pentheus bring sorrow to thy house; it is not my prophetic art, but circumstances that lead me to say this; for the words of a fool are folly.

(Exeunt CADMUS and TEIRESIAS.)

Chorus

O holiness, queen amongst the gods, sweeping on golden pinion o'er the earth! dost hear the words of Pentheus, dost hear his proud blaspheming Bromius, the son of Semele; first of all the blessed gods at every merry festival? His it is to rouse the revellers to dance, to laugh away dull care, and wake the flute, whene'er at banquets of the gods the luscious grape appears, or when the winecup in the feast sheds sleep on men who wear the ivy-spray. The end of all unbridled speech and lawless senselessness is misery; but the life of calm repose and the rule of reason abide unshaken and support the home; for far away in heaven though they dwell, the powers divine behold man's state. Sophistry is not wisdom, and to

indulge in thoughts beyond man's ken is to shorten life; and if a man on such poor terms should aim too high, he may miss the pleasures in his reach. These, to my mind, are the ways of madmen and idiots. Oh! to make my way to Cyprus, isle of Aphrodite, where dwell the love-gods strong to soothe man's soul, or to Paphos, which that foreign river, never fed by rain, enriches with its hundred mouths! Oh! lead me, Bromian god, celestial guide of Bacchic pilgrims, to the hallowed slopes of Olympus, where Pierian Muses have their haunt most fair. There dwell the Graces; there is soft desire; there thy votaries may hold their revels freely. The joy of our god, the son of Zeus, is in banquets, his delight is in peace, that giver of riches and nurse divine of youth. Both to rich and poor alike hath he granted the delight of wine, that makes all pain to cease; hateful to him is every one who careth not to live the life of bliss, that lasts through days and nights of joy. True wisdom is to keep the heart and soul aloof from over-subtle wits. That which the less enlightened crowd approves and practises, will I accept.

(Re-enter PENTHEUS. Enter SERVANT bringing DIONYSUS bound.)

Servant

We are come, Pentheus, having hunted down this prey, for which thou didst send us forth; not in vain hath been our quest. We found our quarry tame; he did not fly from us, but yielded himself without a struggle; his cheek ne'er blanched, nor did his ruddy colour change, but with a smile he bade me bind and lead him away, and he waited, making my task an easy one. For very shame I said to him, "Against my will, sir stranger, do I lead thee hence, but Pentheus ordered it, who sent me hither." As for his votaries whom thou thyself didst check, seizing and binding them hand and foot in the public gaol, all these have loosed their bonds and fled into the meadows where they now are sporting, calling aloud on the Bromian god. Their chains fell off their feet of their own accord, and doors flew open without man's hand to help. Many a marvel hath this stranger brought with him to our city of Thebes; what yet remains must be thy care.

Pentheus

Loose his hands; for now that I have him in the net he is scarce swift enough to elude me. So, sir stranger, thou art not ill-favoured from a woman's point of view, which was thy real object in coming to Thebes; thy hair is long because thou hast never been a wrestler, flowing right down thy cheeks most wantonly; thy skin is white to help thee gain thy end, not tanned by ray of sun, but kept within the

shade, as thou goest in quest of love with beauty's bait. Come, tell me first of thy race.

Dionysus

That needs no braggart's tongue, 'tis easily told; maybe thou knowest Tmolus by hearsay.

Pentheus

I know it, the range that rings the city of Sardis round.

Dionysus

Thence I come, Lydia is my native home.

Pentheus

What makes thee bring these mysteries to Hellas?

Dionysus

Dionysus, the son of Zeus, initiated me.

Pentheus

Is there a Zeus in Lydia, who begets new gods?

Dionysus

No, but Zeus who married Semele in Hellas.

Pentheus

Was it by night or in the face of day that he constrained thee?

Dionysus

'Twas face to face he intrusted his mysteries to me.

Pentheus

Pray, what special feature stamps thy rites?

Dionysus

That is a secret to be hidden from the uninitiated.

Pentheus

What profit bring they to their votaries?

Dionysus

Thou must not be told, though 'tis well worth knowing.

Pentheus

A pretty piece of trickery, to excite my curiosity!

Dionysus

A man of godless life is an abomination to the rites of the god.

Pentheus

Thou sayest thou didst see the god clearly; what was he like?

Dionysus

What his fancy chose; I was not there to order this.

Pentheus

Another clever twist and turn of thine, without a word of answer.

Dionysus

He were a fool, methinks, who would utter wisdom to a fool.

Pentheus

Hast thou come hither first with this deity?

Dionysus

All foreigners already celebrate these mysteries with dances.

Pentheus

The reason being, they are far behind Hellenes in wisdom.

Dionysus

In this at least far in advance, though their customs differ.

Pentheus

Is it by night or day thou performest these devotions?

Dionysus

By night mostly; darkness lends solemnity.

Pentheus

Calculated to entrap and corrupt women.

Dionysus

Day too for that matter may discover shame.

Pentheus

This vile quibbling settles thy punishment.

Dionysus

Brutish ignorance and godlessness will settle thine.

Pentheus

How bold our Bacchanal is growing! a very master in this wordy strife!

Dionysus

Tell me what I am to suffer; what is the grievous doom thou wilt inflict upon me?

Pentheus

First will I shear off thy dainty tresses.

Dionysus

My locks are sacred; for the god I let them grow.

Pentheus

Next surrender that thyrsus.

Dionysus

Take it from me thyself; 'tis the wand of Dionysus I am bearing.

Pentheus

In dungeon deep thy body will I guard.

Dionysus

The god himself will set me free, whene'er I list.

Pentheus

Perhaps he may, when thou standest amid thy Bacchanals and callest on his name.

Dionysus

Even now he is near me and witnesses my treatment.

Pentheus

Why, where is he? To my eyes he is invisible.

Dionysus

He is by my side; thou art a godless man and therefore dost not see him.

Pentheus

Seize him! the fellow scorns me and Thebes too.

Dionysus

I bid you bind me not, reason addressing madness.

Pentheus

But I say "bind!" with better right than thou.

Dionysus

Thou hast no knowledge of the life thou art leading; thy very existence is now a mystery to thee.

Pentheus

I am Pentheus, son of Agave and Echion.

Dionysus

Well-named to be misfortune's mate!

Pentheus

Avaunt! Ho! shut him up within the horses' stalls hard by, that for light he may have pitchy gloom. Do thy dancing there, and these women whom thou bringest with thee to share thy villainies I will either sell as slaves or make their hands cease from this noisy beating of drums, and set them to work at the loom as servants of my own.

Dionysus

I will go; for that which fate forbids, can never befall me. For this thy mockery be sure Dionysus will exact a recompense of thee-even the god whose existence

thou deniest; for thou art injuring him by haling me to prison.

(Exit DIONYSUS, guarded, and PENTHEUS.)

Chorus

Hail to thee, Dirce, happy maid, daughter revered of Achelous! within thy founts thou didst receive in days gone by the babe of Zeus, what time his father caught him up into his thigh from out the deathless flame, while thus he cried: "Go rest, my Dithyrambus, there within thy father's womb; by this name, O Bacchic god, I now proclaim thee to Thebes." But thou, blest Dirce, thrustest me aside, when in thy midst I strive to hold my revels graced with crowns. Why dost thou scorn me? Why avoid me? By the clustered charm that Dionysus sheds o'er the vintage I vow there yet shall come a time when thou wilt turn thy thoughts to Bromius. What furious rage the earth-born race displays, even Pentheus sprung of a dragon of old, himself the son of earth-born Echion, a savage monster in his very mien, not made in human mould, but like some murderous giant pitted against heaven; for he means to bind me, the handmaid of Bromius, in cords forthwith, and e'en now he keeps my fellow-reveller pent within his palace, plunged in a gloomy dungeon. Dost thou mark this, O Dionysus, son of Zeus, thy prophets struggling 'gainst resistless might? Come, O king, brandishing thy golden thyrsus along the slopes of Olympus; restrain the pride of this bloodthirsty wretch! Oh! where in Nysa, haunt of beasts, or on the peaks of Corycus art thou, Dionysus, marshalling with thy wand the revellers? or haply in the thick forest depths of Olympus, where erst Orpheus with his lute gathered trees to his minstrelsy, and beasts that range the fields. Ah blest Pieria! Evius honours thee, to thee will he come with his Bacchic rites to lead the dance, and thither will he lead the circling Maenads, crossing the swift current of Axius and the Lydias, that giveth wealth and happiness to man, yea, and the father of rivers, which, as I have heard, enriches with his waters fair a land of steeds.

Dionysus (Within)

What ho! my Bacchantes, ho! hear my call, oh! hear.

Chorus i

Who art thou? what Evian cry is this that calls me? whence comes it?

Dionysus

What ho! once more I call, I the son of Semele, the child of Zeus.

Chorus ii

My master, O my master, hail!

Chorus iii

Come to our revel-band, O Bromian god.

Chorus iv

Thou solid earth!

Chorus v

Most awful shock!

Chorus vi

O horror! soon will the palace of Pentheus totter and fall.

Chorus vii

Dionysus is within this house.

Chorus viii

Do homage to him.

Chorus ix

We do! I do!

Chorus x

Did ye mark yon architrave of stone upon the columns start asunder?

Chorus xi

Within these walls the triumph-shout of Bromius himself will rise.

Dionysus

Kindle the blazing torch with lightning's fire, abandon to the flames the halls of Pentheus.

Chorus xii

Ha! dost not see the flame, dost not clearly mark it at the sacred tomb of Semele, the lightning flame which long ago the hurler of the bolt left there?



Chorus xiii

Your trembling limbs prostrate, ye Maenads, low upon the ground.

Chorus xiv

Yea, for our king, the son of Zeus, is assailing and utterly confounding this house.

(Enter DIONYSUS.)

Dionysus

Are ye so stricken with terror that ye have fallen to the earth, O foreign dames? Ye saw then, it would seem, how the Bacchic god made Pentheus' halls to quake; but arise, be of good heart, compose your trembling limbs.

Chorus

O chiefest splendour of our gladsome Bacchic sport, with what joy I see thee in my loneliness!

Dionysus

Were ye cast down when I was led into the house, to be plunged into the gloomy dungeons of Pentheus?

Chorus

Indeed I was. Who was to protect me, if thou shouldst meet with mishap? But how wert thou set free from the clutches of this godless wretch?

Dionysus

My own hands worked out my own salvation, easily and without trouble.

Chorus

But did he not lash fast thy hands with cords?

Dionysus

There too I mocked him; he thinks he bound me, whereas he never touched or caught hold of me, but fed himself on fancy. For at the stall, to which he brought me for a gaol, he found a bull, whose legs and hoofs he straightly tied, breathing out fury the while, the sweat trickling from his body, and he biting his lips; but I from near at hand sat calmly looking on. Meantime came the Bacchic god and

made the house quake, and at his mother's tomb relit the fire; but Pentheus, seeing this, thought his palace was ablaze, and hither and thither he rushed, bidding his servants bring water; but all in vain was every servant's busy toil. Thereon he let this labour be awhile, and, thinking maybe that I had escaped, rushed into the palace with his murderous sword unsheathed. Then did Bromius—so at least it seemed to me; I only tell you what I thought—made a phantom in the hall, and he rushed after it in headlong haste, and stabbed the lustrous air, thinking he wounded me. Further the Bacchic god did other outrage to him; he dashed the building to the ground, and there it lies a mass of ruin, a sight to make him rue most bitterly my bonds. At last from sheer fatigue he dropped his sword and fell fainting; for he a mortal frail, dared to wage war upon a god; but I meantime quietly left the house and am come to you, with never a thought of Pentheus. But methinks he will soon appear before the house; at least there is a sound of steps within. What will he say, I wonder, after this? Well, be his fury never so great, I will lightly bear it; for 'tis a wise man's way to school his temper into due control.

(Enter PENTHEUS.)

Pentheus

Shamefully have I been treated; that stranger, whom but now I made so fast in prison, hath escaped me. Ha! there is the man! What means this? How didst thou come forth, to appear thus in front of my palace?

Dionysus

Stay where thou art; and moderate thy fury.

Pentheus

How is it thou hast escaped thy fetters and art at large?

Dionysus

Did I not say, or didst thou not hear me, "There is one will loose me."

Pentheus

Who was it? there is always something strange in what thou sayest.

Dionysus

He who makes the clustering vine to grow for man.

Pentheus

*I scorn him and his vines!*

Dionysus

A fine taunt indeed thou hurlest here at Dionysus!

Pentheus (To his servants)

Bar every tower that hems us in, I order you.

Dionysus

What use? Cannot gods pass even over walls?

Pentheus

How wise thou art, except where thy wisdom is needed!

Dionysus

Where most 'tis needed, there am I most wise. But first listen to yonder messenger and hear what he says; he comes from the hills with tidings for thee; and I will await thy pleasure, nor seek to fly.

(Enter MESSENGER.)

Messenger

Pentheus, ruler of this realm of Thebes! I am come from Cithaeron, where the dazzling flakes of pure white snow ne'er cease to fall.

Pentheus

What urgent news dost bring me?

Messenger

I have seen, O king, those frantic Bacchanals, who darted in frenzy from this land with bare white feet, and I am come to tell thee and the city the wondrous deeds they do, deeds passing strange. But I fain would hear, whether I am freely to tell all I saw there, or shorten my story; for I fear thy hasty temper, sire, thy sudden bursts of wrath and more than princely rage.

Pentheus

Say on, for thou shalt go unpunished by me in all respects; for to be angered with the upright is wrong. The direr thy tale about the Bacchantes, the heavier

punishment will I inflict on this fellow who brought his secret arts amongst our women.

### Messenger

I was just driving the herds of kine to a ridge of the hill as I fed them, as the sun shot forth his rays and made the earth grow warm; when lo! I see three revel-bands of women; Autonoe was chief of one, thy mother Agave of the second, while Ino's was the third. There they lay asleep, all tired out; some were resting on branches of the pine, others had laid their heads in careless ease on oak-leaves piled upon the ground, observing all modesty; not, as thou sayest, seeking to gratify their lusts alone amid the woods, by wine and soft flute-music maddened.

Anon in their midst thy mother uprose and cried aloud to wake them from their sleep, when she heard the lowing of my horned kine. And up they started to their feet, brushing from their eyes sleep's quickening dew, a wondrous sight of grace and modesty, young and old and maidens yet unwed. First o'er their shoulders they let stream their hair; then all did gird their fawn-skins up, who hitherto had left the fastenings loose, girdling the dappled hides with snakes that licked their cheeks. Others fondled in their arms gazelles or savage whelps of wolves, and suckled them-young mothers these with babes at home, whose breasts were still full of milk; crowns they wore of ivy or of oak or blossoming convolvulus. And one took her thyrsus and struck it into the earth, and forth there gushed a limpid spring; and another plunged her wand into the lap of earth and there the god sent up a fount of wine; and all who wished for draughts of milk had but to scratch the soil with their finger-tips and there they had it in abundance, while from every ivy-wreathed staff sweet rills of honey trickled.

Hadst thou been there and seen this, thou wouldst have turned to pray to the god, whom now thou dost disparage. Anon we herdsmen and shepherds met to discuss their strange and wondrous doings; then one, who wandereth oft to town and hath a trick of speech, made harangue in the midst, "O ye who dwell upon the hallowed mountain-terraces! shall we chase Agave, mother of Pentheus, from her Bacchic rites, and thereby do our prince a service?" We liked his speech, and placed ourselves in hidden ambush among the leafy thickets; they at the appointed time began to wave the thyrsus for their Bacchic rites, calling on Iacchus, the Bromian god, the son of Zeus, in united chorus, and the whole mount and the wild creatures re-echoed their cry; all nature stirred as they rushed on. Now Agave

chanced to come springing near me, so up I leapt from out my ambush where I lay concealed, meaning to seize her. But she cried out, "What ho! my nimble hounds, here are men upon our track; but follow me, ay, follow, with the thyrsus in your hand for weapon." Thereat we fled, to escape being torn in pieces by the Bacchantes; but they, with hands that bore no weapon of steel, attacked our cattle as they browsed. Then wouldst thou have seen Agave mastering some sleek lowing calf, while others rent the heifers limb from limb. Before thy eyes there would have been hurling of ribs and hoofs this way and that; and strips of flesh, all blood-bedabbled, dripped as they hung from the pine-branches. Wild bulls, that glared but now with rage along their horns, found themselves tripped up, dragged down to earth by countless maidens' hands. The flesh upon their limbs was stripped therefrom quicker than thou couldst have closed thy royal eye-lids. Then off they sped, like birds that skim the air, to the plains beneath the hills, which bear a fruitful harvest for Thebes beside the waters of Asopus; to Hysiae and Erythrae, hamlets 'neath Cithaeron's peak, with fell intent, swooping on everything and scattering all pellmell; and they would snatch children from their homes; but all that they placed upon their shoulders, abode there firmly without being tied, and fell not to the dusky earth, not even brass or iron; and on their hair they carried fire and it burnt them not; but the country-folk rushed to arms, furious at being pillaged by Bacchanals; whereon ensued, O king, this wondrous spectacle. For though the ironshod dart would draw no blood from them, they with the thyrsus, which they hurled, caused many a wound and put their foes to utter rout, women chasing men, by some god's intervention. Then they returned to the place whence they had started, even to the springs the god had made to spout for them; and there washed off the blood, while serpents with their tongues were licking clean each gout from their cheeks. Wherefore, my lord and master, receive this deity, whoe'er he be, within the city; for, great as he is in all else, I have likewise heard men say, 'twas he that gave the vine to man, sorrow's antidote. Take wine away and Cypris flies, and every other human joy is dead.

Chorus

Though I fear to speak my mind with freedom in the presence of my king, still must I utter this; Dionysus yields to no deity in might.

Pentheus

Already, look you! the presumption of these Bacchantes is upon us, swift as

fire, a sad disgrace in the eyes of all Hellas. No time for hesitation now! away to the Electra gate! order a muster of all my men-at-arms, of those that mount fleet steeds, of all who brandish light bucklers, of archers too that make the bowstring twang; for I will march against the Bacchanals. By Heaven! this passes all, if we are to be thus treated by women.

(Exit MESSENGER.)

Dionysus

Still obdurate, O Pentheus, after hearing my words! In spite of all the evil treatment I am enduring from thee, still I warn thee of the sin of bearing arms against a god, and bid thee cease; for Bromius will not endure thy driving his votaries from the mountains where they revel.

Pentheus

A truce to thy preaching to me! thou hast escaped thy bonds, preserve thy liberty; else will I renew thy punishment.

Dionysus

I would rather do him sacrifice than in a fury kick against the pricks; thou a mortal, he a god.

Pentheus

Sacrifice! that will I, by setting afoot a wholesale slaughter of women 'mid Cithaeron's glens, as they deserve.

Dionysus

Ye will all be put to flight-a shameful thing that they with the Bacchic thyrsus should rout your mail-clad warriors.

Pentheus

I find this stranger a troublesome foe to encounter; doing or suffering he is alike irrepressible.

Dionysus

Friend, there is still a way to compose this bitterness.

Pentheus

Say how; am I to serve my own servants?

Dionysus

I will bring the women hither without weapons.

Pentheus

Ha! ha! this is some crafty scheme of thine against me.

Dionysus

What kind of scheme, if by my craft I purpose to save thee?

Pentheus

You have combined with them to form this plot, that your revels may go on for ever.

Dionysus

Nay, but this is the compact I made with the god; be sure of that.

Pentheus (Preparing to start forth)

Bring forth my arms. Not another word from thee!

Dionysus

Ha! wouldst thou see them seated on the hills?

Pentheus

Of all things, yes! I would give untold sums for that.

Dionysus

Why this sudden, strong desire?

Pentheus

'Twill be a bitter sight, if I find them drunk with wine.

Dionysus

And would that be a pleasant sight which will prove bitter to thee?

Pentheus

Believe me, yes! beneath the fir-trees as I sit in silence.

Dionysus

Nay, they will track thee, though thou come secretly.

Pentheus

Well, I will go openly; thou wert right to say so.

Dionysus

Am I to be thy guide? wilt thou essay the road?

Pentheus

Lead on with all speed, I grudge thee all delay.

Dionysus

Array thee then in robes of fine linen.

Pentheus

Why so? Am I to enlist among women after being a man?

Dionysus

They may kill thee, if thou show thy manhood there.

Pentheus

Well said! Thou hast given me a taste of thy wit already.

Dionysus

Dionysus schooled me in this lore.

Pentheus

How am I to carry out thy wholesome advice?

Dionysus

Myself will enter thy palace and robe thee.

Pentheus

What is the robe to be? a woman's? Nay, I am ashamed.

Dionysus

Thy eagerness to see the Maenads goes no further.

Pentheus

But what dress dost say thou wilt robe me in?

Dionysus



Upon thy head will I make thy hair grow long.

Pentheus

Describe my costume further.

Dionysus

Thou wilt wear a robe reaching to thy feet; and on thy head shall be a snood.

Pentheus

Wilt add aught else to my attire?

Dionysus

A thyrsus in thy hand, and a dappled fawnskin.

Pentheus

I can never put on woman's dress.

Dionysus

Then wilt thou cause bloodshed by coming to blows with the Bacchanals.

Pentheus

Thou art right. Best go spy upon them first.

Dionysus

Well, e'en that is wiser than by evil means to follow evil ends.

Pentheus

But how shall I pass through the city of the Cadmeans unseen?

Dionysus

We will go by unfrequented paths. I will lead the way.

Pentheus

Anything rather than that the Bacchantes should laugh at me.

Dionysus

We will enter the palace and consider the proper steps.

Pentheus

Thou hast my leave. I am all readiness. I will enter, prepared to set out either

sword in hand or following thy advice.

(Exit PENTHEUS.)

Dionysus

Women! our prize is nearly in the net. Soon shall he reach the Bacchanals, and there pay forfeit with his life. O Dionysus! now 'tis thine to act, for thou art not far away; let us take vengeance on him. First drive him mad by fixing in his soul a wayward frenzy; for never, whilst his senses are his own, will he consent to don a woman's dress; but when his mind is gone astray he will put it on. And fain would I make him a laughing-stock to Thebes as he is led in woman's dress through the city, after those threats with which he menaced me before. But I will go to array Pentheus in those robes which he shall wear when he sets out for Hades' halls, a victim to his own mother's fury; so shall he recognize Dionysus, the son of Zeus, who proves himself at last a god most terrible, for all his gentleness to man.

(Exit DIONYSUS.)

Chorus

Will this white foot e'er join the night-long dance? what time in Bacchic ecstasy I toss my neck to heaven's dewy breath, like a fawn, that gambols 'mid the meadow's green delights, when she hath escaped the fearful chase, clear of the watchers, o'er the woven nets; while the huntsman, with loud halloo, harks on his hounds' full cry, and she with laboured breath at lightning speed bounds o'er the level water-meadows, glad to be far from man amid the foliage of the bosky grove. What is true wisdom, or what fairer boon has heaven placed in mortals' reach, than to gain the mastery o'er a fallen foe? What is fair is dear for aye. Though slow be its advance, yet surely moves the power of the gods, correcting those mortal wights, that court a senseless pride, or, in the madness of their fancy, disregard the gods. Subtly they lie in wait, through the long march of time, and so hunt down the godless man. For it is never right in theory or in practice to o'er-ride the law of custom. This is a maxim cheaply bought: whatever comes of God, or in time's long annals, has grown into a law upon a natural basis, this is sovereign. What is true wisdom, or what fairer boon has heaven placed in mortals' reach, than to gain the mastery o'er a fallen foe? What is fair is dear for aye. Happy is he who hath escaped the wave from out the sea, and reached the haven; and happy he

who hath triumphed o'er his troubles; though one surpasses another in wealth and power; yet there be myriad hopes for all the myriad minds; some end in happiness for man, and others come to naught; but him, whose life from day to day is blest, I deem a happy man.

(Enter DIONYSUS.)

Dionysus

Ho! Pentheus, thou that art so eager to see what is forbidden, and to show thy zeal in an unworthy cause, come forth before the palace, let me see thee clad as a woman in frenzied Bacchante's dress, to spy upon thy own mother and her company.

(Enter PENTHEUS.)

Yes, thou resemblest closely a daughter of Cadmus.

Pentheus

Of a truth I seem to see two suns, and two towns of Thebes, our seven-gated city; and thou, methinks, art a bull going before to guide me, and on thy head a pair of horns have grown. Wert thou really once a brute beast? Thou hast at any rate the appearance of a bull.

Dionysus

The god attends us, ungracious heretofore, but now our sworn friend; and now thine eyes behold the things they should.

Pentheus

Pray, what do I resemble? Is not mine the carriage of Ino, or Agave my own mother?

Dionysus

In seeing thee, I seem to see them in person. But this tress is straying from its place, no longer as I bound it 'neath the snood.

Pentheus

I disarranged it from its place as I tossed it to and fro within my chamber, in Bacchic ecstasy.

Dionysus

Well, I will rearrange it, since to tend thee is my care; hold up thy head.

Pentheus

Come, put it straight; for on thee do I depend.

Dionysus

Thy girdle is loose, and the folds of thy dress do not hang evenly below thy ankles.

Pentheus

I agree to that as regards the right side, but on the other my dress hangs straight with my foot.

Dionysus

Surely thou wilt rank me first among thy friends, when contrary to thy expectation thou findest the Bacchantes virtuous.

Pentheus

Shall I hold the thyrsus in the right or left hand to look most like a Bacchanal?

Dionysus

Hold it in thy right hand, and step out with thy right foot; thy change of mind compels thy praise.

Pentheus

Shall I be able to carry on my shoulders Cithaeron's glens, the Bacchanals and all?

Dionysus

Yes, if so thou wilt; for though thy mind was erst diseased, 'tis now just as it should be.

Pentheus

Shall we take levers, or with my hands can I uproot it, thrusting arm or shoulder 'neath its peaks?

Dionysus

No, no! destroy not the seats of the Nymphs and the haunts of Pan, the place of his piping.

Pentheus

Well said! Women must not be mastered by brute force; amid the pines will I conceal myself.

Dionysus

Thou shalt hide thee in the place that fate appoints, coming by stealth to spy upon the Bacchanals.

Pentheus

Why, methinks they are already caught in the pleasant snares of dalliance, like birds amid the brakes.

Dionysus

Set out with watchful heed then for this very purpose; maybe thou wilt catch them, if thou be not first caught thyself.

Pentheus

Conduct me through the very heart of Thebes, for I am the only man among them bold enough to do this deed.

Dionysus

Thou alone bearest thy country's burden, thou and none other; wherefore there await thee such struggles as needs must. Follow me, for I will guide thee safely thither; another shall bring thee thence.

Pentheus

My mother maybe.

Dionysus

For every eye to see.

Pentheus

My very purpose in going.

Dionysus

Thou shalt be carried back,

Pentheus

What luxury

Dionysus

In thy mother's arms.

Pentheus

Thou wilt e'en force me into luxury.

Dionysus

Yes, to luxury such as this.

Pentheus

Truly, the task I am undertaking deserves it.

(Exit PENTHEUS.)

Dionysus

Strange, ah! strange is thy career, leading to scenes of woe so strange, that thou shalt achieve a fame that towers to heaven. Stretch forth thy hands, Agave, and ye her sisters, daughters of Cadmus; mighty is the strife to which I am bringing the youthful king, and the victory shall rest with me and Bromius; all else the event will show.

(Exit DIONYSUS.)

Chorus

To the hills! to the hills! fleet hounds of madness, where the daughters of Cadmus hold their revels, goad them into wild fury against the man disguised in woman's dress, a frenzied spy upon the Maenads. First shall his mother mark him as he peers from some smooth rock or riven tree, and thus to the Maenads she will call, "Who is this of Cadmus' sons comes hasting to the mount, to the mountain away, to spy on us, my Bacchanals? Whose child can he be? For he was never born of woman's blood; but from some lioness maybe or Libyan Gorgon is he sprung." Let justice appear and show herself, sword in hand, to plunge it through and through the throat of the godless, lawless, impious son of Echion, earth's monstrous child! who with wicked heart and lawless rage, with mad intent and frantic purpose, sets out to meddle with thy holy rites, and with thy mother's, Bacchic god, thinking with his weak arm to master might as masterless as thine. This is the life that saves all pain, if a man confine his thoughts to human themes,

as is his mortal nature, making no pretence where heaven is concerned. I envy not deep subtleties; far other joys have I, in tracking out great truths writ clear from all eternity, that a man should live his life by day and night in purity and holiness, striving toward a noble goal, and should honour the gods by casting from him each ordinance that lies outside the pale of right. Let justice show herself, advancing sword in hand to plunge it through and through the throat of Echion's son, that godless, lawless, and abandoned child of earth! Appear, O Bacchus, to our eyes as a bull or serpent with a hundred heads, or take the shape of a lion breathing flame! Oh! come, and with a mocking smile cast the deadly noose about the hunter of thy Bacchanals, e'en as he swoops upon the Maenads gathered yonder.

(Enter SECOND MESSENGER.)

Second messenger

O house, so prosperous once through Hellas long ago, home of the old Sidonian prince, who sowed the serpent's crop of earth-born men, how do I mourn thee! slave though I be, yet still the sorrows of his master touch a good slave's heart.

Chorus

How now? Hast thou fresh tidings of the Bacchantes?

Second messenger

Pentheus, Echion's son is dead.

Chorus

Bromius, my king! now art thou appearing in thy might divine.

Second messenger

Ha! what is it thou sayest? art thou glad, woman, at my master's misfortunes?

Chorus

A stranger I, and in foreign tongue I express my joy, for now no more do I cower in terror of the chain.

Second messenger

Dost think Thebes so poor in men?[\*]

[\* Probably the whole of one iambic line with part of another is here lost.]

Chorus

'Tis Dionysus, Dionysus, not Thebes that lords it over me.

Second messenger

All can I pardon thee save this; to exult o'er hopeless suffering is sorry conduct, dames.

Chorus

Tell me, oh! tell me how he died, that villain scheming villainy!

Second messenger

Soon as we had left the homesteads of this Theban land and had crossed the streams of Asopus, we began to breast Cithaeron's heights, Pentheus and I, for I went with my master, and the stranger too, who was to guide us to the scene. First then we sat us down in a grassy glen, carefully silencing each footfall and whispered breath, to see without being seen. Now there was a dell walled in by rocks, with rills to water it, and shady pines o'erhead; there were the Maenads seated, busied with joyous toils. Some were wreathing afresh the drooping thyrsus with curling ivy-sprays; others, like colts let loose from the carved chariot-yoke, were answering each other in hymns of Bacchic rapture. But Pentheus, son of sorrow, seeing not the women gathered there, exclaimed, "Sir stranger, from where I stand, I cannot clearly see the mock Bacchantes; but I will climb a hillock or a soaring pine whence to see clearly the shameful doings of the Bacchanals." Then and there I saw the stranger work a miracle; for catching a lofty fir-branch by the very end he drew it downward to the dusky earth, lower yet and ever lower; and like a bow it bent, or rounded wheel, whose curving circle grows complete, as chalk and line describe it; e'en so the stranger drew down the mountain-branch between his hands, bending it to earth, by more than human agency. And when he had seated Pentheus aloft on the pine branches, he let them slip through his hands gently, careful not to shake him from his seat. Up soared the branch straight into the air above, with my master perched thereon, seen by the Maenads better far than he saw them; for scarce was he beheld upon his lofty throne, when the stranger disappeared, while from the sky there came a voice, 'twould seem, by Dionysus uttered-



“Maidens, I bring the man who tried to mock you and me and my mystic rites; take vengeance on him.” And as he spake he raised ’twixt heaven and earth a dazzling column of awful flame. Hushed grew the sky, and still hung each leaf throughout the grassy glen, nor couldst thou have heard one creature cry. But they, not sure of the voice they heard, sprang up and peered all round; then once again his bidding came; and when the daughters of Cadmus knew it was the Bacchic god in very truth that called, swift as doves they dirted off in eager haste, his mother Agave and her sisters dear and all the Bacchanals; through torrent glen, o’er boulders huge they bounded on, inspired with madness by the god. Soon as they saw my master perched upon the fir, they set to hurling stones at him with all their might, mounting a commanding eminence, and with pine-branches he was pelted as with darts; and others shot their wands through the air at Pentheus, their hapless target, but all to no purpose. For there he sat beyond the reach of their hot endeavours, a helpless, hopeless victim. At last they rent off limbs from oaks and were for prising up the roots with levers not of iron. But when they still could make no end to all their toil, Agave cried: “Come stand around, and grip the sapling trunk, my Bacchanals! that we may catch the beast that sits thereon, lest he divulge the secrets of our god’s religion.”

Then were a thousand hands laid on the fir, and from the ground they tore it up, while he from his seat aloft came tumbling to the ground with lamentations long and loud, e’en Pentheus; for well he knew his hour was come. His mother first, a priestess for the nonce, began the bloody deed and fell upon him; whereon he tore the snood from off his hair, that hapless Agave might recognize and spare him, crying as he touched her cheek, “O mother! it is I, thy own son Pentheus, the child thou didst bear in Echion’s halls; have pity on me, mother dear! oh! do not for any sin of mine slay thy own son.”

But she, the while, with foaming mouth and wildly rolling eyes, bereft of reason as she was, heeded him not; for the god possessed her. And she caught his left hand in her grip, and planting her foot upon her victim’s trunk she tore the shoulder from its socket, not of her own strength, but the god made it an easy task to her hands; and Ino set to work upon the other side, rending the flesh with Autonoe and all the eager host of Bacchanals; and one united cry arose, the victim’s groans while yet he breathed, and their triumphant shouts. One would make an arm her prey, another a foot with the sandal on it; and his ribs were stripped of flesh by their rending nails; and each one with blood-dabbled hands

was tossing Pentheus' limbs about. Scattered lies his corpse, part beneath the rugged rocks, and part amid the deep dark woods, no easy task to find; but his poor head hath his mother made her own, and fixing it upon the point of a thyrsus, as it had been a mountain lion's, she bears it through the midst of Cithaeron, having left her sisters with the Maenads at their rites. And she is entering these walls exulting in her hunting fraught with woe, calling on the Bacchic god her fellow-hunter who had helped her to triumph in a chase, where her only prize was tears.

But I will get me hence, away from this piteous scene, before Agave reach the palace. To my mind self-restraint and reverence for the things of God point alike the best and wisest course for all mortals who pursue them.

(Exit SECOND MESSENGER.)

Chorus

Come, let us exalt our Bacchic god in choral strain, let us loudly chant the fall of Pentheus from the serpent sprung, who assumed a woman's dress and took the fair Bacchic wand, sure pledge of death, with a bull to guide him to his doom. O ye Bacchanals of Thebes! glorious is the triumph ye have achieved, ending in sorrow and tears. 'Tis a noble enterprise to dabble the hand in the blood of a son till it drips. But hist! I see Agave, the mother of Pentheus, with wild rolling eye hasting to the house; welcome the revellers of the Bacchic god.

(Enter AGAVE.)

Agave

Ye Bacchanals from Asia

Chorus

Why dost thou rouse me? why?

Agave

From the hills I am bringing to my home a tendril freshly-culled, glad guerdon of the chase.

Chorus

I see it, and I will welcome thee unto our revels. All hail!

Agave

I caught him with never a snare, this lion's whelp, as ye may see.

Chorus

From what desert lair?

Agave

Cithaeron-

Chorus

Yes, Cithaeron?

Agave

Was his death.

Chorus

Who was it gave the first blow?

Agave

Mine that privilege; "Happy Agave!" they call me 'mid our revellers.

Chorus

Who did the rest?

Agave

Cadmus-

Chorus

What of him?

Agave

His daughters struck the monster after me; yes, after me.

Chorus

Fortune smiled upon thy hunting here.

Agave

Come, share the banquet.

Chorus

Share? ah! what?

Agave

'Tis but a tender whelp, the down just sprouting on its cheek beneath a crest of failing hair.

Chorus

The hair is like some wild creature's .

Agave

The Bacchic god, a hunter skilled, roused his Maenads to pursue this quarry skilfully.

Chorus

Yea, our king is a hunter indeed.

Agave

Dost approve?

Chorus

Of course I do.

Agave

Soon shall the race of Cadmus-

Chorus

And Pentheus, her own son, shall to his mother-

Agave

Offer praise for this her quarry of the lion's brood.

Chorus

Quarry strange!

Agave

And strangely caught.

Chorus

Dost thou exult?

Agave

Right glad am I to have achieved a great and glorious triumph for my land that all can see.

Chorus

Alas for thee! show to the folk the booty thou hast won and art bringing hither.

Agave

All ye who dwell in fair fenced Thebes, draw near that ye may see the fierce wild beast that we daughters of Cadmus made our prey, not with the thong-thrown darts of Thessaly, nor yet with snares, but with our fingers fair. Ought men idly to boast and get them armourers' weapons? when we with these our hands have caught this prey and torn the monster limb from limb? Where is my aged sire? let him approach. And where is Pentheus, my son? Let him bring a ladder and raise it against the house to nail up on the gables this lion's head, my booty from the chase.

(Enter CADMUS.)

Cadmus

Follow me, servants to the palace-front, with your sad burden in your arms, ay, follow, with the corpse of Pentheus, which after long weary search I found, as ye see it, torn to pieces amid Cithaeron's glens, and am bringing hither; no two pieces did I find together, as they lay scattered through the trackless wood. For I heard what awful deeds one of my daughters had done, just as I entered the city-walls with old Teiresias returning from the Bacchanals; so I turned again unto the hill and bring from thence my son who was slain by Maenads. There I saw Autonoe, that bare Actaeon on a day to Aristaeus, and Ino with her, still ranging the oak-groves in their unhappy frenzy; but one told me that that other, Agave, was rushing wildly hither, nor was it idly said, for there I see her, sight of woe!

Agave

Father, loudly mayst thou boast, that the daughters thou hast begotten are far the best of mortal race; of one and all I speak, though chiefly of myself, who left my shuttle at the loom for nobler enterprise, even to hunt savage beasts with my hands; and in my arms I bring my prize, as thou seest, that it may be nailed up on thy palace-wall; take it, father, in thy hands, and proud of my hunting, call thy

friends to a banquet; for blest art thou, ah! doubly blest in these our gallant exploits.

Cadmus

O grief that has no bounds, too cruel for mortal eye! 'tis murder ye have done with your hapless hands. Fair is the victim thou hast offered to the gods, inviting me and my Thebans to the feast! Ah, woe is me! first for thy sorrows, then for mine. What ruin the god, the Bromian king, hath brought on us, just maybe, but too severe, seeing he is our kinsman!

Agave

How peevish old age makes men! what sullen looks! Oh, may my son follow in his mother's footsteps and be as lucky in his hunting, when he goes in quest of game in company with Theban youths! But he can do naught but wage war with gods. Father, 'tis thy duty to warn him. Who will summon him hither to my sight to witness my happiness?

Cadmus

Alas for you! alas! Terrible will be your grief when ye are conscious of your deeds; could ye remain forever till life's close in your present state, ye would not, spite of ruined bliss, appear so cursed with woe.

Agave

Why? what is faulty here? what here for sorrow?

Cadmus

First let thine eye look up to heaven.

Agave

See! I do so. Why dost thou suggest my looking thereupon?

Cadmus

Is it still the same, or dost think there's any change?

Agave

'Tis brighter than it was, and clearer too.

Cadmus

Is there still that wild unrest within thy soul?

Agave

I know not what thou sayest now; yet methinks my brain is clearing, and my former frenzy passed away.

Cadmus

Canst understand, and give distinct replies?

Agave

Father, how completely I forget all we said before!

Cadmus

To what house wert thou brought with marriage-hymns?

Agave

Thou didst give me to earthborn Echion, as men call him.

Cadmus

What child was born thy husband in his halls?

Agave

Pentheus, of my union with his father.

Cadmus

What head is that thou barest in thy arms?

Agave

A lion's; at least they said so, who hunted it.

Cadmus

Consider it aright; 'tis no great task to look at it.

Agave

Ah! what do I see? what is this I am carrying in my hands?

Cadmus

Look closely at it; make thy knowledge more certain.

Agave

Ah, 'woe is me! O sight of awful sorrow!

Cadmus

Dost think it like a lion's head?

Agave

Ah no! 'tis Pentheus' head which I his unhappy mother hold.

Cadmus

Bemoaned by me, or ever thou didst recognize him.

Agave

Who slew him? How came he into my hands?

Cadmus

O piteous truth! how ill-timed thy presence here!

Agave

Speak; my bosom throbs at this suspense.

Cadmus

'Twas thou didst slay him, thou and thy sisters.

Agave

Where died he? in the house or where?

Cadmus

On the very spot where hounds of yore rent Actaeon in pieces.

Agave

Why went he, wretched youth! to Cithaeron?

Cadmus

He would go and mock the god and thy Bacchic rites.

Agave

But how was it we had journeyed thither?

Cadmus

Ye were distraught; the whole city had the Bacchic frenzy.



Agave

'Twas Dionysus proved our ruin; now I see it all.

Cadmus

Yes, for the slight he suffered; ye would not believe in his godhead.

Agave

Father, where is my dear child's corpse?

Cadmus

With toil I searched it out and am bringing it myself.

Agave

Is it all fitted limb to limb in seemly wise?

Cadmus [\*]

[\* One line, or maybe more, is missing]

Agave

But what had Pentheus to do with folly of mine?

Cadmus

He was like you in refusing homage to the god, who, therefore, hath involved you all in one common ruin, you and him alike, to destroy this house and me, forasmuch as I, that had no sons, behold this youth, the fruit of thy womb, unhappy mother! foully and most shamefully slain. To thee, my child, our house looked up, to thee my daughter's son, the stay of my palace, inspiring the city with awe; none caring to flout the old king when he saw thee by, for he would get his deserts. But now shall I be cast out dishonoured from my halls, Cadmus the great, who sowed the crop of Theban seed and reaped that goodly harvest. O beloved child! dead though thou art, thou still shalt be counted by me amongst my own dear children; no more wilt thou lay thy hand upon my chin in fond embrace, my child, and calling on thy mother's sire demand, "Who wrongs thee or dishonours thee, old sire? who vexes thy heart, a thorn within thy side? Speak, that I may punish thy oppressor, father mine!"

But now am I in sorrow plunged, and woe is thee, and woe thy mother and her suffering sisters too! Ah! if there be any man that scorns the gods, let him well

mark this prince's death and then believe in them.

Chorus

Cadmus, I am sorry for thy fate; for though thy daughter's child hath met but his deserts, 'tis bitter grief to thee.

Agave

O father, thou seest how sadly my fortune is changed.[\*]

[\* After this a very large lacuna occurs in the MS.]

Dionysus

Thou shalt be changed into a serpent; and thy wife Harmonia, Ares' child, whom thou in thy human life didst wed, shall change her nature for a snake's, and take its form. With her shalt thou, as leader of barbarian tribes, drive thy team of steers, so saith an oracle of Zeus; and many a city shalt thou sack with an army numberless; but in the day they plunder the oracle of Loxias, shall they rue their homeward march; but thee and Harmonia will Ares rescue, and set thee to live henceforth in the land of the blessed. This do I declare, I Dionysus, son of no mortal father but of Zeus. Had ye learnt wisdom when ye would not, ye would now be happy with the son of Zeus for your ally.

Agave

O Dionysus! we have sinned; thy pardon we implore.

Dionysus

Too late have ye learnt to know me; ye knew me not at the proper time.

Agave

We recognize our error; but thou art too revengeful.

Dionysus

Yea, for I, though a god, was slighted by you.

Agave

Gods should not let their passion sink to man's level.

Dionysus

Long ago my father Zeus ordained it thus.

Agave

Alas! my aged sire, our doom is fixed; 'tis woful exile.

Dionysus

Why then delay the inevitable? Exit.

Cadmus

Daughter, to what an awful pass are we now come, thou too, poor child, and thy sisters, while I alas! in my old age must seek barbarian shores, to sojourn there; but the oracle declares that I shall yet lead an army, half-barbarian, half-Hellene, to Hellas; and in serpent's shape shall I carry my wife Harmonia, the daughter of Ares, transformed like me to a savage snake, against the altars and tombs of Hellas at the head of my troops; nor shall I ever cease from my woes, ah me! nor ever cross the downward stream of Acheron and be at rest.

Agave

Father, I shall be parted from thee and exiled.

Cadmus

Alas! my child, why fling thy arms around me, as a snowy cygnet folds its wings about the frail old swan?

Agave

Whither can I turn, an exile from my country?

Cadmus

I know not, my daughter; small help is thy father now.

Agave

Farewell, my home! farewell, my native city! with sorrow I am leaving thee, an exile from my bridal bower.

Cadmus

Go, daughter, to the house of Aristaeus,[\*]

[\* Another large lacuna follows.]

Agave

Father, I mourn for thee.

Cadmus

And I for thee, my child; for thy sisters too I shed a tear.

Agave

Ah! terribly was king Dionysus bringing this outrage on thy house.

Cadmus

Yea, for he suffered insults dire from you, his name receiving no meed of honour in Thebes.

Agave

Farewell, father mine!

Cadmus

Farewell, my hapless daughter and yet thou scarce canst reach that bourn.

Agave

Oh! lead me, guide me to the place where I shall find my sisters, sharers in my exile to their sorrow! Oh! to reach a spot where cursed Cithaeron ne'er shall see me more nor I Cithaeron with mine eyes; where no memorial of the thyrsus is set up! Be they to other Bacchantes dear!

Chorus

Many are the forms the heavenly will assumes, and many a thing the gods fulfil contrary to all hope; that which was expected is not brought to pass, while for the unlooked-for Heaven finds out a way. E'en such hath been the issue here.

(Exeunt OMNES.)