

Selections from
EURIPIDES' "BACCHAE"

Translated by
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<http://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/>

Characters:

- **DIONYSOS** (also known as Bromius, Bacchus, Evius)
- **TEIRESIAS** (Prophet of Thebes)
- **KADMOS** (Cadmus; Founder and former king of Thebes)
- **PENTHEUS** (King of Thebes, Kadmos' grandson)
- **AGAVE** (Pentheus' mother / Dionysus's aunt)
- **MESSENGER**
- **BACCHAE / BACCHANTES / MAENADS**

NOTE: the Thyrsus is a staff carried by Dionysus and his followers

Dionysus has returned to Thebes to spread his cult as well as to seek revenge against his mother's family who did not believe that she slept with Zeus

Dionysos: So here I am! Thebes!

I am Dionysos, son of Zeus. My mother was Semele and she was Kadmos' daughter. Zeus delivered me from my mother with one of his awesome lightening bolts.

Indicates the tomb behind him.

Up there!

I have left my godly appearance and taken on that of man and so, here I am now, walking by the brooks and creeks of Dirki, through the waters of Isminos.

Yes, I have taken the guise of a common man, I, the god, Dionysos.

Again turns and points at the tomb.

I can see my mother's tomb back there, near the royal palace. Struck dead by Zeus' flame... and there! The smoke still raises from the ruins of her house, a potent sign that Hera's savage anger towards my mother will never be quenched.

I thank and admire old Kadmos for turning this into a sacred monument in honour of his daughter.

Of course, it was I who shaded the tomb with the lush green vines.

I've left behind me the gold-rich farms of Lydia and Frygia. I went through the stony walls of Vaktria, and the wild and freezing lands of the Medes, the sun-washed fields of Persia, the whole

of blessed Arabia and the rest of Asia. A land, spread far alongside the sea with cities full of sublime tall towers, full of Greeks and Barbarians all pleasantly mingled together. And in all these lands I have shown my mysteries, taught my dances and established myself as a god.

This is the first Greek city I've visited, the first one I've come to introduce myself and my rites. Firstly, I've stirred these Theban women, dressed them in fawn skins and armed them with the thyrsus and its ivy crown.

Kadmos' daughters, you see, would not accept that my father was Zeus. They should have known better than to behave like that towards my mother. They were accusing her of having slept with some mortal or other and then blamed Zeus for my birth. Typical Kadmos trickery: protect the daughter's honour and you protect your own. But the sisters kept spreading the rumour that my mother had slept with a human and that she had blamed a god for her "improper" pregnancy and that's why, they say, that God had killed her.

So, to these Theban women, I've delivered a little bit of madness. Made them leave their house and rush off all in a rage to the mountains where they now live.

I've made them wear the dress of my rites and ceremonies and tore the logic out of their minds. The whole female population of Thebes. Then, I've sent them off to the mountains to live with Kadmos' daughters, my mother's sisters, among the wild beasts, in a wild forest, beneath the wild firs and rocks, without roof nor shelter over their heads.

This city must learn one way or another, whether it likes it or not, that it can't stay uninitiated and ignorant of my rites!

This city must learn, one way or another, whether it likes it not, that my mother was innocent and this city must apologise to her!

This city must learn, one way or another, whether it likes it not, that I am here to reveal to the whole world that I am her son, Semele's son and the son of Zeus!

Old man Kadmos has now left his crown to his daughter's son, Pentheus. Now that's a man who habitually fights with gods and leaves me out of all his libations and prayers. So, I shall show him and all his Thebans that I am truly a god. After that, after I've settled everything here and got them all to know me, I shall go elsewhere in the world, to teach the world about my true power as a god.

If the people of Thebes decide to take arms against my Bacchantes and pursue them from their mountain, I'll stand at the head of my Maenads and enter the battle with them.

This is why I've taken on the guise of a man.

From both sides of the stage we hear tambourines, flutes and ecstatic sounds of women. It is that of the chorus of maenads (Dionysos' followers) and, after a short time, they enter the stage dancing wildly, noisily and in a frenzy.

They are wearing garishly coloured dresses, fawn skin jackets and ivy crowns and carry a thyrsus.

They are dressed as “foreigners,” in a distinctly “Eastern” style.

Ah! My darling group of followers! Here you are! Come, come in, my darlings! You, who have followed me here, all the way from Tmolos, Lydia’s stronghold, that land of barbarians. Come, my travelling mates, my friends, play your Phrygian instruments, your drums and tambourines, the instruments that mother Rea and I have discovered.

Play around here, around King Pentheus’ palace and let Kadmos’ city hear us. I’m off to visit the other Bacchantes, the Thebans, those whom I made live in the crags, peaks and valleys of Kitheron. I shall join them in their dances there.

Exit Dionysos

Dionysus, disguised as a follower of Dionysus, has been arrested and taken before his uncle Pentheus, the ruler of Thebes

Guard 1: Pentheus, my Lord, here we are with the prey you’ve asked us to hunt out. We’ve sat and we’ve waited and, true enough, we’ve caught him. Our watch was not wasted. Now this... “beast” was quite tame with me, my Lord. Never shook his legs or anything, trying to escape, like, but he gave his hands to me without the slightest hesitation. He didn’t become pale or lose the deep blush of his cheeks. He just let himself be taken easily, laughed even and wondered where we’d be taking him. Towards me, in any case, this man was a proper gentleman and I felt a bit ashamed about tying him up, see, so I said to him, “Stranger,” I said, “I ain’t doin’ this out of my own accord, it’s ‘cause of Pentheus’ orders. He sent us to do it,” I said to him.

Guard 2: And as for all them women, me Lord, them that follow this 'ere god, my Lord, the Bacchantes, those whom you grabbed and locked up with chains and all, in all the city’s buildings, well, sir, they’re all loose, sir. They’re all running about all over the countryside, sir, all ready for their orgiasums sir, and they’re all calling out for their Bellowing God, Dionysos. All their chains fell apart all by themselves, letting their legs free. So did all the padlocks of the gates. They’ve all gone and opened themselves right up without even one human hand touching them! This man here has a great many tricks up his sneaky sleeves, me Lord! It’s your call now, me Lord.

Pentheus: Move away from him. He’s no bother to me while he’s chained like that. He’s not that fast that he can escape me.

He examines Dionysos thoroughly.

Hmmm. Physically, you're not unattractive, stranger. Most appealing to the women of Thebes, for whom you have obviously come.

Nice hair, too. Nice, long plaits, spilled all around your cheeks not because you were engaged in some many wrestling competition but for a greater sexual effect, I'd say.

Nice skin, too. Lovely and white. Obviously you take good care of it. You don't expose it to the sun's rays and you stay in the shade all day, hunting sex, no doubt. Isn't that right?

But first, tell me, what is your race? Where are you from?

Dionysos: I see no reason not to tell you. You've heard of Tmolos, the land of the many blooms?

Pentheus: Yes, I've heard of Tmolos. That's the place that surrounds Sardis.

Dionysos: That's where I'm from. Lydia is my home.

Pentheus: Who taught you all these rites and mysteries?

Dionysos: Dionysos, Zeus' son, it was he who initiated me into them.

Pentheus: Is there a Zeus in Lydia who makes up new gods?

Dionysos: No, just the one. The one who slept with Semele, here, in Thebes, in fact.

Pentheus: Did he initiate you in darkness or in light?

Dionysos: Face-to-face. In the light of day.

Pentheus: So, what are these mysteries? What is your view of them?

Dionysos: They are secret to the uninitiated mortals.

Pentheus: Is there some benefit for those who participate in these mysteries of yours?

Dionysos: It is not right for you to know this but it would be good for you to see those mysteries.

Pentheus: You're making them sound great so that I can be persuaded to go on listening to you.

Dionysos: He who practices disrespect to the gods earns their wrath.

Pentheus: Tell me clearly what your god looks like –if you ever saw him!

Dionysos: He looked as he pleased. That was not something which I could determine.

Pentheus: How cleverly you slide away from questions.

Dionysos: It is not wise for the wise to say anything wise to the ignorant.

Pentheus: Did you come here, to Thebes first, to introduce this god of yours?

Dionysos: The rest of the world already dances to these rites.

Pentheus: Because they are even more stupid than the Greeks.

Dionysos: You might be right but it's also that their customs are different.

Pentheus: These... holy orgies of yours... do you perform them during the day or in the night?

Dionysos: Most of them during the night. Darkness adds a certain modesty.

Pentheus: That's quite a dangerous thing for the women... and rather lecherous, I'd say.

Dionysos: One can perform shameful deeds even by day.

Pentheus: We must take you to our courts for your evil philosophies.

Dionysos: And you, too, for your ignorance and your disrespect for the god.

Pentheus: What bold words from this Bacchic initiate! His tongue is well trained in speech, too!

Dionysos: Show me, then what terrible fate you have in store for me. What am I about to suffer?

Pentheus: First, I'll chop off these lovely long plaits of yours.

Dionysos: The plaits are sacred. I nurture them for the god.

Pentheus: Then I'll take your Thyrsus. Give it to me!

Dionysos: The Thyrsus belongs to Dionysus. Come and take it if you dare!

Pentheus: And then we'll lock your body up in the dungeon. Day and night.

Dionysos: God himself will free me when I ask him.

Pentheus: You'll be praying to him only when you're among all those women followers of yours, all those Bacchantes.

Dionysos: God is present even now, next to me and he sees all that I'm going through.

Pentheus: Where is he? I can't see him. Not with my eyes.

Dionysos: He's right beside me but you couldn't possibly see him because you are disrespectful of him.

Pentheus: *To his guards*

Guards, arrest this stranger! He mocks me; and he mocks Thebes!

Dionysos: I speak wisely to the unwise: Don't tie me up!

Pentheus: But, you see, I must and will, because I have the greater power of us two.

Dionysos: You don't even know that you're alive, nor what it is you're doing, Pentheus, let alone who you are!

Pentheus: Who me? I am Pentheus, Agave's and Ehion's son.

Dionysos: Pentheus! Your name means grief. Very well qualified to bring it upon yourself! Just as your name suggests.

Pentheus: Off you go! Guards, lock him up in the stables, next to the horses. Let him enjoy the darkness in there. Dance in there all you like. As for all those women you've brought with you, your partners in crime, either we'll sell them all or I'll be put an end to their drum-beating by holding them here, to work my looms.

Dionysos: I'm going. I will not suffer what is not my fate to suffer. But Dionysus will take care of all these insults you've committed against him, even though you don't believe he exists. By being disrespectful to us, you invoke his anger.

Exit Dionysos, guards and Pentheus

A herald describes the gathering of Dionysus's followers in the woods outside of the city

Herald: Lord Pentheus, I have just left Mount Kitheron, the place which is forever sparkling with the constant fall of snowflakes, to come to you, ruler of our Thebes.

Pentheus: *(Impatiently)*

Yes, yes, you came, and what new disaster has your coming brought us?

Herald: Lord, I saw the frenzied Bacchants up on the mountain, rushing out of their house as if stung hard by a gad fly. They were rushing wildly up towards the mountain, showing their white thighs as they did. Seeing all this I immediately came to tell you about it; but I saw them doing awful things in the city, too, Lord. Should I tell you freely what I saw, my Lord or should I

watch my words? I wouldn't want to cop the wrong end of your wrath, my Lord because I know you can be a bit sharp with it and you do have the royal power.

Pentheus: Speak! You're excused of everything you're about to say. We have no right to be angry at the just. In any case the more awful things you can tell us about the Bacchants, the more easily I'd be able condemn their instructor.

Herald: Just a short while ago, my Lord, when the sun's rays were breaking out and getting ready to warm the earth, I took my herd of young cattle to graze over to the mountain side. Just then, I saw three groups of dancing women. The leader of the first was Aftinoe, then your mother, Agave, of the second and of the third group was Ino.

Their bodies looked relaxed, asleep and some were rested with their backs against the pine trees, others rested on fir leaves, their heads bowed modestly towards the ground and, to all intents and purposes, looking as if they were one with Nature; not the way you said, my Lord, drunk with wine and with the sweet sounds of flutes, chasing lust in the dark solitude of the night. When my horned herd approached them and made their usual bellowing noises, your mother woke up, jumped into the centre of the other Bacchants and yelled loudly.

The others, too, threw the sweet sleep from their eyes and stood up straight! What a sight for sore eyes, my Lord! Very pleasant indeed! Young virgins, older women, young women, married or unmarried!

First they let their hair fall to their shoulders, fixed all the clasps and pins of their fawn skin dresses that have become loose and then tied around their waist snakes whose heads came up and licked their beautiful cheeks.

Others, who had babies back home and their breasts were bursting with milk held gently in their arms young deer or young wild wolves which they suckled with their own white milk. Others were making garlands of ivy, fir branches and bryony. One of them hit a rock with her thyrsus and the rock became a spring of gushing clear water. Another digs her reed into the ground and right on that spot the god opens up a spring from where wine rushes out. Those who wanted a drink of milk, all they had to do is scratch the ground with their fingernails and out it would come, all bubbly and white. Sweet honey dripped from the ivy around their thyrsus. So, my Lord, if you were there just at that very minute and saw all them things, you'd be praising the god who you now condemn.

Well, we herdsmen gathered together and began to argue about what them women were doing. Some of that stuff was damned awesome, horrible!

Then one of us, a traveller from the city and good with his words, says to the rest of us, "Hey, you folk who live along the gentle mountain slopes, would you like us to grab Agave, Pentheus' mother, out of all this mystic Bacchic stuff and take her to the King? He'll be very pleased with us."

We all thought it was a good idea, so we hid behind shrubs, ready for the ambush. But, I can tell you, Lord, we was also fearing for our lives. The women, though, suddenly began to shake their thyrsus as if they were entering into a bacchic rite and, at the same time, all of them with one voice, began to cry out for Zeus' son, Dionysos.

Everything around them joined in the ceremony, the mountain, the beasts, everything swayed in its spot.

Agave was also doing like the others and she was heading towards me. Suddenly, I leapt out of my hiding place and jumped at her, hoping to catch her.

But just then she shouted out to the other women, "Hey, my speedy bitches, there are some men here who are hunting us. They want our submission. Come, run with me. Arm yourselves with your thyrsus and come with me! Let's get them"

We just managed to run away and escape the slaughter but they threw themselves, with neither spear nor sword among them, threw themselves at the calves that were quietly grazing nearby. One of those women tore a poor, tiny calf away from its mother's udder and others ripped calves into bloody pieces with their bare hands and then they began eating them raw.

My Lord, you could see bits of flesh strewn all around the place. Whole sides of animals, legs, other chunks of animal flesh hanging from the fir trees, dripping blood. Huge bulls, my Lord which only a few minutes earlier stood tall and proud, the sort that if one got them angry they'd tear everything apart with their massive horns, well, now they dropped their bodies to the ground and straightaway countless girls dragged them about with their bare hands and... and by the time you blinked your royal eye, my Lord, they'd have the skin torn off those massive carcasses of them bulls.

And then they went flying about like the wild birds that ruin the proud wheat stalks of Thebes, the ones that fly low next to the rushing waters of Asopos river. Then them women rushed off to the villages of Erythres, near Ysies, at the foot of Mount Kitheron and, just like an invading army, they turned everything upside down, ripping children out of their houses and taking all sorts of goods from there, which they just threw carelessly over their shoulder without tying anything together; still nothing fell to the dark soil, not even bronze or iron, my Lord! And, o, my Lord Pentheus, around their hair there was this brilliant fire that had no effect on them. Didn't burn them one bit.

Then all the men came out fuming with anger and fully armed, wanting to bring these Bacchants into submission, but then, my Lord, if only you could have seen this most awesome thing! Most terrible thing to see.

Our sharp spears and arrows drew no blood from them, yet they threw their thyrsus at us and wounded us, so we quickly turned and ran off. Now I'm certain, my Lord that that lot had some god helping them.

Then they went back to the peak of the mountain where their god produced springs of clear water for them from the earth. Snakes rose up to their cheeks and with their tongues washed away the blood until their skin once again became bright white.

My Lord, you'd better let this god, whoever he is, enter our city because he has many other great powers. They also say -and I agree with this meself- that he's the god who brought the wine to the mortals. Great stuff that. It stops all sadness. Truth is, my Lord, when the wine is missing so does love and then... well, there's nothing sweet left for us mortals then.

Dionysus, still as a disguised prisoner, has a plan

Dionysos: Hold on! Pentheus, would you like to see them yourself, up on the mountains, all of those... women together?

Pentheus: Sure! Of course, of course I would! I'd give an awful lot of gold for that privilege.

Dionysos: Oh, yes? Why so eager?

Pentheus: I want to see these poor, wretched women drunk.

Dionysos: But these things would be hard for your eye. What sort of pleasure would you gain from that?

Pentheus: Absolute pleasure! I'd be sitting quietly beneath the fir trees...

Dionysos: Ah, but even if you go there quietly, they'll still know you're there.

Pentheus: Hmm. You're right. Then I'll go quite openly.

Dionysos: All right then, let's go... Will you really take on this challenge?

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Pentheus: Get me there, quickly. I'd hate to lose any more time because of you.

Dionysos: You'll have to change your clothes first, Pentheus. You need to wear fine linen.

Pentheus: What's all this? You want to dress me up as a woman?

Dionysos: Because if you show yourself there as a man, they'll kill you.

Pentheus: You're right again. I can see you're an old hand at this sort of trickery.

Dionysos: The god Dionysos taught us all this.

Pentheus: Well, then, my wise counsellor, how do we do all this?

Dionysos: Let's go into the palace and I'll dress you up.

Pentheus: Dress me up with what? Women's clothes?

Dionysos: Don't you want to watch the Maenads then?

Pentheus: Well... tell me everything you're going to do to me.

Dionysos: I'll let your hair fall all over your back.

Pentheus: All right. Then?

Dionysos: Then I'll dress you up with long robes, right down to your feet and, on your head, you'll wear a ribbon.

Pentheus: And after all that?

Dionysos: You'll carry a thyrsus in one hand and you'll wear a dappled fawn skin around your body.

Pentheus: No, no, no! I just can't wear women's clothes. I just can't do it!

Dionysos: Well then, if you end up in a fight with the Bacchantes it'll be your blood on the ground, not mine!

Pentheus: *Thinks for a minute, then*

Yes! All right! When we get there we must first spy on them.

Dionysos: It's far wiser to hunt the dangerous without putting yourself in danger.

Pentheus: How will I be able to walk through the street without being seen by all the Kadmeians?

Dionysos: We'll take the deserted roads. Don't worry, I'll guide you.

Pentheus: We must do what's necessary so that the Bacchantes don't get a whiff of all of this. I'm going inside to think about it all.

Dionysos: Sure. Go, I'm ready to help you with everything.

The guards come out of the palace bearing weapons for the king.

Pentheus: I'm going and I'll either take up my weapons or I'll take up your advice.

Guards and Pentheus exit into the palace, guards despondent.

Dionysos: Women, we have trapped our man! He will go to the Bacchant and, with his death, justice will be achieved. Dionysos, it is up to you now to get revenge. You are not very far. First of all, take away his mind.

Give him a slight dose of madness, enough for him to wear women's clothes; otherwise, if his mind is clear he won't wear them. Then I've got to make a fool of him, parading him through Thebes, dressed as a woman. That will teach him to make those dreadful threats of his.

I'm off now, to dress him up in his funeral clothes. The clothes with which he will be meeting Hades, once his mother slaughters him with her bare hands. Only then will he learn that the son of Zeus, Dionysos, is a god of peace for the good folk but he is also a fearsome god for those who don't respect him.

Pentheus! Come out of the palace. Let me see you dressed in your new clothes as a Maenad, a Bacchant. You, who's anxious to spy on your mother and on the Bacchic rituals.

Enter Pentheus and his servant.

*Pentheus is dressed as a Bacchant. Long curls, long white robe, garlands, thyrsus.
He enjoys his new get up and enthusiastically accepts Dionysos' suggestions.
He is in a daze. In ecstasy.*

Pentheus: I... I think I can see two suns... and our city of seven gates, Thebes... there are two of them also. Two cities! And you, stranger, you act as my guide, I see you've turned into a great bull and two huge horns have sprouted out of your head! Were you ever before a beast?

Dionysos: Ah, yes! Your eyes have been restored now, Pentheus. Now you can see properly. You see? God is with us now, not like before when he fought us.

Pentheus: So, how do I look? Look at my face. Is it more similar to my mother's, to Agave's, or to Ino's?

Dionysos: Hmm... to tell you the truth, when I look at you carefully... I think I can see both of them in you. O, look at this curl, you've messed it up! Not at all like I had it inside!

Pentheus: Yes, I had a bit of a dance inside and as I whirled my head around a bit, like the Bacchant, I threw it out of its place.

Dionysos: Here, let me fix it for you. Lift your head a bit.

Pentheus: Come, I'm in your hands. Tidy me up a bit.

Dionysos: Look here! Your girdle is very loose and the folds of your robe don't fall straight, all the way to your ankles.

Pentheus: Yes, I thought so! It's all right with the left leg though, isn't it?

Dionysos: You'll see, Pentheus. I'll be your best friend once you see how wise and properly behaved the Bacchantes are.

Pentheus: How do I hold the thyrsus so that I can look more like a Bacchant? Right hand or left?

Dionysos: You hold it with your right hand and move your right foot forward at the same time. I'm glad you've changed your mind about all this.

Pentheus: Do you think I'd be able to lift the whole mountain, its valleys and all the Bacchantes on my back?

Dionysos: Of course you will! Now that you have your mind back, you can do whatever you like. Not like before.

Pentheus: Well, should I bring great levers and pulleys for the job or could I do it with my bare hands, arms and shoulders? I mean tear up the whole mountain.

Dionysos: You'd have to be careful not to destroy the Bacchantes' haunts and the dens of Pan! You know how Pan loves to play his pipes around there.

Pentheus: Quite right, quite right. It's not proper to use my strength to defeat mere women. I'll hide among the fir trees.

Dionysos: Absolutely! You must hide yourself well, since you're going there secretly, to spy upon them.

Pentheus: He, he! I think I'll be catching these women as one catches the little birds: inside their little love nests.

Dionysos: Well, that's what you're going there for, to spy on them and catch them... that is... if they don't catch you first!

Pentheus: Take me right through the centre of Thebes, stranger! Because I want to show them that I'm the only one among them who dares do such a thing.

Dionysos: You are the only one who cares for your city, enough to undergo such trials, Pentheus. The trials are worthy of just such a brave man as you. Follow me. I'll be your guide and your saviour.
Once we're there, others will take over from me...

Pentheus: My mother, yes.

Dionysos: You're a revered symbol to them all, Pentheus.

Pentheus: That's why I'm coming.

Dionysos: ...take you from me and deliver you to...

Pentheus: Take me from you... like a spoilt child, you mean?

Dionysos: ...your mother.

Pentheus: You are giving me such a big head with all your compliments.

Dionysos: And what a big head!

Pentheus: I do deserve it, of course!

While Pentheus is absorbed in his clothes.

Dionysos: You're a mighty man, Pentheus! Mightier than the mighty and there are mighty battles waiting for you, mighty enough for your glory to reach the heavens! Oh, Agave and all of you, daughters of Kadmos, open your arms, get ready for the man I'm bringing you. Receive him and offer him this mighty battle – a battle of which I'll be the winner. I and Dionysos. The battle will disclose whatever else is necessary.

Exit Pentheus, Dionysos and Pentheus' servant.

A servant describes what happened to Pentheus

Servant: I was following my master and the stranger and, after we walked past all the Theban houses, we went through the murky waters of Asepos and the three of us climbed the peaks of Kitheron. The stranger was first, then my master and finally me. The stranger was leading us to the place where we could see the mystic rites performed by the Bacchants.

We walked and talked softly so that we could see them but they couldn't see us. We eventually came to a grassy spot and there we spread ourselves flat on the ground. All around us were deep crags and precipices and the river's waters rushed mightily and the pine trees with their huge shades cooled us.

The maenads were sitting nearby and enjoyed themselves with pleasant deeds, fixing the ivy that fell off their thyrsus or, just like the happy young fillies that had just been released from their cart's handsome yoke, sang sacred songs to each other.

Poor Pentheus could sense the presence of the crowd of Maenads but he couldn't see them so he said to the stranger, "stranger, my eyes can't see these rotten Bacchantes from here. Let me climb high up onto the tip of that fir tree so that I can see better their lecherous deeds."

And it's from that moment on that I truly saw the stranger's miracles.

He grabs a branch which was very high up on the tree, bends it and brings it all the way down to the black soil. All the way down from the depths of the sky.

The branch made a perfect and beautiful circle, like the ring of a wheel, drawn and made by a compass. Something no mortal could have done. Then he places Pentheus onto the branch and slowly, carefully, lets it rise, so that he wouldn't fall down. The king then sat on that branch and waited. Suddenly though, the Maenads saw him better than he saw them himself.

No one could see the stranger any more and it was only a minute later that Dionysos –I'm sure it was he- called out loudly: "Maenads! I've brought you the man who mocks you and mocks my rites also. Come, he's yours, punish him!"

With these words, heaven and earth were filled with sacred fires. Then a great silence filled the air. A silence which bound all the trees of the valley, all the shrubs and one could not hear the voices of the beasts.

The women didn't seem to have heard Dionysos' voice so they stood and, aloof and with their eyes wide open they waited.

Dionysos yelled again and this time Kadmos' daughters recognised Dionysos' voice and, like doves, rushed quickly and attacked him.

Agave, his mother, his sisters and all the other Bacchantes, wild with the god's spirit, jumped over huge torrents and over valleys and over caves until they reached the king. When they saw him sitting up there, on the fir tree, they first began throwing rocks at him but then they climbed a rock and from there shot at him long branches of fir, made like spears. Others again sent their thyrsus flying at poor Pentheus but they too, kept missing him.

That's because he was still far too high for them. The poor king sat there not knowing what to do. The Maenads then tore great big branches from the tree, made wooden levers out of them and then tried to rip out Pentheus' tree from the roots. Those efforts also amounted to nothing. Then Agave shouted, "Come, Maenads, come stand around it, grab the branches of the tree with your hands and climb up to the beast. Kill it so he won't reveal our mystic rites to the world."

The Maenads surrounded the tree and with a thousand hands tore the fir from its roots. Down came Pentheus, crashing to the ground, the fear cutting his breath. He knew he was near his death.

First it was his own mother, who is Dionysos' priestess. She started the slaughter. She jumped upon him with anger. The poor man took the ribbon from his head so that his mother would recognise him and spare him and patted her cheek softly. "It's me, mother," he said, "your son,

Pentheus. You gave birth to me, mother, in Ehion's palace! Have pity on me, mother! Don't kill me, don't kill your son just because he's made a mistake."

But he couldn't convince her. She was frothing at the mouth and her eyes rolled wildly in their sockets. Dionysos' spirit had made her crazy. Mad. She was now seized by the spirit of her own god.

She then grabbed her son's arm, stepped on his shoulder blade and ripped his arm clean off his body. The strength was not her own but that of her god. On the other side Ino was doing her part, tearing his flesh. So did Aftonoe. The whole population of Maenads stopped and gazed at the spectacle. The whole place echoed with screams and he was groaning with pain while he was still alive. Then the Maenads began a war cry and each carried some part of Pentheus' body. One carried a hand another a foot with its shoe still attached on it, others tore at his ribs showing them bare and others with bloody hands tossed parts of his flesh to each other. Bits of his flesh were strewn about everywhere. Some, up against the rough rocks, others so deep in the shrubs of the forest that it was impossible to find them all.

And his poor head! His mother happened to take a hold of it. She stuck it at the end of her thyrsus and now carries it around the paths of the mountain, yelling, "it's the head of a mountain lion! It's the head of a mountain lion!"

She left behind her sisters and the rest of the Maenads and she is now heading this way, proudly carrying the poor prey and calling Dionysos her "fellow hunter" and "partner in the hunt" and "most victorious."

With this victory, Agave gained only a black tear.

I don't want to witness her misery when she comes to the palace so, I'll leave now in case we're both here at the same time.

Wisdom and respect for the gods is a great virtue and a possession most worthy for the mortals to have.

Exit Pentheus' servant.

Chorus: *Joyfully*

Ah, let us rejoice the victory of our Lord, Dionysos and let us mourn the death of dragon-born Pentheus, who put on women's clothes and looking for a reason to die, took a weighty thyrsus with him. A bull guided him to his death.

Women of Kadmos, you've turned a glorious victory into a tearful lament.

What a delightful victory it is for a mother to dip her hand into her the blood dripping head of her own son. A son she has murdered with her own hands, a son she's caressing in her own arms! Ha! I can see her! Pentheus' mother Agave is rushing towards the palace. What a dreadful sight! How wild her eyes!

Receive her, receive her you group of Dionysos' followers!

Enter Agave, wild, bloodstained, with Pentheus' head stuck on the tip of her thyrsus. Ecstatic.

She is followed by two or three other blood spattered Bacchants.

Agave: Bacchants of Asia!

Chorus: O, how I shudder when I look at you!

Agave: Look! I bring from the mountain a branch, freshly cut, a jewel to my thyrsus! It's for the palace. Oh, what stunning hunt!

Chorus: I see it, Agave and I shall accept it. We will celebrate together.

Agave: I caught it with my own hands.
I caught this lion with my own hands, no traps, nothing.
Come! Come and look!

She shows them the head but they withdraw in fear

Chorus: Where did you... catch it?

Agave: At Kitheron.

Chorus: What's Kitheron?

Agave: A mountain. That's where we killed this lion.

Chorus: Which of you struck first?

Agave: I was honoured to be the first. I am honoured and famous also for my dancing.

Chorus: Who was next?

Agave: Kadmos'...

Chorus: Yes? Kadmos' what?

Agave: Kadmos' daughters next. They threw themselves at the beast straight after me. O, what a happy hunt!

Chorus: *(Text lost)*

Agave: Come, join the celebrations!

Chorus: How can I, poor woman?

Agave caresses Pentheus' head

Agave: What a delightful little lamb! How silky and thick the down on his cheek. Soft and barely visible beneath his hair.

Chorus: It looks like the mane of a wild beast that lives deep in the forest.

Agave: Dionysos is wise and wise was his act to throw his maenads at this hunt.

Chorus: Dionysos is an excellent hunter.

Agave: An excellent hunter, yes.

Chorus: Excellent, indeed!

Agave: The Thebans, too, will praise me!

Chorus: Your son, too, Pentheus.

Agave: Everyone will praise me for catching this lovely lion. What a great catch!

Chorus: A rich reward!

Agave: Richly rewarded

Chorus: And you're happy then?

Agave: Am I happy? I am happy and totally elated, because I achieved great, wondrous things through this hunt.

Chorus: Agave, go and show your catch to the locals. Show them all what a good hunter you are.

Agave: *To the audience*

Come near, people of this land, people of Thebes with her splendid towers. Come and see the catch we, Kadmos' daughters caught without traps or nets or with any Thessalian spears but with our own bare hands.

No need for people to try so hard with their javelins. Here we are, with these bare hands alone we caught and tore the beast to shreds.

Where is my old father? Where is that old man? Someone tell him to come out here. Pentheus, too, my son. Where is he? Let him take the high ladder and, putting it safely against the palace wall, let him nail onto the sculptures this lion's head which I, yes I, hunted and caught.

She exits with a joyful run.

Enter Kadmos, mourning.

He is followed by two servants who are carrying the remainder of Pentheus' body on a bier.