

**DIONYSOS**

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**JOCASTA**

by Andrew Rissik

**SCRIPTUS BOOKS**

First published in 2015 in Great Britain  
by Scriptusbooks Ltd.

46 Murray Road  
London SW19 4PE

Scriptusbooks.com

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Printed by [printondemand-worldwide.com](http://printondemand-worldwide.com)

ISBN 978-0-9564466-2-6

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# DIONYSOS

## **Characters**

Kadmos, grandfather of Pentheus, father of Agave

Lykurgos

Kritias

Polybos

Pentheus, king of Thebes

Tiresias

Agave, mother of Pentheus

Dionysos

The Condemned Slave

Chorus of Four Women

*A note on the text*

The text of *Dionysos* changed in various small but significant ways during recording and editing, and later between the play's first broadcast in 2003 and its repeat in 2004, when it finally joined *The Art Of Love* and *Resurrection* as the first part of a three play sequence for Easter. I've made a number of minor changes for this printed version of the script, restoring some cuts, removing a number of passages that for one reason or another I was never happy with, and returning at the beginning of the play to the original scene order.

A.R.

*Dionysos* was first broadcast by BBC Radio 3  
on April 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 with the following cast:

**Kadmos** Paul Scofield

**Lykurgos** Roger Allam

**Kritias** Pip Donaghy

**Polybos** Bruce Purchase

**Pentheus** Toby Stephens

**Tiresias** Jeffery Kissoon

**Agave** Diana Rigg

**Dionysos** Chiwetel Ejiofor

**The Condemned Slave** Trevor Martin

**Chorus Leader** Anna Carteret

**Chorus** Mia Soteriou, Yolanda Vasquez, Mali Harries

The play was directed by Jeremy Mortimer  
with music by Mia Soteriou.

## VIII

*A room in the palace.*

*Pentheus wakes with a jolt from a disturbed sleep  
to find that Dionysos has entered the room.*

*The god stands: an abnormally tall, bright-skinned, radiant,  
flower-clad presence, gazing at Pentheus.*

**Pentheus**

Who are you?

My doors are guarded and locked.  
How did you get in?

**Dionysos**

I can pass at will through solid stone.

**Pentheus**

Then you are a phantom.

**Dionysos**

Touch me. I am real.

*Pentheus does so.*

**Pentheus**

You speak the truth.  
I was told that the prisoners had escaped.

They think they have cheated me,  
but I know what they are doing.

**Dionysos**

What are they doing?

**Pentheus**

They are worshipping their god, in unnatural ways.  
They lie on their backs under the stars.

They think that joy and idleness fit together like gloves.

I will see for myself what is being done.  
I will go to Kithairon. There I will arrest them.

**Dionysos**

They will know by your clothes that you are the king.

**Pentheus**

I will dress as they do. I will dress as a woman.

**Dionysos**

They are many. You are one.

**Pentheus**

They are weak.

**Dionysos**

No, they are strong.

**Pentheus**

They raise rebellion and have done the city harm.

## **Dionysos**

They are my own. Hurt none of them.

To me they came running  
like bride to groom;  
“our slavery is broken”, they sang;  
“earth is given in marriage to heaven.”

You alone have spoken against them  
and declared:  
“the wedding is not lawful;  
the guests shall be barred;

the music silenced  
and the house darkened.”

And now they dance their freedom  
in thorn-brake and forest,

where Orpheus once brought music  
to charm the stubborn wilderness.

There, by the sweetness of his melody,  
he gathered the creatures to him,

releasing them from age-old savagery  
with songs of wild ecstatic joy.

These I protect  
and every blow which you inflict

falls upon me and I suffer it as mine.

Every time you kill a man  
the wine I delight in turns to blood,  
and the blood is my blood.

**Pentheus**

They are slaves.  
They are women.

**Dionysos**

I am in the slave  
more than in the free man;  
I am in the one who starves  
more than the one who is sufficient.

Understand:  
you  
and the beggar  
and the broken  
and the condemned  
are one.

When you are as they are, then you will be whole.

*A moment.*

**Pentheus**

Who are you?

**Dionysos**

I am the corn, threshed upon the threshing floor.  
I am the vine, cropped and pruned to nothing.  
I am the dead man who lives and is eternally young.

**Pentheus**

I have seen the torches burn  
to herald the dawn.  
I have heard the voices moan  
in ecstasy or pain.

What magic or what ritual does the night conceal?

**Dionysos**

God's effigy  
is garlanded with flowers,  
and hung upon a tree;  
then, it is buried under stone  
where for three days and nights it must remain.

On the third day, before dawn,  
a lighted torch  
is carried to the tomb;  
there, the initiated one  
witnesses in flame the glory of the soul reborn.

**Pentheus**

Is there meaning in an effigy,  
a wooden nothing?

No,  
you play at immortality, as children do.

**Dionysos**

How may the soul acknowledge  
what lies beyond the scope of language  
unless the heart is free, by image,  
to see as the eye sees?

O witness  
these things which are enacted,  
these are the shadows and shapes which redeem.

*Pentheus cuts in, hard.*

**Pentheus**

You lie.

Rise at dawn:  
ride out above the city, as I have often done.

Observe, peaceful in the morning,  
the wooded hill below the summit of Kithairon:

yet in every bush,  
in every ditch,  
under every blade of grass  
the beetle is eaten,  
and the ant and fly are consumed  
by the agile spider;

out of the air the predatory bird  
brings death in a coil of movement;

the snail is smashed from its shell;  
the scurrying mouse, the lingering earth-worm,  
they perish like trash.

If these creatures could scream,  
our ears would drown in their din.

And this is the world  
which you say God is master of.

*Dionysos studies him a moment, severe, inscrutable.*

**Dionysos**

Sit with me, as my brother, at meat.  
Feed upon the fruit of my heart.

*He holds out his hands, palms upward.*

Look.

*But Pentheus recoils.*

**Pentheus**

You are bleeding.  
Your body is running with blood.

**Dionysos**

It is wine, Pentheus.

*Silence as they confront each other.*

Do not pursue the limiting pleasure  
but the infinite joy;

abandon desire:  
while you lust after this thing or that thing

you forget what is most holy:  
the universal everything;

have no allegiance to country:  
all countries are God's country;

nor to city nor to tribe  
nor to leader nor to king:

your loyalty and love must be  
to all men, not to one man,

to the light in every created being.  
Remember:

none are above you,  
and none below you;

in doing violence to either,  
you do violence to your soul;

let the radiance of God burn within  
in every task you perform:

this is freedom: this is the joy  
which even death cannot destroy.

*Pentheus says nothing, does not move.*

Love others. Love again.  
Love me.

### **Pentheus**

You are preaching anarchy.

I will see you stripped naked and hanged upon a tree.

*Dionysos turns away, melting into the shadows.*

**Dionysos**

I am like a reflecting glass.

In me every man will see himself.

*As he goes the noise of bells, cymbals, tambourines,  
fading after him.*