

*Coryphaeus*

I tremble  
to speak the words of freedom before the tyrant.  
But let the truth be told: there is no god  
greater than Dionysus.

*Pentheus*

Like a blazing fire  
this Bacchic violence spreads. It comes too close.  
We are disgraced, humiliated in the eyes  
of Hellas. This is no time for hesitation.

(*He turns to an attendant.*)

You there. Go down quickly to the Electran gates  
and order out all heavy-armed infantry;  
call up the fastest troops among our cavalry,  
the mobile squadrons and the archers. We march  
against the Bacchae! Affairs are out of hand  
when we tamely endure such conduct in our women.

(*Exit attendant.*)

*Dionysus*

Pentheus, you do not hear, or else you disregard  
my words of warning. You have done me wrong,  
and yet, in spite of that, I warn you once  
again: do not take arms against a god.  
Stay quiet here. Bromius will not let you  
drive his women from their revels on the mountain.

*Pentheus*

Don't you lecture me. You escaped from prison.  
Or shall I punish you again?

*Dionysus*

If I were you,  
I would offer him a sacrifice, not rage  
and kick against necessity, a man defying  
god.

775

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*Pentheus*

I shall give your god the sacrifice  
that he deserves. His victims will be his women.  
I shall make a great slaughter in the woods of Cithaeron.

*Dionysus*

You will all be routed, shamefully defeated,  
when their wands of ivy turn back your shields  
of bronze.

*Pentheus*

It is hopeless to wrestle with this man.  
Nothing on earth will make him hold his tongue.

*Dionysus*

you can still save the situation.

*Pentheus*

How?

By accepting orders from my own slaves?

*Dionysus*

No.  
I undertake to lead the women back to Thebes.  
Without bloodshed.

*Pentheus*

This is some trap.

*Dionysus*

A trap?

How so, if I save you by my own devices?

*Pentheus*

You and they have conspired to establish your rites  
forever.

*Dionysus*

True, I have conspired—with god.

Friend,

Pentheus

Bring my armor, someone. And you stop talking.

810

*(Pentheus strides toward the left, but when he is almost offstage, Dionysus calls imperiously to him.)*

Dionysus

Wait!

Would you like to see their revels on the mountain?

Pentheus

I would pay a great sum to see that sight.

Dionysus

Why are you so passionately curious?

Pentheus

I'd be sorry to see them drunk—

Of course

Dionysus

But for all your sorrow,

you'd like very much to see them?

815

Pentheus

Yes, very much.

I could crouch beneath the fir trees, out of sight.

Dionysus

But if you try to hide, they may track you down.

Pentheus

Your point is well taken. I will go openly.

Dionysus

Shall I lead you there now? Are you ready to go?

Pentheus

The sooner the better. The loss of even a moment would be disappointing now.

820

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Dionysus

First, however, you must dress yourself in women's clothes.

Pentheus

What?

You want me, a man, to wear a woman's dress. But why?

Dionysus

If they knew you were a man, they would kill you instantly.

Pentheus

True. You are an old hand at cunning, I see.

Dionysus

Dionysus taught me everything I know.

825

Pentheus

Your advice is to the point. What I fail to see is what we do.

Dionysus

I shall go inside with you and help you dress.

Pentheus

Dress? In a woman's dress, you mean? I would die of shame.

Dionysus

Very well.

Then you no longer hanker to see the Maenads?

Pentheus

What is this costume I must wear?

Dionysus

On your head

830

I shall set a wig with long curls.

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*Pentheus*

And then?

*Dionysus*

Next, robes to your feet and a net for your hair.

*Pentheus*

Yes? Go on.

*Dionysus*

Then a thyrsus for your hand  
and a skin of dappled fawn.

*Pentheus*

I could not bear it.  
I cannot bring myself to dress in women's clothes.

*Dionysus*

Then you must fight the Bacchae. That means bloodshed.

*Pentheus*

Right. First we must go and reconnoiter.

*Dionysus*

Surely a wiser course than that of hunting bad  
with worse.

*Pentheus*

But how can we pass through the city  
without being seen?

*Dionysus*

We shall take deserted streets.  
I will lead the way.

*Pentheus*

Any way you like,  
provided those women of Bacchus don't jeer at me.  
First, however, I shall ponder your advice,  
whether to go or not.

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*Dionysus*

Do as you please.  
I am ready, whatever you decide.

*Pentheus*

Yes.

Either I shall march with my army to the mountain  
or act on your advice.

(Exit *Pentheus* into the palace.)

*Dionysus*

Women, our prey now thrashes  
in the net we threw. He shall see the Bacchae  
and pay the price with death.

O *Dionysus*,

now action rests with you. And you are near.  
Punish this man. But first distract his wits;  
bewilder him with madness. For sane of mind  
this man would never wear a woman's dress;  
but obsess his soul and he will not refuse.  
After those threats with which he was so fierce,  
I want him made the laughingstock of Thebes,  
paraded through the streets, a woman.

Now

I shall go and costume *Pentheus* in the clothes  
which he must wear to Hades when he dies, burchered  
by the hands of his mother. He shall come to know  
*Dionysus*, son of Zeus, consummate god,  
most terrible, and yet most gentle, to mankind.

*Chorus*

—When shall I dance once more  
with bare feet the all-night dances,  
tossing my head for joy  
in the damp air, in the dew,  
as a running fawn might frisk  
for the green joy of the wide fields,

(Exit *Dionysus* into the palace.)

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free from fear of the hunt,  
 free from the circling beaters  
 and the nets of woven mesh  
 and the hunters hallooing on  
 their yelping packs? And then, hard pressed,  
 she sprints with the quickness of wind,  
 bounding over the marsh, leaping  
 to frisk, leaping for joy,  
 gay with the green of the leaves,  
 to dance for joy in the forest,  
 to dance where the darkness is deepest,  
 where no man is.

— What is wisdom? What gift of the gods  
is held in honor like this:  
to hold your hand victorious  
over the heads of those you hate?  
Honor is precious forever.

— Slow but unmistakable  
 the might of the gods moves on.  
 It punishes that man,  
 infatuate of soul  
 and hardened in his pride,  
 who disregards the gods.  
 The gods are crafty:  
 they lie in ambush  
 a long step of time  
 to hunt the unholy.  
 Beyond the old beliefs,  
 no thought, no act shall go.  
 Small, small is the cost  
 to believe in this:  
 whatever is god is strong;  
 whatever long time has sanctioned,  
 that is a law forever;  
 the law tradition makes  
 is the law of nature.

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— What is wisdom? What gift of the gods  
 is held in honor like this:  
 to hold your hand victorious  
 over the heads of those you hate?  
 Honor is precious forever.

— Blessèd is he who escapes a storm at sea,  
who comes home to his harbor.  
 — Blessèd is he who emerges from under affliction.  
 — In various ways one man outraces another in the  
 race for wealth and power.  
 — Ten thousand men possess ten thousand hopes.  
 — A few bear fruit in happiness; the others go awry.  
 — But he who garners day by day the good of life,  
 he is happiest. Blessèd is he.

(*Re-enter Dionysus from the palace. At the threshold  
 he turns and calls back to Pentheus.*)

Dionysus

Pentheus if you are still so curious to see  
 forbidden sights, so bent on evil still,  
 come out. Let us see you in your woman's dress,  
 disguised in Maenad clothes so you may go and spy  
 upon your mother and her company.

(*Enter Pentheus from the palace. He wears a long linen dress  
 which partially conceals his fawn-skin. He carries a thyrsus  
 in his hand; on his head he wears a wig with long blond  
 curls bound by a snood. He is dazed and completely in  
 the power of the god who has now possessed him.*)

Why,

you look exactly like one of the daughters of Cadmus.

Pentheus

I seem to see two suns blazing in the heavens.  
 And now two Thebes, two cities, and each  
 with seven gates. And you—you are a bull

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who walks before me there. Horns have sprouted from your head. Have you always been a beast? But now I see a bull.

Dionysus

It is the god you see.

Though hostile formerly, he now declares a truce and goes with us. You see what you could not when you were blind.

Pentheus (*coyly primping*)

Do I look like anyone?

Like Ino or my mother Agave?

Dionysus

So much alike

I almost might be seeing one of them. But look: one of your curls has come loose from under the snood where I tucked it.

Pentheus

It must have worked loose when I was dancing for joy and shaking my head.

Dionysus

Then let me be your maid and tuck it back. Hold still.

Pentheus

Arrange it. I am in your hands completely.

(Dionysus tucks the curl back under the snood.)

Dionysus

And now your strap has slipped. Yes, and your robe hangs askew at the ankles.

Pentheus (*bending backward to look*)

I think so.

At least on my right leg. But on the left the hem lies straight.

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Dionysus

You will think me the best of friends when you see to your surprise how chaste the Bacchae are.

Pentheus

But to be a real Bacchante, should I hold the wand in my right hand? Or this way?

Dionysus

No.

In your right hand. And raise it as you raise your right foot. I commend your change of heart.

Pentheus

Could I lift Cithaeron up, do you think? Should the cliffs, Bacchae and all?

Dionysus

If you wanted. Your mind was once unsound, but now you think as sane men do.

Pentheus

Should we take crowbars with us?

Or should I put my shoulder to the cliffs and heave them up?

Dionysus

What? And destroy the haunts of the nymphs, the holy groves where Pan plays his woodland pipe?

Pentheus

You are right. In any case, women should not be mastered by brute strength. I will hide myself beneath the firs instead.

Dionysus

You will find all the ambush you deserve, creeping up to spy on the Maenads.

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*Pentheus*

I can see them already, there among the bushes,  
mating like birds, caught in the toils of love.

Think.

*Dionysus*

Exactly. This is your mission: you go to watch.  
You may surprise them—or they may surprise you.

960

*Pentheus*

Then lead me through the very heart of Thebes,  
since I, alone of all this city, dare to go.

*Dionysus*

You and you alone will suffer for your city.  
A great ordeal awaits you. But you are worthy  
of your fate. I shall lead you safely there;  
someone else shall bring you back.

965

*Pentheus*

Yes, my mother.

*Dionysus*

An example to all men.

*Pentheus*

It is for that I go.

*Dionysus*

You will be carried home—

*Pentheus*

O luxury!

*Dionysus*

cradled in your mother's arms.

*Pentheus*

You will spoil me.

*Dionysus*

I mean to spoil you.

« 236 »

*Pentheus*

I go to my reward.

970

*Dionysus*

You are an extraordinary young man, and you go  
to an extraordinary experience. You shall win  
a glory towering to heaven and usurping  
god's.

(Exit *Pentheus*.)

Agave and you daughters of Cadmus,

reach out your hands! I bring this young man

to a great ordeal. The victor? Bromius.

975

Bromius—and I. The rest the event shall show.

(Exit *Dionysus*.)

*Chorus*

—Run to the mountain, fleet hounds of madness!

Run, run to the revels of Cadmus' daughters!

Sting them against the man in women's clothes,

980

the madman who spies on the Maenads, who peers

from behind the rocks, who spies from a vantage!

His mother shall see him first. She will cry

985

to the Maenads: "Who is this spy who has come

to the mountains to peer at the mountain-revels

of the women of Thebes? What bore him, Bacchae?

This man was born of no woman. Some lioness

give him birth, some one of the Libyan gorgons!"

990

—O Justice, principle of order, spirit of custom,  
come! Be manifest; reveal yourself with a sword!

Stab through the throat that godless man,

the mocker who goes, flouting custom and outraging god!

O Justice, stab the evil earth-born spawn of Echion!

995

—Uncontrollable, the unbeliever goes,  
in spitting rage, rebellious and amok,  
madly assaulting the mysteries of god,  
profaning the rites of the mother of god.

« 237 »

Against the unassailable he runs, with rage  
obsessed. Headlong he runs to death.  
For death the gods exact, curbing by that bit  
the mouths of men. They humble us with death  
that we remember what we are who are not god,  
but men. We run to death. Wherefore, I say,  
accept, accept:

humility is wise; humility is blest.  
But what the world calls wise I do not want.  
Elsewhere the chase. I hunt another game,  
those great, those manifest, those certain goals,  
achieving which, our mortal lives are blest.  
Let these things be the quarry of my chase:  
purity; humility; an unrebelleous soul,  
accepting all. Let me go the customary way,  
the timeless, honored, beaten path of those who walk  
with reverence and awe beneath the sons of heaven.

1010

—O Justice, principle of order, spirit of custom,  
come! Be manifest; reveal yourself with a sword!  
Stab through the throat that godless man,  
the mocker who goes, flouting custom and outraging god!  
O Justice, destroy the evil earth-born sprawn of Echion!

1015

—O Dionysus, reveal yourself a bull! Be manifest,  
a snake with darting heads, a lion breathing fire!  
O Bacchus, come! Come with your smile!  
Cast your noose about this man who hunts  
your Bacchae! Bring him down, trampled  
underfoot by the murderous herd of your Maenads!

1020

(Enter a messenger from Cithaeron.)

Messenger

How prosperous in Hellas these halls once were,  
this house founded by Cadmus, the stranger from Sidon  
who sowed the dragon seed in the land of the snake!

1025

I am a slave and nothing more, yet even so  
I mourn the fortunes of this fallen house.

1000

Coryphaeus

What is it?

Is there news of the Bacchae?

Messenger

This is my news:

Pentheus, the son of Echion, is dead.

1030

Coryphaeus

All hail to Bromius! Our god is a great god!

Messenger

What is this you say, women? You dare to rejoice  
at these disasters which destroy this house?

Coryphaeus

I am no Greek. I hail my god  
in my own way. No longer need I  
shrink with fear of prison.

1035

Messenger

If you suppose this city is so short of men—

Coryphaeus

Dionysus, Dionysus, not Thebes,  
has power over me.

Messenger

Your feelings might be forgiven, then. But this,  
this exultation in disaster—it is not right.

1040

Coryphaeus

Tell us how the mocker died.

How was he killed?

Messenger

There were three of us in all: Pentheus and I, attending my master, and that stranger who volunteered his services as guide. Leaving behind us the last outlying farms of Thebes, we forded the Asopus and struck into the barren scrubland of Cithaeron.

There in a grassy glen we halted, unmoving, silent, without a word, so we might see but not be seen. From that vantage, in a hollow cut from the sheer rock of the cliffs, a place where water ran and the pines grew dense with shade, we saw the Maenads sitting, their hands busily moving at their happy tasks. Some wound the stalks of their tattered wands with tendrils of fresh ivy; others, frisking like fillies newly freed from the painted bridles, chanted in Bacchic songs, responsively.

But Pentheus— unhappy man—could not quite see the companies of women. "Stranger," he said, "from where I stand, I cannot see these counterfeit Maenads.

But if I climbed that towering fir that overhangs the banks, then I could see their shameless orgies better."

And now the stranger worked a miracle. Reaching for the highest branch of a great fir, he bent it down, down, down to the dark earth, till it was curved the way a taut bow bends or like a rim of wood when forced about the circle of a wheel. Like that he forced that mountain fir down to the ground. No mortal could have done it. Then he seated Pentheus at the highest tip and with his hands let the trunk rise straightly up, slowly and gently, lest it throw its rider. And the tree rose, towering to heaven, with my master

huddled at the top. And now the Maenads saw him more clearly than he saw them. But barely had they seen, when the stranger vanished and there came a great voice out of heaven—Dionysus', it must have been—crying: "Women, I bring you the man who has mocked at you and me and at our holy mysteries.

Take vengeance upon him." And as he spoke a flash of awful fire bound earth and heaven. The high air hushed, and along the forest glen the leaves hung still; you could hear no cry of beasts. The Bacchae heard that voice but missed its words, and leaping up, they stared, peering everywhere.

Again that voice. And now they knew his cry, the clear command of god. And breaking loose like startled doves, through grove and torrent, over jagged rocks, they flew, their feet maddened by the breath of god. And when they saw my master perching in his tree, they climbed a great stone that towered opposite his perch and showered him with stones and javelins of fir, while the others hurtled their wands. And yet they missed their target, poor Pentheus in his perch, barely out of reach of their eager hands, treed, unable to escape.

Finally they splintered branches from the oaks and with those bars of wood tried to lever up the tree by prying at the roots. But every effort failed.

Then Agave cried out: "Maenads, make a circle about the trunk and grip it with your hands. Unless we take this climbing beast, he will reveal the secrets of the god." With that, thousands of hands tore the fir tree from the earth, and down, down from his high perch fell Pentheus, tumbling to the ground, sobbing and screaming as he fell, for he knew his end was near. His own mother, like a priestess with her victim, fell upon him first. But snatching off his wig and snood



so she would recognize his face, he touched her cheeks, screaming. "No, no, Mother! I am Pentheus, your own son, the child you bore to Echion! Pity me, spare me, Mother! I have done a wrong, but do not kill your own son for my offense."

But she was foaming at the mouth, and her crazed eyes rolling with frenzy. She was mad, stark mad, possessed by Bacchus. Ignoring his cries of pity, she seized his left arm at the wrist; then, planting her foot upon his chest, she pulled, wrenching away the arm at the shoulder—not by her own strength, for the god had put inhuman power in her hands. Ino, meanwhile, on the other side, was scratching off his flesh. Then Autonoe and the whole horde of Bacchae swarmed upon him. Shouts everywhere, he screaming with what little breath was left, they shrieking in triumph. One tore off an arm, another a foot still warm in its shoe. His ribs were clawed clean of flesh and every hand was smeared with blood as they played ball with scraps of Pentheus' body.

The pitiful remains lie scattered, one piece among the sharp rocks; others lying lost among the leaves in the depths of the forest. His mother, picking up his head, impaled it on her wand. She seems to think it is some mountain lion's head which she carries in triumph through the thick of Cithaeron. Leaving her sisters at the Maenad dances, she is coming here, gloating over her grisly prize. She calls upon Bacchus: he is her "fellow-huntsman," "comrade of the chase, crowned with victory." But all the victory she carries home is her own grief.

Now,

before Agave returns, let me leave this scene of sorrow. Humility,

a sense of reverence before the sons of heaven—of all the prizes that a mortal man might win, these, I say, are wisest; these are best.

(Exit Messenger.)

Chorus

—We dance to the glory of Bacchus!  
We dance to the death of Pentheus,  
the death of the spawn of the dragon!  
He dressed in woman's dress;  
he took the lovely thyrsus;  
it waved him down to death,  
led by a bull to Hades.

Hail, Bacchae! Hail, women of Thebes!  
Your victory is fair, fair the prize,  
this famous prize of grief!

Glorious the game! To fold your child  
in your arms, streaming with his blood!

Coryphaeus

But look: there comes Pentheus' mother, Agave,  
running wild-eyed toward the palace.

—Welcome,  
welcome to the reveling band of the god of joy!

(Enter Agave with other Bacchantes. She is covered with blood  
and carries the head of Pentheus impaled upon her thyrsus.)

Agave

Bacchae of Asia—

Chorus

Speak, speak.

Agave

We bring this branch to the palace,  
this fresh-cut spray from the mountains.  
Happy was the hunting.

Chorus

I see.

I welcome our fellow-reveler of god.

Agave

The whelp of a wild mountain lion,  
and snared by me without a noose.  
Look, look at the prize I bring.

1175

Chorus

Where was he caught?

Agave

On Cithaeron—

Chorus

On Cithaeron?

Agave

Our prize was killed.

Chorus

Who killed him?

Agave

I struck him first.

The Maenads call me "Agave-the-blest."

1180

Chorus

And then?

Agave

Cadmus—

Chorus

Cadmus?

Agave

Daughters.

After me, they reached the prey.

After me. Happy was the hunting.

« 244 »

Chorus

Happy indeed.

Agave

Then share my glory,  
share the feast.

Chorus

Share, unhappy woman?

Agave

See, the whelp is young and tender.  
Beneath the soft mane of its hair,  
the down is blooming on the cheeks.

1185

Chorus

With that mane he looks a beast.

Agave

Our god is wise. Cunningly, cleverly,  
Bacchus the hunter lashed the Maenads  
against his prey.

1190

Chorus

Our king is a hunter.

Agave

You praise me now?

Chorus

I praise you.

Agave

The men of Thebes—

Chorus

And Pentheus, your son?

Agave

Will praise his mother. She caught  
a great quarry, this lion's cub.

1195

« 245 »

Chorus

Extraordinary catch.

Agave

Extraordinary skill.

Chorus

You are proud?

Agave

Proud and happy.

I have won the trophy of the chase,  
a great prize, manifest to all.

Coryphaeus

Then, poor woman, show the citizens of Thebes  
this great prize, this trophy you have won  
in the hunt.

*(Agave proudly exhibits her thyrsus with the head  
of Pentheus impaled upon the point.)*

Agave

You citizens of this towered city,  
men of Thebes, behold the trophy of your women's  
hunting! This is the quarry of our chase, taken  
not with nets nor spears of bronze but by the white  
and delicate hands of women. What ate they worth,  
your boastings now and all that uselessness—  
your armor is, since we, with our bare hands,  
captured this quarry and tore its bleeding body  
limb from limb?

—But where is my father Cadmus?  
He should come. And my son. Where is Pentheus?

Fetch him. I will have him set his ladder up  
against the wall and, there upon the beam,  
nail the head of this wild lion I have killed  
as a trophy of my hunt.

*(Enter Cadmus, followed by attendants who bear upon  
a bier the dismembered body of Pentheus.)*

Cadmus

Follow me, attendants.  
Bear your dreadful burden in and set it down,  
there before the palace.

1215

*(The attendants set down the bier.)*

This was Pentheus

whose body, after long and weary scorchings  
I painfully assembled from Cithaeron's glens  
where it lay, scattered in shreds, dismembered  
throughout the forest, no two pieces  
in a single place.

1220

Old Teiresias and I

had returned to Thebes from the orgies on the mountain  
before I learned of this atrocious crime  
my daughters did. And so I hurried back

1225

to the mountain to recover the body of this boy  
murdered by the Maenads. There among the oaks  
I found Aristaeus' wife, the mother of Actaeon

Autochoë, and with her Ino, both

still stung with madness. But Agave, they said,  
was on her way to Thebes, still possessed.

1230

And what they said was true, for there she is,  
and not a happy sight.

Agave

Now, Father,

yours can be the proudest boast of living men.

For you are now the father of the bravest daughters

in the world. All of your daughters are brave,

1235

but I above the rest. I have left my shuttle

at the loom; I raised my sight to higher things—

to hunting animals with my bare hands.

You see?

Here in my hands I hold the quarry of my chase,

a trophy for our house. Take it, Father, take it.

1240

Glory in my kill and invite your friends to share

the feast of triumph. For you are blest, Father,  
by this great deed I have done.

*Cadmus*

This is a grief  
so great it knows no size. I cannot look.  
(This is the awful murder your hands have done.  
This, this is the noble victim you have slaughtered  
to the gods. And to share a feast like this  
you now invite all Thebes and me?)  
O gods,  
how terribly I pity you and then myself.  
Justly—too, too justly—has lord Bromius,  
this god of our own blood, destroyed us all,  
every one.

*Agave*

How scowling and crabbed is old age  
in men. I hope my son takes after his mother  
and wins, as she has done, the laurels of the chase  
when he goes hunting with the younger men of Thebes.  
But all my son can do is quarrel with god.  
He should be scolded, Father, and you are the one  
who should scold him. Yes, someone call him out  
so he can see his mother's triumph.

*Cadmus*

Enough. No more.  
When you realize the horror you have done,  
you shall suffer terribly. But if with luck  
your present madness lasts until you die,  
you will seem to have, not having, happiness.

*Agave*

Why do you reproach me? Is there something wrong?

*Cadmus*

First raise your eyes to the heavens.

*Agave*

There.

1265

But why?

*Cadmus*

Does it look the same as it did before?  
Or has it changed?

*Agave*

It seems—somehow—clearer,  
brighter than it was before.

*Cadmus*

Do you still feel  
the same flurry inside you?

*Agave*

The same—flurry?  
No, I feel—somehow—calmer. I feel as though—  
my mind were somehow—changing.

1270

*Cadmus*

Can you answer clearly?  
Can you still hear me?

*Agave*

No. I have forgotten  
what we were saying, Father.

*Cadmus*

Who was your husband?

*Agave*

Echion—a man, they said, born of the dragon seed.

*Cadmus*

What was the name of the child you bore your husband?

1275

*Agave*

Pentheus.

*Cadmus* And whose head do you hold in your hands?

*Agave (averting her eyes)*  
A lion's head—or so the hunters told me.

*Cadmus*  
Look directly at it. Just a quick glance.

*Agave*  
What is it? What am I holding in my hands?

*Cadmus*  
Look more closely still. Study it carefully.

*Agave*  
No! O gods, I see the greatest grief there is.

*Cadmus*  
Does it look like a lion now?

*Agave*  
No, no. It is—  
Pentheus' head—I hold—

*Cadmus*  
And mourned by me  
before you ever knew.

*Agave*  
But *who* killed him?  
Why am I holding him?

*Cadmus*  
O savage truth,  
what a time to come!

*Agave*  
For god's sake, speak.  
My heart is beating with terror.

*Cadmus*  
You and your sisters.  
You killed him.

*Agave*  
Here at home? Where?  
But where was he killed?

*Cadmus*  
He was killed on Cithaeron,  
there where the hounds tore Actaeon to pieces.

*Agave*  
But why? Why had Pentheus gone to Cithaeron?

*Cadmus*  
He went to your revels to mock the god.

*Agave*  
But *we*—  
what were we doing on the mountain?

*Cadmus*  
The whole city was possessed.  
You were mad.

*Agave*  
Dionysus has destroyed us all.  
Now, now I see:

*Cadmus*  
You denied that he was truly god.  
You outraged him.

*Agave*  
Father,  
where is my poor boy's body now?

*Cadmus*  
There it is.  
I gathered the pieces with great difficulty.

Agave

Is his body entire? Has he been laid out well?

1300

Cadmus

[All but the head. The rest is mutilated horribly.]

Agave

But why should Pentheus suffer for my crime?

Cadmus

He, like you, blasphemed the god. And so the god has brought us all to ruin at one blow, you, your sisters, and this boy. All our house the god as utterly destroyed and, with it, me. For I have no sons left, no male heir; and I have lived only to see this boy, this branch of your own body, most horribly and foully killed.

(He turns and addresses the corpse.)

—To you my house looked up.  
Child, you were the stay of my house; you were my daughter's son. Of you this city stood in awe. No one who once had seen your face dared outrage the old man, or if he did, you punished him. Now I must go, a banished and dishonored man—I, Cadmus the great, who sowed the soldiery of Thebes and harvested a great harvest. My son, dearest to me of all men—for even dead, I count you still the man I love the most—never again will your hand touch my chin; no more, child, will you hug me and call me “Grandfather” and say, “Who is wronging you? Does anyone trouble you or vex your heart, old man? Tell me, Grandfather, and I will punish him.” No, now there is grief for me; the mourning

1320

for you; pity for your mother; and for her sisters, sorrow.

If there is still any mortal man who despises or defies the gods, let him look on this boy's death and believe in the gods.

Coryphaeus

Cadmus, I pity you. Your daughter's son has died as he deserved, and yet his death bears hard on you.

[At this point there is a break in the manuscript of nearly fifty lines. The following speeches of Agave and Coryphaeus and the first part of Dionysus' speech have been conjecturally reconstructed from fragments and later material which made use of the Bacchae. Lines which can plausibly be assigned to the lacuna are otherwise not indicated. My own inventions are designed, not to complete the speeches, but to effect a transition between the fragments, and are bracketed. For fuller comment, see the Appendix.—TRANS.]

Agave

O Father, now you can see how everything has changed. I am in anguish now, tormented, who walked in triumph minutes past, exulting in my kill. And that prize I carried home with such pride was my own curse. Upon these hands I bear the curse of my son's blood. How then with these accursed hands may I touch his body? How can I, accursed with such a curse, hold him to my breast? O gods, what dirge can I sing [that there might be] a dirge [for every] broken limb?

Where is a shroud to cover up his corpse?  
O my child, what hands will give you proper care unless with my own hands I lift my curse?

1305

1310

1315

(*She lifts up one of Pentheus' limbs and asks the help of Cadmus in piecing the body together. She mourns each piece separately before replacing it on the bier. See Appendix.*)

Come, Father. We must restore his head to this unhappy boy. As best we can, we shall make him whole again.

—O dearest, dearest face!  
 Pretty boyish mouth! Now with this veil I shroud your head, gathering with loving care these mangled bloody limbs, this flesh I brought to birth

*Coryphaeus*

Let this scene teach those [who see these things: Dionysus is the son] of Zeus.

(*Above the palace Dionysus appears in epiphany.*)

*Dionysus*

[I am Dionysus, the son of Zeus, returned to Thebes, revealed, a god to men.] But the men [of Thebes] blasphemed me. They slandered me; they said I came of mortal man, and not content with speaking blasphemies, [they dared to threaten my person with violence.] These crimes this people whom I cherished well did from malice to their benefactor. Therefore, I now disclose the sufferings in store for them. Like [enemies], they shall be driven from this city to other lands; there, submitting to the yoke of slavery, they shall wear out wretched lives, captives of war, enduring much indignity.

(*He turns to the corpse of Pentheus.*)

This man has found the death which he deserved, torn to pieces among the jagged rocks.  
You are my witnesses: he came with outrage;

he attempted to chain my hands, abusing me [and doing what he should least of all have done.] And therefore he has rightly perished by the hands of those who should the least of all have murdered him. What he suffers, he suffers justly.

Upon you, Agave, and on your sisters I pronounce this doom: you shall leave this city in expiation of the murder you have done. You are unclean, and it would be a sacrilege that murderers should remain at peace beside the graves [of those whom they have killed].

(*He turns to Cadmus.*)

Next I shall disclose the trials which await this man. You, Cadmus, shall be changed to a serpent, and your wife, the child of Ares, immortal Harmonia, shall undergo your doom, a serpent too. With her, it is your fate to go a journey in a car drawn on by oxen, leading behind you a great barbarian host. For thus decrees the oracle of Zeus.

With a host so huge its numbers cannot be counted, you shall ravage many cities; but when your army plunders the shrine of Apollo, its homecoming shall be perilous and hard. Yet in the end the god Ares shall save Harmonia and you and bring you both to live among the blest.

So say I, born of no mortal father, Dionysus, true son of Zeus. If then, when you would not, you had muzzled your madness, you should have an ally now in the son of Zeus.

*Cadmus*

We implore you, Dionysus. We have done wrong.

*Dionysus*

Too late. When there was time, you did not know me.

1345

*Cadmus*

We have learned. But your sentence is too harsh.

*Dionysus*

I am a god. I was blasphemed by you.

*Cadmus*

Gods should be exempt from human passions.

*Dionysus*

Long ago my father Zeus ordained these things.

*Agave*

It is fated, Father. We must go.

*Dionysus*

Why then delay?

1350

For you must go.

*Cadmus*

Child, to what a dreadful end have we all come, you and your wretched sisters and my unhappy self. An old man, I must go to live a stranger among barbarian peoples, doomed to lead against Hellas a motley foreign army. Transformed to serpents, I and my wife, Harmonia, the child of Ares, we must captain spearmen against the tombs and shrines of Hellas. Never shall my sufferings end; not even over Acheron shall I have peace.

1355

*Agave (embracing Cadmus)*

O Father,  
to be banished, to live without you!

« 256 »

*Cadmus*

Poor child,

like a white swan warding its weak old father, why do you clasp those white arms about my neck?

1365

*Agave*

But banished! Where shall I go?

*Cadmus*

I do not know,  
my child. Your father can no longer help you.

*Agave*

Farewell, my home! Ciry, farewell.

O bridal bed, banished I go,  
in misery, I leave you now.

1370

*Cadmus*

Go, poor child, seek shelter in Aristæus' house.

*Agave*

I pity you, Father.

*Cadmus*

And I pity you, my child,  
and I grieve for your poor sisters. I pity them.

*Agave*

Terribly has Dionysus brought  
disaster down upon this house.

1375

*Dionysus*

I was terribly blasphemed,  
my name dishonored in Thebes.

*Agave*

Farewell, Father.

« 257 »



Cadmus

Farewell to you, unhappy child,  
Fare well. But you shall find your faring hard

1380

(Exit Cadmus.)

Agave

Lead me, guides, where my sisters wait,  
poor sisters of my exile. Let me go  
where I shall never see Cithaeron more,  
where that accursed hill may not see me,  
where I shall find no trace of thyrsus!  
That I leave to other Bacchae.

1385

(Exit Agave with attendants.)

Chorus

The gods have many shapes.  
The gods bring many things  
to their accomplishment.  
And what was most expected  
has not been accomplished.  
But god has found his way  
for what no man expected.  
So ends the play.

1390

# Genealogical Tree of the Family of Antigone

