

BACCHAI

Euripides

PENTHEUS: I leave the city for three short days
And am no sooner on the road but hear
That all our women have abandoned house and home
And taken to the mountains in nothing
But the skins of beasts and gad about
Dark forests in demented dancing,
In the name of some new-fangled cult
Of Dionysus. Furthermore I hear
The chief practice of this cult consists
Of drinking quantities of wine then sneaking
Off to slake the thirsts of male concelebrants.
They might see this as some sort of sacred rite
Of this self-styled god, but from what I see
They are driven not by duty but desire.
Those whom I've caught I've bound both hand and foot
And placed under heavy guard in prison,
Those whop remain at large I will hunt down.
That includes Agave, my own mother,
Her sisters Ino and Autonoe,
Mother of my dead cousin Actaeon.
With hunter's net and manacles of iron,
I will stop these evil rites from spreading.
I've also heard that some Asian foreigner,
Masquerading as a kind of priest,
With big brown eyes and long, golden hair
- Too womanish to be a proper man-
Keeps constant company with our women
And with his song and dance leads them astray.
If I catch him within my city's walls
I'd soon stop his drumstick drumming
I'll cut off those long, gold, blond locks of his.
He's the one who claims that Dionysus
Is a god hatched from the thigh of Zeus.
Dionysus is no god, nor son of god
But died in the womb in the lightning blast
That killed his mother, my aunt, Semele;
Struck down for the boast that she'd lain with Zeus.
The gods will always punish arrogance.
And this foreigner, like Semele, will pay.
And what's this? Another wonder! Our prophet

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Teiresias dressed in the dappled deerskin
And grandfather with a wand of ivy?
Has the whole city gone completely mad?
You make me sick, you make me want to laugh.
You make me want to laugh till I throw up.
So many years and yet so little sense.
Take off that wreath of ivy grandfather!
Throw down that silly stick! Do what I say!
I blame you for all of this Teiresias,
You hope by the invention of new gods
To expand your business in burnt offerings.
If it weren't for your wrinkles and grey hair
I'd bind you like the women, hand and foot,
For spreading such unseemly practices.