A Choral Song on the Origins of Thebes from Euripides' play, *Phoenician Women*

CHORUS

Kadmos came from 'Tyre
to this land where
a wild calf fell
to its knees,
thus fulfilling
the divine oracle
that directed Kadmos to settle
the wheat-thick plains
where from lovely river water
the moisture sinks in its fullness
into Dirke's green and
depth-sown ground.
Here a mother bore Bromios,
son of Zeus,
over whom twisting ivy
sent its tendrils
tipped with green,
covering him in its leafy shade
while he was still a baby,
to make him smile.
Dionysos, partner in dances
of young Theban girls
and women who raise
"Evoé"
for him.

Here slid the gory snake
whose pupils darted
from place to place;
the savage guard of Ares' spring
and streams that make
the land grow green.
While fetching lustral waters,
Kadmos killed him,
blow upon blow to his brute head
from the crystal rock
he held tight
in his monster-killing fist.

THE PHOENICIAN WOMEN

At the order of the heavenly
unmothered one, Pallas Athene,
Kadmos scattered the great snake's teeth
and they fell into the furrows
of rich fields.
Then through the surface of her soil
Earth erupted the likeness
of armed men.
Slaughter with a soul of iron
drew them down again to bare earth
and soaked in blood the soil
that had shown them to the sunlit
breezes of upper air.

I invoke you, Epaphos,
offspring long ago of our ancestor
Io, and offspring of Zeus.
I call on you with foreign cries,
ah, with foreign prayers.
Come, come to this city
founded by your descendants
and devoted to the goddesses
we name in the same breath:
Persephone and dear Demeter,
ruler of all things,
nurse of all things,
Earth Mother.

Epaphos,
look after this land
and send the goddesses with torches
held high in their hands.
To the gods who sit in power
everything is easy.