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,
led through the town in woman's form.

855
But now
I shall go and costume Pentheus in the clothes
which he will wear to Hades when he dies, butchered
by the hands of his mother. He shall come to know

860
Dionysus, son of Zeus, consummate god,
most terrible, and yet most gentle, to humankind.

(Exit Dionysus into the palace.)

CHORUS [singing]

STROPHE

When shall I dance once more
with bare feet the all-night dances,
tossing my head for joy

865
in the damp air; in the dew,
as a running fawn would frisk
for the green joy of the wide fields,
freed from fear of the hunt,

870
freed 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,

875
leaping for joy by the river,
joyous at the green of the leaves,
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 cherished forever.

ANTISTROPHE

Slow but unmistakable
the might of the gods moves.
It punishes that man
who honors folly
and with mad conceit
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,
and the law of nature.

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 cherished forever.

EPODE

Blessed is he who escapes a storm at sea,
who comes home to his harbor.
Blessed 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 a happy life,
him I call truly blessed.

(Enter Dionysus from the palace.)

DIONYSUS

Pentheus! If you are still so curious to see
and do forbidden sights, forbidden things,
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, dressed as a
bacchant and carrying a thyrsus.)

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
who walks before me there. Horns have sprouted
from your head. Have you always been a beast?
Well, now you have become a bull.

DIONYSUS

The god
was hostile formerly, but now declares a truce
and goes with us. You now see what you should.

(Coyly primping.)

PENTHEUS