

Greek 896: The Bacchai of Euripides

John Lindsay Orr

1 Preface

Primary text [Dig94], with reference to [ED87].

2 Translation

2.1 Lines 1 – 203

Dionysos I have come, Zeus' son, to this Theban land,
I, Dionysos, whom Kadmos' daughter once bore —
Semele, when her labor was brought on with lighting-borne fire;
and, having changed my appearance from god to mortal,
5 here I am, by Dirke's stream and the water of Ismenos.
I see this memorial to my thunderbolt-smitten mother
near the ruins of house and home,
smouldering with the flame of Zeus' yet living fire,
the undying wrong of Hera towards my mother.
10 I commend Kadmos, who kept this ground untouched by foot,
his daughter's sanctuary; and with a vine's
grape-green growth, I have myself covered it quite round.
With the Lydians' gold-rich land behind me,
and the Phrigians' too — and the Persians' sun-struck plains,
15 the Bactrian walls, and the wintry land
of the Medes; after going to wealthy Arabia
and all of Asia which lies by the bitter salt sea
with Greeks and barbarians all mixed together,
and with populous cities adorned with lovely towers,
20 I came to this city first, of the Greeks,
having danced and established my rites over there,
so that I might be revealed as a god to mortals.
I set up the cry first through this Thebes of the Greek land,
affixing fawnskin to skin,
25 and giving thyrsis to hand, an ivy bolt;
since my mother's sisters, who should least do so,
say that I, Dionysos, am not the offspring of Zeus,
and that Semele, who had been married, tried to transfer
from some mortal to Zeus the fault of her bed —
30 Kadmos' schemes — because of which Zeus killed her,
they loudly proclaimed, because she falsely declared there was a "marriage".
Therefore I drove these very women from their homes
with frenzies, and they live in the mountain, struck out of their wits,
and I make them keep my the attire of my rites.
35 Also, all the female seed of the Kadmeians, all who
were women, I sent maddened from their homes;
and all mixed up with Kadmos' children
they sit under green firs outdoors on rocks.
For this city needs to learn, even if it doesn't wish,
40 it being uninitiated in my Bacchic rites,
to speak in defence of my mother Semele for my sake,
who have been revealed to mortals as a god whom she bore to Zeus.
Now, Kadmos is delegating his royal prerogative and power
to Pentheus, who is the offspring of his daughter

45 and who opposes the gods in things concerning me and
wrests me from libations, and in his prayers he has recollection of nothing at all.
Therefore, I, god that I am, will reveal myself right here
to all Thebans. Then, when I have put things right here,
I'll set my foot toward another land,
50 after I've revealed myself; but if the city of the Thebans
in anger seeks with men-at-arms to bring the Bacchai from the mountain,
I will hold fast to my wild women as the leader of their host.
Therefore I have changed and have a mortal form,
and I have cast my shape to the stature of a man.
55 But now, oh you who left Tmolos, bulwark of Lydia,
my troop, women whom I brought from barbarian lands
as my companions and fellow-travelers,
raise your drums, native to the Phrygian land,
inventions of mother Rhea and mine,
60 and going about the royal house, this one, Pentheus' —
beat! So that Kadmos' city should see.
And, I, with my Bacchai, when I have gone to the folds of Kithairon
where they are, will join in the dances.

Chorus From Asian land,
65 having left holy Tmolos, I urge on
the sweet labor for Bromios
and his easy work,
calling out the Bacchic cry.
Who is for the road, who is for the road? Who is for the
beams of the house? Let him be out of that place,
70 and let each one devote a pious mouth;
for we will continually sing the customary praises
of Dionysos.

[str.] Oh blessed is the fortunate one who,
having known the initiations of the gods,
leads a pious life
75 and joins his spirit to the troop
in the mountains, partaking in a holy
Bacchic cleansing;
who, testifying the sacred rites
of the great mother Kybele,
80 brandishing a thyrsis,
and crowned with ivy,
waits on Dionysos.
Come Bacchai! Come Bacchai!
bringing Bromios, divine child of a god,
85 Dionysos, down
from Phrygian mountains to Greece's
broad highways — Bromios!

[antistr.] He whom his mother once held
in the birthing pains brought on her
90 from Zeus' flying thunder,
cast from her womb,
she bore him, losing
her life by thunderbolt stroke;
but at once Kronos' son Zeus
95 received him from the birthing chamber,
and when he had covered him up in this thigh,

48 ἐς δ' ἄλλην] The δέ answers the μέν l. 43, so the
contrast is "first, as to Kadmos and Pentheus, then, on

to another land. . ."

hidden from Hera,
 he pressed it closed with golden pins.
 And when the Fates decreed,
 100 he brought forth the bull-horned god
 and crowned him
 with crowns of snakes, whence the maenads cast
 their wild-fed catch about themselves for braids.

[str.] Oh Thebes, which nurtured Semele,
 105 crown yourself with ivy;
 be filled, filled with green
 bryony with its fair fruit,
 and make wild Bacchic processions with oak
 110 or fir banches,
 and top dappled fawnskin garments
 with white locks of
 fleece; and sanctify all round the outrageous fennel stalks for yourselves;
 all the world will be dancing now,
 115 when Bromios leads his troops
 to the mountain, to the mountain, where
 the female crowd waits
 driven away from the loom and the side of the waeving comb
 for Dionysos.

[antistr.] 120 Oh cave of the Kouretes,
 and Crete's sacred,
 Zeus-bearing haunts,
 where thrice-crested Korybantes
 invented this skin-stretched round
 125 for me;
 and they mingled the intense bacchic drumbeat
 with the sweet-voiced breath
 of the Phrygian flute and put the mix into mother Rhea's
 hand, as clamor for the crazed cries of the bacchai;
 130 and maddened Satyrs
 obtained it from the mother goddess,
 and they attached it to
 the dances of the three-year festival,
 which Dionysos delights in.

[epode] 135 Sweet it is in the mountains when
 one drops to the ground from the
 swift bacchic troops, with the holy
 garb of fawnskin, lusting for
 fresh-killed goat blood, a raw-feeding delight,
 140 sent to the mountains, Phrygian, Lydian —
 and their leader, Bromios:
 Euoi! The plain flows with milk, it flows with wine,
 and it flows with the nectar of bees.
 Like the smoke of Syrian frankincense
 145 Baccheus, holding up
 a fiery pine cone's flame,
 makes it dart from the fennel stalk
 at a run, also stirring
 wanderers to his choruses
 and rousing up with cries,
 150 and tossing soft locks of hair to the sky.
 At the same time, he roars words with wild cries like this:
 Oh come, Bacchai!

Oh come, Bacchai!
 adornment of gold streaming Tmolos,
 155 celebrate Dionysos
 with deep-booming drums,
 wildly glorifying the wild god
 in Phrygian calls and cries,
 160 when the tuneful holy lotus-flute
 plays holy tunes uniting with the
 wanderers to the mountain, to the mountain!
 165 And happy as a foal with its
 nursing mother, a Bacchante leads her quick leg with skipping steps.

Teiresias 170 Who is within the gates? Call out Kadmos from his house,
 Agenor's son, who left the Sidonian city
 and built up this town of Thebes.
 Let someone go, announce that Teiresias
 seeks him; he knows himself about what I have come,
 175 and the things which I, old man that I am, agreed with an older one;
 to hold thyrsos high and have fawn skins,
 and to crown our heads with ivy shoots.

Kadmos Ah, dearest friend! I perceived your voice, listening to
 wise words from a wise man, while I was in my house.
 180 And I have come, ready to have this garb of the god;
 For since he is my daughter's child
 [Dionysos, who has appeared to men as a god]
 we must glorify him greatly as much as is in our power.
 Whither must we dance, whither set foot
 185 and shake a gray head? You be my guide,
 an old man for an old man, Teiresias; for you are wise.
 Happily, we have been overlooked, since we are old,
 so that I need not have labored night and day
 beating the ground with a thyrsos.

Teiresias You experience these things together with me;
 190 for even I am in my prime, and will try my hand at the dance.

Kadmos Won't we go to the mountain by carriage?

Teiresias But the god would not have honor in the same way.

Kadmos Shall I, an old man, educate you, old man?

Teiresias The god will lead us there without trouble.

Kadmos 195 Will we dance for Baccheus, alone of the city?

Teiresias Since we alone think rightly, and the others wrongly.

Kadmos The expectation is of long work; but hold my hand.

Teiresias Look, hold tight and join your hand.

Kadmos I, living as a mortal, do not look down on the gods.

Teiresias 200 We are not wise in anything to the gods.
 The traditions of our fathers, and ones of like age which
 we have acquired, no rationalizations will overthrow them,
 not even if the clever idea was discovered through the height of wits.

197 μακρὸν τὸ μέλλειν] See [LS89, μέλλω II.2]; μακρὸν
 (κάμειν) μέλλω

2.2 Lines 519 – 659

[str.] Acheloios' daughter,
 520 Kindly maiden, Mistress Dirke,
 for once you took Zeus' babe
 in your streams,
 when Zeus, the one who bore him with his thigh,
 525 snatched him from immortal fire, calling out these words:
 "Come, Dithyrambos, enter this,
 my male womb;
 I am revealing, oh Bacchic son,
 for Thebes to call you by this name."
 530 But you, blessed Dirke,
 are pushing me away, I who keep
 crown-bearing Bacchic troops by you.
 Why do you reject me? Why do you flee me?
 Still, by Dionysos' grape-like
 535 grace of the vine,
 you will yet care for Bromios.

[antistr.] What anger!
 Pentheus, who one descended from a snake,
 is revealing his earthy race,
 540 he, who Echion
 grew from the ground,
 a wild-faced monster, not a mortal man,
 and murderous as a giant struggling with the gods;
 545 who readily tied me up in nooses,
 a woman of Bromios,
 and who now keeps my troop leader
 within his house,
 hidden in dark dungeons.
 550 Do you see these things, oh son of Zeus,
 Dionysos; your prophets
 in a trial of mastery?
 Come, lord, down from Olympos,
 brandishing your golden thyrsos,
 555 and hold back this murderous man's sin.

[epode] In which part of Nysa, where wild beasts flourish,
 are you leading your troop with your thyrsos,
 oh Dionysos, or are you on the
 peaks of Korykia?
 560 Perhaps you are in the thick-forested nooks of Olympos,
 where Orpheus once, by playing his kithara
 drew the trees together with music,
 drew the wild beasts together.
 565 Oh blessed Pieria,
 Euios sanctifies you, and he will come,
 dancing with bacchic festivities,
 and he will lead twirling mænads
 570 when he has crossed the swift-flowing Axios
 and the Lydias, her father which gives
 wealth to mortal men, which I have heard
 makes the land of fine horses gleam
 575 with the loveliest waters.

532] [LSe95, See ἐν A.I.4]

553 ἄνα] Not a tmesis but either vocative ἄναξ, or else
 an implied imperative, e.g. ἀνάστυθι.

Dionysos Lo, hearken, hearken to my voice,
 Lo, bacchai; lo, bacchai.

Chorus What is this? What voice of Euaios, from where,
 is calling me up?

Dionysos 580 Lo, lo, again I speak,
 Semele's, Zeus' son.

Chorus Lo! Lo! Master, master,
 come now to our troop,
 oh Bromios, Bromios.

Dionysos 585 Shake the surface of the earth, Mistress Quake.

Chorus Ah! Ah!
 The beams of Pentheus' house will surely
 be shaken apart in a collapse.
 Dionysos is up on the beams; revere him!

Chorus 590 Oh! We revere him!

Chorus Do you see these stone inserts to the columns
 flying apart? Bromios is raising the
 cry from within the roof.

Dionysos Lay hold of a smoky thunderstruck torch, burn up, burn up Pentheus' halls.

Chorus 595 Ah! Ah!
 Don't you glimpse, nor clearly see
 the fire about this holy tomb of Semele,
 a flame which once Zeus' thunderbolt-casting
 thunder left?

600 Cast to the ground, cast your trembling
 bodies, mænads;
 For our lord, who has put these beams head over heel
 is approaching, the offspring of Zeus.

Dionysos Barbarian woman, have you been struck so witless with fear
 605 that you have fallen to the ground? You saw, so it appears, Bacchos
 shaking apart Pentheus' house; but stand your bodies up
 and take heart, making a change from trembling of the flesh.

Chorus Oh great light for us of exultant Bacchic celebraton,
 how happy I was when I saw you, while I kept to lonely solitude.

Dionysos 610 Did you sink into despondency when I was sent inside,
 seeming to fall into Pentheus' dark dungeons?

Chorus How could I not? Who would be my guard if you encountered misfortune?
 But how were you freed, when you met with the irreverend man?

Dionysos I saved myself easily, and without trouble.

Chorus 615 And didn't he tie your hands with binding nooses?

Dionysos In this too I injured him, because while thinking that he fettered me,
 he neither held nor grasped us, but nourished himself on empty hopes.
 But finding a bull near the troughs, at the place where he he shut us up when he took us,
 he threw nooses around its knees and hooves,
 620 puffing in his temper, dripping sweat from his body,
 biting his lips; and I was nearby,
 sitting quietly, watching. And at this time
 Bacchos came and shook up the house and set fire to
 his mother's tomb; But [Pentheus], as I saw, thinking that his house was burning,
 625 darted hither and thither, telling slaves to bring Acheloios [water],

and was altogether a slave in the business, toiling in vain.
 When he had given up on this labor, since I had fled,
 he drew a black sword which he had snatched up from inside the house.
 And then Bromios — as it appeared to me; I am telling you my belief —
 630 made a phantom down in the courtyard; and [Pentheus], rushing toward it
 was darting and stabbing empty air, trying to slaughter me.
 And in addition to these, Bacchos heaped the following pains on him:
 he smashed his halls to the ground, and everything of his collapsed
 while he saw my imprisonment as most bitter; and giving up
 635 beating with the sword, he was exhausted; for he, although a man,
 had dared to go to battle against a god. And I, stepping quietly from
 the halls have come to you, giving no thought for Pentheus.
 But as it seems to me (a boot at any rate is sounding from within the house)
 he will come at once to the front. What ever will he say of these events?
 640 For I will deal with him easily, even if he should come greatly puffed up.
 For it befits a wise man to practice a prudent gentleness of temper.

Pentheus I have suffered terribly! The foreigner has escaped me,
 who just now was constrained in fetters.
 Ah! Ah!

645 This is the man! Why are these things happening? How are you
 showing yourself to me by the front of the house, having got out?

Dionysos Stand still! Cool your temper as you cool your heels!

Pentheus How did you come out, escaping your bonds?

Dionysos Did I not say, or did you not hear, that someone would set me free?

Pentheus 650 Who? For you are always introducing new explanations.

Dionysos He who makes the grape-laden vine grow for mortal men.

Pentheus <...>

Dionysos You reproached Dionysos for this fine thing.

Pentheus I am commanding everyone to shut the city walls in a circle.

Dionysos Why? Do the gods not step over even fortifications?

Pentheus 655 You are wise, wise, except in what you should be wise in.

Dionysos As for what I most should be, in that I, at least, have grown wise.
 But first learn the news by listening to that man,
 who is here from the mountain to relate something for you.
 And we will remain with you, we will not flee.

Messenger 660 Pentheus, you who rule this Theban land,
 I have come, leaving behind Kithairon, where
 the holy falls of white snow never lift.

Pentheus And you have come, presenting what sort of urgency of speech?

Messenger Having seen the noble bacchai, the ones who darted out on their white limbs
 665 from this land, [driven] with a gadfly,
 I have come, needing to tell you and the city, lord,
 what remarkable things they are doing, and things more than marvelous.
 But I want to hear whether I should speak to you about matters from there
 freely, or if I should restrain my speech;
 670 for I'm afraid of the quickness of your temper, lord,
 of your sharp temper, and especially your royal power.

633 ἰδόντι] Possessive dative.

647 στήσον... πόδα] Literally “set your feet, and put
 quiet feet under your temper.” So perhaps less

colloquially, “Stand still and let the stillness of your feet
 be a guide for your temper.”

648 πόθεν] “From what means”

Pentheus Speak, as you shall be wholly without punishment from me;
 [since it is not right to be roused in anger against just men.]
 But by however much you say more terrible things about the bacchai,
 675 by that much more we shall put this man, who established these arts
 for women, to just punishment.

Messenger I was recently driving a herd
 of young cattle to ascend a crag, when the sun
 shot shot rays warming the earth.
 680 I saw three troops of female dancers,
 of which, the leader of one was Autonoe, of the second
 the leader was your mother Agaue, and Ino of the third dance troop.
 All the women were sitting, relaxing their bodies,
 some pressing their backs against the tresses of a fir tree,
 685 others throwing their heads to the ground here and there amid oak leaves,
 in a sober manner; they were not not, as you say,
 drunk with the wine cup and sound of the lotus flute,
 chasing the Cyprian through the wood, leaving a trail of devastation.
 And your mother, standing in the middle of the bacchai
 690 raised a cry to rouse the body from sleep,
 lowing calls like one hears from horned cattle.
 And when they had cast abundant sleep from their eyes
 they darted upright, a wonder to behold of fine array,
 young women, old women, and maidens as yet unwed.
 695 And first they let their hair down to their shoulders,
 and all who had loosed the fastenings of their halters
 gathered up fawnskins, and girdled the dappled skins
 with snakes that flick their tongues across the jaw.
 Next, those holding young deer or wild wolf cubs
 700 in their arms gave them white milk,
 all those who, having recently given birth, still had swollen breasts
 since they had left their babies behind; and the put on ivy-woven
 crowns of oak and flower-bearing choke-weed.
 One of them, taking a thyrsis skipped to a rock
 705 from which dewy droplets of water sprang,
 and another dropped a feenel stalk down to the surface of the earth
 and right there the god made a spring of wine flow up and out;
 and all those who had a desire for white drink,
 scraped the ground with the tips of their fingers
 710 and had a stream of milk; and a sweet flow of honey
 dripped from ivy-woven thyrsos.
 So that if you had been present, you would have pursued with prayers
 the god whom now you criticize, when you saw these doings.
 And we herdsmen and shepherds came together
 715 quarelling with each other in shared speech
 how they did terrible things deserving wonderment.
 A certain man, a wanderer through the town and one who is always talking
 said to the group, "Oh you men inhabiting the solemn highlands
 of mountains, are you willing that we should chase
 720 Pentheus' mother Agaue out of the bacchic revels,
 and gain favor with the king?" He seemed to us to speak well,
 and we lay in wait, having camouflaged ourselves
 with the foliage of bushes. And at the appointed time
 they set the thyrsos going toward the bacchic celebration,
 725 calling on Iacchos with one voice, the offspring of Zeus,
 Bromios; and all the mountain was in a bacchic frenzy together,

677 ὑπεξήρχιζον] It is uncertain whether ὑπεξήρχιζω is
 causal or not. This may be "I was driving the cattle to

ascend" or else "the cattle were ascending".

the wild animals too, and and not one thing was unmoved by the running.
 Agaue chanced to be leaping near to me,
 and I leapt out so as to sieze her,
 730 abandoning the ambush where I was hiding my body.
 But she cried out, "Oh my shameless running women,
 we are being hunted by the man; but follow me,
 follow, armed with thyrsos in your hands.
 Then we, by fleeing, escaped
 735 the bacchai's rending, which they yet did to heifers pastured on fresh grass
 that they came upon, with their bare hands, and no iron blades.
 You would have seen one young cow with a fine udder
 bellowing as they dragged her apart in their hands,
 while they tore other heifers apart in a frenzied rending.
 740 And you would have seen ribs or a cloven hoof
 tossed high and low; and garments hung
 under the fir trees were dripping, soiled with blood.
 And proud bulls, enraged to the point of using their horns
 were felled to the ground at the forequarters,
 745 brought down by countless young women's hands;
 and they tore apart the hide more swiftly
 than you would blink your royal eye.
 And they are coming on at a run, like birds ascending,
 to the expanses of plains below, which, along the banks of Asopos' stream,
 750 cast out fruitful corn for Thebans,
 and by Hysia's and Erythra's waters too; stretches of land which have been settled, down
 below Kithairon's crag; falling upon [this land] like warriors,
 they tear everything apart, high and low;
 they were tearing children from their homes
 755 yet they set them all on their shoulders, and they were not bound tight with shackles,
 and there did not fall [to the black earth,
 neither bronze, nor iron], and they carried fire close to
 their curls, and did not burn. And the men who, out of anger,
 moved to arms were swept away by the bacchai.
 760 Which was a terrible sight to see, lord;
 for no sharp-tipped dart of theirs drew blood,
 757a neither bronze, nor iron ,
 but those women, shooting forth their thyrsos from their hands,
 wounded men and made them turn tail and run,
 not without some god's help.
 765 And they moved back to the place from which they had stirred foot,
 to the same streams which the god let flow up for them,
 and they washed off the blood, and snakes cleaned
 droplets from the skin of their cheeks with their tongues.
 So then, oh king, receive this god, whoever he is,
 770 to the city; as he is great both in these other doings,
 and also in the thing they say, so I hear,
 that he gave the grief-stopping vine to mortals.
 And if wine no longer existed, there would be no Cyprian,
 nor even one other pleasure for humanity any longer.

733 διὰ χειρῶν] More literally, "armed with thyrsos by means of your hands". In other words the thyrsos become weapons by means of their use in the bacchantes' hands. So perhaps a better translation is "armed with thyrsos for hand-to-hand combat."
 735 αἱ δὲ] This truncated sentence tries to avoid stating explicitly what the bacchai did to the calves, communicating a sense of revulsion.

747 κόαις] Irony in the idiom of κόρη = "eye", since it is Kadmos' βασιλῆοι κόραι who are leading the σπαργμός. Compare also the use of the idiom in Theoc. ix. 36 (ἅ μία κόρη).
 756 ἔπιπτεν] The following two half lines are dubious. If χαλκός and σίδηρος are good, then they seem to be the subjects of ἔπιπτεν. But it is also easy to see that the τέχνα carried on shoulders could be the subject.
 767 ἴψαντο] Rare unaugmented aorist in Attic.

Chorus 775 I dread to speak free words
to the tyrant, but nevertheless it will be said;
Dionysos has grown to be lesser than none of the gods.

Pentheus Already nearby this wantonness of the bacchai, like fire,
has secretly laid hold, a great stain to Greeks.

780 But it is not right to hesitate; go, march to Electra's
gates; tell all the heavily armed soldiers
and those mounting all fleet-footed horses,
and as many light foot-soldiers as swing a shield and
twang bowstings by hand, how we will march against
785 the bacchai; for these things...no! they are too much,
that we shall be told by women what happens to us.

2.3 Lines 862 –

[str.] Shall I ever put my white
foot in all-night dances,
revelling again, tossing my neck
865 to the dewy sky,
like a fawn playing
in a meadow's green delights,
when she flees a terrifying
hunt, beyond the look-outs, over the nets,
870 and the yelling handler
urge on the dogs' running,
but she, fast as the wind,
with swift labors, mounts the river
bank, delighting
875 in the absence of men and in shoots of shady-
tressed woods?

What is the clever thing, or what is the nobler thing;
honor among men from the gods
or to hold a stronger hand over
880 the heads of one's enemies?
whatever is noble is always dear.

[antistr.] It is hardly hurrying, but all the same
the godly strength is something
sure; and it straightens out those mortals
885 who value folly
and who do not praise the gods' works,
with their frenzied perception.
They hide craftily
the long passage of time and
890 pursue the unholy man; for
one should understand, and put in practice, that
nothing is ever superior to the traditional customs.
It is a light cost to consider this to have force;
whatever is truly divine,
895 the customary practice established in a long time
will flourish forever, and has flourished.

784 *πάλλουσι...ψάλλουσι*] "Swing" and "twang" are an attempt to mimic the consonance of *πάλλω* and *ψάλλω*.

What is the clever thing, or what is the nobler thing;
honor among men from the gods
or to hold a stronger hand over
900 the heads of one's enemies?
whatever is noble is always dear.

[epode] He is happy who, out of the sea,
escapes a storm, and reaches a harbor;
and he is happy who is above his troubles;
905 and in other ways one man
surpasses another with fortune and might.
There are yet countless hopes
for countless men; some result in fortune
for mortal men, others come to nothing;
910 But to take each day as it comes
is a happy way of life for anyone, say I.

Dionysos Pentheus, I am calling you, who are eager to see
things not yours to see, and are pursuing what is not yours to pursue,
come out in front of the building, let yourself be visible to me,
915 in the garb of a frenzied bacchic woman,
as a spy on your mother and her band;
in appearance you are fit to be one of Kadmos' daughters.

Pentheus And I seem to be seeing two suns,
and a double Thebes and seven-gated city;
920 and you seem to be a bull leading us onward,
and horns seem to have grown on your head.
Or were you at some time really a wild beast? For in any case you have become a bull.

Dionysos The god is accompanying us as an ally; before he was not well-disposed;
but now you are seeing what you are meant to see.

Pentheus 925 How do I look then? Not set with the stature of Ino
or of Agaue, or at least of my mother?

Dionysos Seeing you, I seem to be looking at those very women.
Except this braid of your hair has stood out from its place,
not how I fixed it under your head-band.

Pentheus 930 I unmoored it from its place while I was shaking it back and forth
and dancing the bacchic dance indoors.

Dionysos But we, who are concerned with tending to you,
will arrange it back down again; but straighten your head!

Pentheus See, *you* arrange it, for we have been entrusted to you.

Dionysos 935 Your girdles are loose, and the folds of your dress
are not stretching in a row under your ankles.

Pentheus So they seem to me too, at least by my right foot;
but there the dress keeps right by my ankle

Dionysos Maybe you will consider me first among your friends,
940 when you see the bacchae are sensible, contrary to your argument.

Pentheus Which will seem more like a bacchanal?
Taking my thyrsos with my right hand or with this one?

Dionysos You should hold it in the right hand and raise it
together with your right foot; and I approve that you have changed your thinking.

904 ἔφουγε... ἔκλιχεν... ἔγένεθ'] Gnomic aorists

935 ἀνακείμεσθα] Unconscious irony, as this can also mean "dedicated (as a votive offering)".

939 τένοντ'] Properly, the Achilles tendon.

Pentheus 945 Might I be strong enough to bear Kithairon's glens
with the bacchai themselves with my shoulders?

Dionysos You might be strong enough, if you wish; but you did not have
a healthy way of thinking before, and now you have the kind that you need.

Pentheus Should we bring crowbars , or shall I pull up with my hands
950 when I have set my shoulder or arm under the peaks?

Dionysos Don't damage the shrines of the Nymphs
and Pan's seats where he has his piping.

Pentheus Well said; it is not right to defeat women
with force; I will conceal my frame under the pines.

Dionysos 955 You will make yourself the sort of hiding which is right for you,
who go as a crafty spy on the frenzied women.

Pentheus And really, I imagine that they, like birds in the bushes,
are held in the most sweet nets of passion.

Dionysos Aren't you then making ready to go as an observer for this very purpose?
960 And you will probably take them, if you are not taken first.

Pentheus Take me through the middle of the Thebans' land;
for I am the only man among them who dares to do this.

Dionysos Only you, alone, are laboring for this city;
therefore trials await you which were due all along.
965 But follow; I will go as a guide preserving your safety,
and another will bring you back from there. . . [Pent.] My mother, I suppose.

Dionysos . . . when you are remarkable to all. [Pent.] I am going for that purpose.

Dionysos You will come, carried. . . [Pent.] You are talking about my luxury.

Dionysos . . . in your mother's hands. [Pent.] You will even make me live in luxury.

Dionysos 970 At least these sorts of luxury. [Pent.] I am taking hold of what I deserve.

Dionysos You are a terrible man and as a terrible man are going to to terrible sufferings,
so that you will find a fame towering to heaven.
Stretch out your hands, Agaue, and you kindred
daughters of Kadmos; I will lead this young man
975 to a great trial, and the victor will be me
and Bromios. And it will show other things.

[str.] Come, swift dogs of Lyssa, come to the mountain,
where Kadmos' girls have their Bacchic troop;
goad them up
980 against the mad spy in womanish clothes
on the frenzied women.
His mother will see him first,
peering from a smooth rock or tree,
and will call to the mænads,
985 "Who is this man seeking the mountain-running Kadmeian women
who has come, who has come, to the mountain, to the mountain, oh bacchai?
Who bore him?
For he did not grow from
women's blood, but from some lioness
990 or the stock of Libyan Gorgons."

947 ὤμοις] A pun on ὤμος (shoulder) and ὠμός (raw/torn meat).

956 κρύψῃ] "You will hide yourself the hiding which it is right that you are hidden with"

964 υπερχάμνεις] Ironic ambiguity between "laboring for" and "suffering for".

978 Λύσσας] I.e., raging madness,

Let clear justice come, let her come
bearing a sword and stabbing through the throat
the godless, lawless, unjust
earth-born seed of Echion.

[antistr.] 995 He is sent, who is with unjust purpose and lawless temperament,
with his wits frenzied
over the bacchic rites and your mother's
and with a senseless plan,
to master the unconquerable by force.

1000 Unhesitating death fosters prudent judgement
towards matters of the gods,
and to bear things in a mortal way is a trouble free life.
I do not envy the clever thing; but I rejoice chasing
other great, manifest matters of the eternal ones
1005 toward a life lived well,
these matters that well lead on holy living,
by day and into the night,
casting out customs apart from justice, to honor the gods.

Let clear justice come, let her come
1010 bearing a sword and stabbing through the throat
the godless, lawless, unjust
earth-born seed of Echion.

[epode] Appear as a bull, or for us to see as a many-headed
dragon, or

1015 to be seen as a blazing lion.
Come, Bacchos, as a wild beast
and with gloating face cast the fatal noose about
the hunter of the bacchai who falls under your herd
of mænads.

Messenger Oh house of the old Sidonian who sowed the dragon's
1025 earth-born harvest in the land of the serpent;
you who once prospered up and down Greece,
how I lament you, slave as I am, but all the same
the affairs of the king are of interest to worthy slaves.

Chorus What is it? Are you disclosing something new about the bacchai?

Messenger 1030 Pentheus has has perished, the son of his father Echion.

Chorus Lord Bromios, you are shown to be a great god!

Messenger How do you mean? What did you say? Are you really rejoicing
at my rulers faring badly, women?

Chorus I am raising foreign cries with barbarian songs;
1035 since I will no longer cringe in fear or imprisonment.

Messenger Are you leading an un-manned Thebes in this way...?
...

Chorus Dionysos, Dionysos, not Thebes
holds my strength.

Messenger It's understandable for you, except that to rejoice at
1040 wrongs being worked out is not good.

Chorus Tell me, make known: with what fate did he die,
the unjust man who was handing out injustices?

998 ματρός] Semele

1014 ἰδεῖν] The active is explained as in the phrase "a
thing is good to see".

1038 ἔξουσι'] Plural to agree with Θῆβαι, the most
recent noun.

Messenger When we had left the homes of this Theban land,
 we stepped out from the banks of Asopos,
 1045 and we made out way towards Kithairon's crag,
 Pentheus and I (for I was following the king)
 and the stanger, who was our guide to the spectacle.
 First then we settled in a grassy vally,
 preserving the silence from footfall and word of mouth,
 1050 so that we might see without being seen.
 There was a valley surrounded with cliffs, wet with water,
 and shady with pines, where the mænads
 were sitting keeping their hands at pleasing tasks.
 Some of them were restoring a thyrsos that had been lacking,
 1055 making it bushy again with ivy,
 and others, quitting the intricate yoke like foals
 sang a bacchic song back and forth to each other.
 The wretched Pentheus, not seeing the female throng,
 spoke thus: "Stranger, from where we are standing
 1060 I am not reaching the ills of the mænads with my eyes;
 but if I went up on the bank to the high fir
 I would see well the shameful work of the mænads."
 Then presently I saw the stranger's marvelous deeds;
 for, having taken hold of a sky-high branch of the fir,
 1065 he pull, pull, pulled it down to the dark ground;
 it was bent round like a bow or a curved hoop
 drawn a rounded perimeter with a compass;
 thus the stranger, bringing the mountain spigs with his hands,
 bent them to the earth, doing no mortal deeds.
 1070 And when he had set Pentheus on the fir branches,
 by his hands he let the tree go straight up
 without trembling, watching that it didn't throw him,
 and the fir was fixed upright, right in the sky,
 with the king sitting on its back.
 1075 But he was seen more than he looked down on the mænads;
 for insofar as he was not yet visible, sitting up high,
 it was also no longer possible to see the stranger,
 but a voice from the sky, like one would imagine
 Dionysos, raised a cry, "Women,
 1080 I bring the man who puts you and me and my rites
 to mockery, but you, take vengeance on him."
 And at the same time as he said this, a flash
 of holy fire reached to heaven and earth.
 The skay fell silent, the wooded vally kept silent
 1085 in its leaves, and you would not have heard the cry of beasts.
 But the women, who had not received the shout clearly with their ears,
 stood upright and opened wide their eyes.
 He called to them again. And when Kamos' daughters
 recognized the clear command of Bacchus
 1090 they darted, no inferiors in swiftness to a dove,
 [running with intense racings of their feet,
 mother Agaue and kindred relatives,
 and all the Bacchai, and the leapt through the storm-widened valley
 and crags, frenzied with the god's breath.
 1095 And when they saw the king sitting in the fir tree,
 they first hurled rocks at him,

1073 ὁρθῇ] The implied subject is a feminine noun and must be ἐλάτῃ.

1090 ὠκύτητ'] Accusative of respect, and not the direct object of ἔχουσαι.

1091 ἔχουσαι] Other editors have read τρέχουσαι which is more explicit, but the sense must be the same.

having mounted a crag towering opposite,
 and he was pelted with fir branches like javelins,
 while others loosed their thyrsos through the air
 1100 at Pentheus, a miserable shot, but the did not succeed.
 For the poor man, left in a terrible situation, sat
 keeping a height greater than their zeal.
 But in the end, levering together with oak branches
 they tore up the roots with their wooden crowbars.
 1105 But when they did not achieve the goal of the labors,
 Agaue said, "Come, Mænads, let us, standing in a circle,
 take hold of a branch, so that we should catch the beast
 that went up there, and he should not carry word of the god's
 secret dances." And they put countless hands
 1110 on the fir and dragged it up out of the ground.
 And Pentheus, sitting high, cast down from high up,
 fell to the ground with countless cries of woe;
 for he was aware that he was near to harm.
 His mother first led the rites of slaughter
 1115 and fell on him; but he tore the snood from his hair,
 so that if wretched Agaue recognized him,
 she might not kill him, and, touching her cheek,
 he said, "Mother, it's me, your son,
 Pentheus, whom you bore in Echthion's house;
 1120 take pity on me, mother, and do not kill
 your son for my sins."
 But she was under the control of Bacchus, frothing at the mouth
 and rolling her distorted eyes, not understanding what she should have understood,
 and he did not persuade her.
 1125 She took his left hand with her arms,
 set her foot against the ill-fated wretch's sides, and
 tore his arm off at the shoulder, not out of strength
 but rather the god gave her hands the capacity.
 Ino did things on the other side,
 1130 breaking his flesh, and Autone and the whole crowd
 of Bacchai applied themselves; there was all shouting at the same time,
 he for his part groaning as much as he was able to draw breath,
 and the women shrieking to the gods. One was carrying his arm,
 another a foot with the very boots, and his ribs were stripped
 1135 with rendings, and everyone, bloodied about the hands,
 played with Pentheus' flesh like a ball.
 His body lay in pieces; part under harsh
 rocks, part in the deep shaded foliage of a wood,
 not easily found; but his sorry head,
 1140 which his mother happened to take in her hands,
 she fixed on top of a thyrsus as though it was a mountain
 lion's and carried through the missile of Kithairon,
 leaving her sisters in the mænads' choruses.
 She is making her way, exulting in her ill-fated hunt,
 1145 to within these city walls, calling on Bacchus,
 her fellow-hunter, the work-mate of the hunt,
 the one winning a glorious victory, for whom she is bearing tears as a prize.
 As for me, I am going out of the way of this tragedy,
 before Agaue approaches the halls.
 1150 To be prudent and pious in matters of the gods
 is best; and I think it is also wisest
 as a possession for mortals who are provided with it.

Chorus Let us rouse a chorus for Bacchus,
 let us raise a shout for the disaster
 1155 of the dragon's offspring, Pentheus,
 who took the feminine garb
 and the trusty, well shafted
 fennel of Hades,
 with a bull as conductor of his downfall.
 1160 Cadmeian bacchaie,
 you have fully worked the famed noble victory
 to end in wailing, in tears.
 It was a noble contest, to throw round a hand
 dripping with a child's blood.
 1165 But now I see rushing toward the halls
 Pentheus' mother Agaue, with crazed
 eyes; receive her to the reveling god's celebration.

Agaue Asian Bacchai. . . [*Chor.*] Why are you addressing me, women?

Agaue We are bringing from the mountains
 1170 fresh-cut twists [of ivy] to the roof-beams,
 and a blessed catch.

Chorus I see and I will receive you as a fellow-reveller.

Agaue Without a noose I seized this
 [wild lioness'] young son,
 1175 as one can see.

Chorus From which wilderness?

Agaue Kithairon. . . [*Chor.*] Kithairon?

Agaue . . . killed it.

Chorus Which woman cast the shot? [*Ag.*] The honor is mine first;
 1180 I am famous in the thiasoi as blessed Agaue.

Chorus Who else? [*Ag.*] Kadmos' . . .

Chorus Kadmos' what? [*Ag.*] . . . offspring
 after me, after me, laid hands on this wild beast.
 This hunt was fortunate!
 Share in the feast now. [*Chor.*] What am I sharing in, sorry woman?

Agaue 1185 A young cub just growing
 a long, shft-haired jaw
 under its head.

Chorus As suits a wild animal for a mane.

Agaue Bacchus the clever hunter
 1190 cleverly roused his mænads
 against this beast.

Chorus For the lord is a hunter.

Agaue Do you approve? [*Chor.*] I approve.

Agaue And, presently, the Kadmeians . . .

Chorus 1195 And your son, Pentheus. . . [*Ag.*] . . . will praise his mother,
 who took this lion-born catch.

Chorus A prodigious one. [*Ag.*] Prodigiously.

1175 πάρα] Standing for παρέσσι

Chorus Are you glorying? [*Ag.*] I rejoice,
 having accomplished
 great, great deeds, and plain to see, with this hunt.

Chorus 1200 Now, miserable woman, show your victory-gaining
 catch which you came carrying, to the townsfolk.

Agaue Oh you who dwell in the city of the Theban land
 with fine towers, come so as to see this catch
 of a wild beast which we, Kadmos' daughters hunted,
 1205 not with Thessalanians strap-thrown javelins,
 not with nets, but with the fingers
 of hands set on white arms. So then, should one use a javelin,
 or vainly acquire spear-makers' tools?
 But we, only by hand, caught this,
 1210 and tore the beast's joints apart.
 Where is the old man, my father? Let him come near.
 And Pentheus my son, where is he? Let him rouse himself, taking
 the ascent of fixed steps to the palace,
 so that he might fix this lion's head to the riglyphs,
 1215 which I have come, having hunted.

Kadmos Follow me, servants, follow, bringing the sorry load
 of Pentheus before the palace,
 where, worn with endless searching,
 I am bring this body, which I found in Kithairon's glens
 1220 torn apart, and took not a single piece in the same piece of ground,
 lying in a impenetrable wood.
 For I heard about my daughters' deeds from someone,
 when I had gone down to the town from the bacchae,
 within its walls, with the old Teiresias;
 1225 and turning back again to the mountain I carried
 the dead child down from the mænads.
 Also, I saw the one who once bore Aktaion to Aristaios,
 Autonoe, and Ino with her
 still driven madly about the woods, poor women,
 1230 but the other one, Agaue, is making her way here
 with bacchic feet, someone told me, and I did not hear in vain,
 for I see her, not a happy sight.

Agaue Father, you have the opportunity to boast greatly,
 that you begot by far the best daughters of all
 1235 mortal men; I say all, but it is principally me,
 who, having left the loom combs by the looms
 has gone on to greater things, to hunt wild beasts by hand.
 And as you see, I am bringing in my arms this
 great prize which I won, to your palace
 1240 to be hung up; and you, father, take it with your hands,
 and, glorying in my hunting,
 call friends to dinner; for you are blessed,
 blessed, with us performing such deeds.

Kadmos Oh unbearable grief, and not fit to see,
 1245 with them performing a murder with their wretched hands!
 You are calling me and Thebes to dinner
 having cast down a noble spirit for the gods.
 Woe for your evils first, and then for my own;
 how the god, lord Bromios, has justly but so very much
 1250 ruined us, since he have come to dwell here.

1214 τριγλύφους] If it was fixed to adjacent triglyphs it
 would hang on the facade like a metope.

Agaue How old age has grown difficult for people to please,
 and sullen in regard! If only my son
 were good at hunting, comparable to his mothers ways,
 when he exerts himself among the young Theban men
 1255 at hunts together; but that one is only
 good to quarrel with the gods. It is something for you to
 consider, father. Who would call him her to my
 sight, so he might see me, the happy one?

Kadmos Woe! Woe! One one hand, when you have understood what you have done
 1260 you will suffer terrible pain; yet if you stay always through the end
 in this delusion which you have established,
 although you are not happy, you will seem not to be unhappy.

Agaue Why are you not taking these deeds favorably, rather than sorrowfully?

Kadmos First, turn you eye to the sky.

Agaue 1265 See? Why do you suggest that I look at this?

Kadmos Is it still the same, or does it seem to have changes?

Agaue It is brighter than before and more holy.

Kadmos And is this excitement still present in your soul?

Agaue I don't know the words; I am somehow coming
 1270 into my right mind, changed from my former thinking.

References

- [Dig94] J. Diggle (ed.), *Euripidis fabulæ volume iii*, Oxford Classical Text Series, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.
- [ED87] Euripides and E. R. Dodds, *Bacchae*, Clarendon Paperbacks, Oxford University Press, 1987.
- [Kir79] Geoffrey Stephen Kirk, *The Bacchai of Euripides*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- [Lei96] Valdis Leinieks, *The city of Dionysos*, Teubner, 1996.
- [LS89] H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An intermediate Greek-English lexicon*, Oxford University Press, 1889.
- [LSe95] Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart (ed), *An Greek-English lexicon*, ninth ed., Oxford University Press, 1995.