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Madness, Maenads and Mystery Cult Practices: The Continuous Subversion of Dionysus in Painting

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Abstract

This paper examines the imagery of the Greco-Roman god Dionysus and his iconography throughout the ancient world and into the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The nature of his depictions focuses around his ability to cause chaos and break down barriers between genders, sexes, and social classes, as well as influences those around him to behave erratically and without restrictions. Accordingly, Dionysus became affiliated with transgressing boundaries along with wine, madness, and his mystery cult in the ancient world. His ability to manipulate others both physically and psychologically is represented in Euripides' play the *Bacchae*, which inspired violent imagery that indicated his threat to social boundaries through feminine power and autonomy. Dionysus/Bacchus in Rome was connected to chthonic powers of resurrection, which conflated his iconography with that of the Christ figure. The Humanist movement rose and challenged religious beliefs, inspiring various Renaissance artists to utilize Dionysian imagery to represent chaos and cultural transgression. Through the ancient world into the Renaissance and Baroque periods, Dionysus appears in three distinct representations in art--variations of bearded adult, idealized youth, and corpulent figure. These three major manifestations of Dionysus represented a continual symbol of chaos and freedom that confronted social constructions of the current time, his imagery synonymous with change and transgression.

1. Introduction

Although mainly related to wine and theatre, Dionysus is a complex god who was the center of a mystery religion that spanned across the Mediterranean. Dionysus' mythos revolves around his constant flux in both physical and emotional behavior. He is mercurial, often represented as a jovial figure yet he punishes nonbelievers ferociously with no intention of mercy throughout various myths.[1] His ability to manipulate others both physically and psychology, is represented in Euripides' play the *Bacchae*, which inspired violent imagery that indicated his threat to social boundaries through feminine power and autonomy. As a representation of chaos, madness, and freedom, Dionysus became a functional symbol for anarchy in art, a constant challenge to patriarchal societies and social expectations. His many forms and guises are used as representations of rebellion against cultural norms; he disregards gender binaries as well as social and racial boundaries. Through the ancient world into the Renaissance and Baroque periods, Dionysus appears in three distinct representations in art and his variations—as bearded adult, idealized youth, and corpulent figure—are utilized the same way throughout time as an indication of transgression and rejection of cultural restrictions. Dionysus reemerges in the Humanist Movement, redefined as a fleshier, carefree figure that challenged religious doctrine condemning bodily pleasures such as drinking and eating to excess, homoeroticism, and raucous behavior. These three major manifestations of Dionysus represented a continual symbol of chaos and freedom that confronted social constructions of the current time, his imagery synonymous throughout the ancient world through the Renaissance and Baroque periods as a harbinger of change and transgression of acceptable beliefs and actions.

2. Imagery Before Euripides' *Bacchae*

Dionysiac religion is said to have roots in the earliest Greek histories, his name written on the Linear B Tablets (1450 BCE), and he is referred to in the Athenian cult as Dionysus Eleuthereus, literally "the one who sets free."[2] His correlation to wine and theatre is well known, as explained by Jon D. Mikalson in his book *Ancient Greek Religion*, "the god created in his worshipers a state of ecstasy, literally a state of standing outside of oneself."[3] Although represented by the phallus in multiple festivals and representations, Dionysus does not share the same virility and sexual violence as many other male gods in the Greek pantheon.[4] He is often depicted on vase ware dressed in an animal skin and chiton (*χιτών*), a heavy covering which both men and women wore in the ancient world.[5] In Greek pottery, his visage shifts between a mature, bearded adult and an idealized youth, which is due to the young statue of Dionysus on the frieze of the Parthenon erected during the mid-fifth century. In mythology and his cult, he is a deity of death and rebirth and is related to agriculture through the vine and wine making which correlates to his powers of transformation and the cycles of nature.[6] Imagery of Dionysus in the ancient world focuses on his myths and cult, which would often include images of phalli, women, satyrs, theatre and wine paraphernalia, and used to liberate and transform those under his influence.

Dionysus manipulates and changes the sexuality, perceived gender roles, and personalities of the various characters in the *Bacchae*. Although there are multiple theatrical versions of the myth of Pentheus and Dionysus from such ancient authors as Aeschyhlus, Iophon, Chaeremon, and Cleophon, visual representations of Dionysus focused around the Lenaia, an agricultural festival usually held outside the city, before the premiere of Euripides version in 406 BCE.[7] However, in these earlier images, Dionysus is represented usually as an icon, a decorated tree stump that is heralded symbolically as the women dance and praise it. Later, Dionysus appears as a figure that is a part of the scene, but he sits on a chair and is set apart from the revelers. In Greek painting, Dionysus is depicted both as an aged, bearded adult, usually heavily clothed in a chiton until the erection of the Parthenon around 440 BCE. The youthful sculpture of Dionysus in the frieze of the Parthenon influences many images of a younger, idealized version of the god that becomes extremely popular in Rome. Yet, Dionysus continues to shift back and forth between wizened and young in imagery and iconography, which may indicate his own abilities to transform others as well as himself, or perhaps his mercurial nature in mythology. The women in the *Bacchae* are represented as deranged, violent and ruthless in their destruction of both the city and its young king. Their representation is the opposite of what defines a Greek woman, as they abandon their children, husbands and homes to commune with Dionysus in the woods. The god breaks down the cultural norms between human and animal, and man and women in the production as he mutates and persuades those around him to behave outside their usual roles. These images are neither violent nor sexual in nature, but renditions of a joyous congregation of revelers, unable to threaten the political or social balance in Greece.

This version of Dionysiac festival can be seen on a red figure Greek *stamnos* (450 BCE) attributed to The Villa Giulia Painter (Fig. 1), that depicts a collection of female revelers around the single register during a Dionysia festival. The *stamnos*, like the *krater*, is a storage vessel usually reserved for liquids such as wine. In the center between a few women is an erected pillar decorated to appear as a bearded visage of Dionysus plunged deeply into the earth, which could reference his powers of fertility. Dionysus is adorned with a festive headdress of ivy and large discs on each shoulder. Before him is a table with a collection of cakes or loaves and two large *kraters* of wine from which one woman is pouring herself a bowl. The women dance to the flute on the other side of the vessel, which gives life and action to the somewhat static figures. Nearly all the women have drinking bowls, save the musician and one woman that carries a staff and is offered a bowl to drink from as they dance. The women move in synchronization, in groups of three figures around the vessel with the icon of Dionysus in the center. This is indicative of an outdoor festival or celebration of women that are under Dionysus' influence, but not violent Maenads. The offerings of wine and bread are testaments to his influence over the earth's bounty. The vessels in the hands of the women are libation cups (*skyphos*) to pour wine to the earth as offerings. This imagery lacks chaos and madness, but retains the freedom that Dionysus offers to those that follow him and his cult, as the women appear to be outside their homes in order to celebrate. This is not a dramatized depiction of Euripides play, but a realistic view of Dionysiac celebration from a state-funded festival.

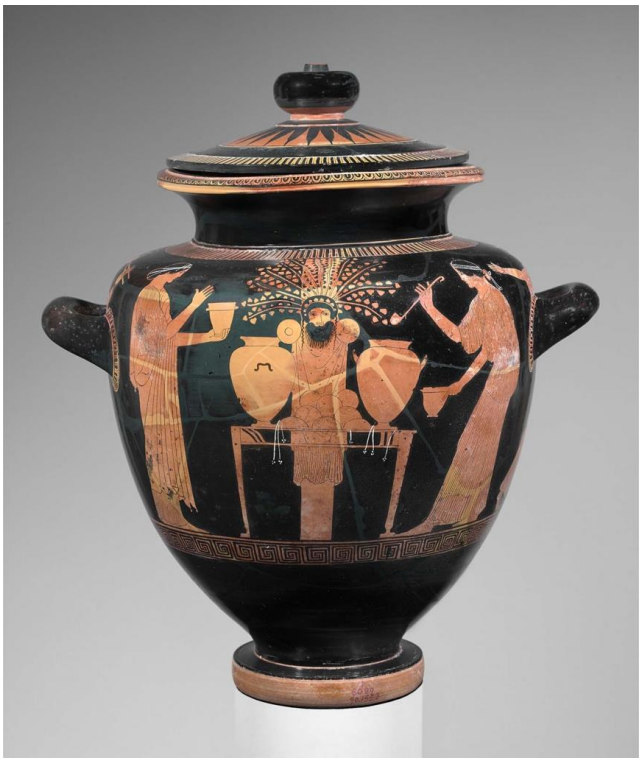

Figure 1. Attributed to The Villa Giulia Painter, Stamnos depicting women around an idol of Dionysus, Attic red-figure stamnos, ca. 450 BCE, housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts. https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/stamnos-depicting-women-congregated-about-an-idol-of-dionysos-153877

There are many versions of these sacred meetings painted on drinking or storage vessels.[8] Festivals such as the Lenaia were conducted on the outskirts of the city and were considered part of the mystery religions and not to be discussed among those uninitiated.[9] They were state funded, and each individual polis would have different traditions and customs conducted during sacred rites. All of these vessels depict only women as they dance, drink, and play music in honor of Dionysus in a nearly intimate, private setting. The suggestion of eroticism from Pentheus in the *Bacchae* is obviously untrue here, as each of the women are heavily clothed in draped *chitons* that obscure their figures, however, the imagery and decoration of the statue is recognizable as a representation of his status as a fertility god. Although these pieces may differ in the number of women depicted dancing and Dionysus' imagery and appearance, they are all painted before the performance of the *Bacchae* in 406 BCE. These are not scenes from Euripides' production, as they are neither violent nor mythological in nature. These women do not celebrate next to mythological figures of Dionysus or satyrs, nor are they influenced to the point of madness or destruction or perform miraculous acts. The wine, much like it is associated as the blood of Christ later, is the essence of Dionysus and when imbibed it both changes and frees them. These women, mostly constrained to household duties and chores, are now able to celebrate with other women with food and wine without intervention. Although initiates to the Dionysian cult were allowed to witness and perform in the sacred rites, the painters of these vessels have reflected a more realistic image of Dionysiac rituals than those created after the premiere of Euripides' play.

3. Dionysus in the *Bacchae*

Euripides' play the *Bacchae* premiered in 405 BCE and is one of the major productions that has remained intact from the ancient world that focuses on the myth of Dionysus and King Pentheus. Despite the production having little to no reference to the actual cult practices of the Bacchic cult, the perception of the production influenced the artistic representations of the god and his followers after the late fifth century. The play challenges the expectations of gender roles, classes, and human limitations while Dionysus continuously tampers with the characters' beliefs and ideals.[10] The play discusses the power of Dionysiac revelry and godly influence over human beings that is both violent and

miraculous, as he transforms himself and those under his influence.[11] In the beginning of the production Dionysus ventures to Thebes, the homeland of his mother, where he expects to be treated respectfully as both a god and king. However, Pentheus, the young newly appointed King of Thebes, Pentheus, mocks Dionysus' feminine appearance in reaction to his own feelings of attraction at his long hair and shapely face.[12] The women of Thebes had already been infected by Dionysus' godly powers of madness and abandon their homes and children, and venture to perform the rites "on the wooded hills (the Maenads) rush wildly to and fro, honoring in their dance this new god Dionysus."[13] The women under the control of Dionysus no longer adhere to human customs and laws and are able to perform both miracles and atrocities.

Dionysus breaks free from his imprisonment and wreaks havoc, as he sets the palace on fire and summons an earthquake. He confronts Pentheus again, who still denies Dionysus' claim of being a god, when a herdsman arrives to confess his struggles with the Maenad women. He found the women as they danced and gathered in the woods and performed strange miracles such as nursing wild animals and summoning streams of milk, wine and honey from the earth.[14] When the herdsman attempted to capture Pentheus' mother, Agave, the Maenads hunted and attacked his cattle and tore the animals apart with their bare hands. Pentheus planned to attack the women but Dionysus convinced him to dress as a woman and approach the Maenads as one of them. Under his influence, Dionysus paraded the maddened King of Thebes through the main road of the city as they approached the mountain filled with the mad women. The King of Thebes climbed a tree in an attempt to view the secret performances, but he is quickly discovered and attacked by the women for the invasion of their private rites. The god empowered their hands as they ripped the young King down and tore him to pieces. Pentheus' mother, still under the influence of Dionysus' power, carried the head of her son back into town convinced that it is the head of a mountain lion. She presented the head to her father just as the veil is lifted and realizes the horror of the act she committed. Dionysus appears again at the end of the production and taunts the fallen royal family, whom he assures that Thebes will be the first to fall along with any who dare deny his powers.[15]

The production uses the Greek fear of female autonomy and the disintegration of Greek ideals of control and male dominance. The *Bacchae* does not represent much about the actions of those that follow Dionysus, but utilizes the perception and reception of his cult that can transform and manipulate others through the influence of wine and physical exertion.[16] Scholar, Barbara Goff claims the Maenads mockingly redefine the polis' democratic system as "a parody of Athenian political inclusivity combined with the common Greek nightmare of women's refusal to accept their subordination."[17] The Maenads appear more democratic than their audience made up of Athenian citizens, as the *thiasoi* blends the old and young, the married and unmarried, and multiple social classes.[18] The Bacchae represents "the world turned upside down" as women have left the home *(oikos)* and the city *(polis)*, to engage in ecstatic worship of Dionysus together without male interference. This inclusive event allows women of all age groups and social statuses to engage in ritual together, and they exhibit traditionally masculine roles of leadership.[19] The Maenad could be read as a masculine representation of the feminine being, as these women hunt, kill both men and animals, and completely deny their domestic roles.[20]

4. The Evidence of Influence

Women in the *Bacchae* exhibit fantastic powers given to them while under the influence of Dionysus, such as monstrous strength and the divine ability to commune with nature.[21] The influence of Dionysus over two Maenads is depicted on a vase currently held in the Cabinet des médailles de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Fig. 2). Created around 550-530 BCE, this vase depicts two women wrapped around each other as they offer a hare to Dionysus. This black figure amphora is attributed to the Amasis painter, from whom remains a varied collection of vase ware. The women and the god stand at the same height, the figures of the two women overlap as they cling to each other. One hand offers a small hare to the god, who reaches out to receive it. The hare is seen on other vases, shown surrounded or eating grapes or figs, connected to Dionysus and the cyclical nature of the earth or given to homoerotic lovers in court scenes.[22] The other figure holds a long strand of ivy in her grip, a symbol of cyclical rebirth and transformation.[23] Dionysus appears as an older man, with a beard that juts forward emphatically. With one hand he reaches for the offering of the rabbit while the other grips a drinking vessel known as a *kantharos* (*κάνθαρος*). The power of Dionysus is represented in the women's wide and wild gaze, as all three eyes visible are shown exaggerated and enlarged. The eyes seem to swell from the face and the pupil and iris have blended together to infer a kind of trance-like state, such as that referenced in the *Bacchae.*[24] Here Dionysus accepts their sacrifice with a gift in return—he extends the *kantharos* filled with wine to the two followers as an offering of freedom and "in a promise of ecstasy."[25] The women that offer themselves to Dionysus receive liberation and exhilaration, freed from social and

cultural constraints usually applied to women in the ancient world.[26] Wine is a pivotal point in ecstatic Dionysiac ritual as means through which the gods' power enters the body and changes the constitution to release a drinker from inhibitions. However, as described in the *Bacchae*, this freedom can be transformed into chaos and destruction.

Figure 2. Attributed to the Amassis Painter, Dionysus and two Maenads, one holding a hare. Ancient Greek Attic black-figure neck-amphora, ca. 550–530 BC, from Vulci. Cabinet des médailles de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/84/Dionysos_Mainades_Cdm_Paris_222.jpg.

This piece was also created before the Euripides production, and the women here are also not depicted as violent while under his influence. Women in the ancient world had specific roles to honor Dionysus that deeply aligned them with his cult.[27] He had two festivals, one that was held in the city and another in the more rural areas beyond the polis. During these events, phalluses would be created in great size and number as a representation of the gods agricultural fertility.[28] Citizens would parade one extremely large phallus through the streets of Athens, which may have been decorated or anthropomorphized with facial features.[29] In some cities, men were allowed to submit and perform theatrical entries in the Dionysia competition and join the processions.[30] However, women in artistic depictions appear to have had a deeper connection to the religion and were the ones mainly illustrated performing rites and rituals in ancient Greek painting such as those cited earlier. The cult allowed them social freedom and they would perform mysterious rites at a local hill where they would sing, dance, and drink in an attempt to achieve an ecstatic state.[31] Although this may have been believed as a sexual event hidden from men, such as Pentheus did in the *Bacchae*,[32] ancient sources proclaim that the women were chaste during this event.[33] Women would hold organizational positions and leadership roles and initiate those that entered into the religion in Greece; their connection to Dionysus neither sexual nor violent but a joyous embracing of their own femininity and release from cultural domestic expectations.[34] The church would later exploit this transformative power in order to blaspheme ancient Roman culture at the height of the Humanist Movement, but artists of the Renaissance also used Dionysus as an icon of chaos and anarchy.

5. Maenads and Bacchantes

Dionysus offers freedom, but he warns against the dangers of overindulgence, which is later played upon in renditions of a corpulent and fleshy version of the god.[35] This distinction is pointed out in Euripides' play, as Dionysus arrives in Thebes with a retinue of female followers quite unlike those that he influences inside the city. In the introduction, Dionysus describes his followers,

> Hail! My sisterhood of worshippers (*θίασος*)…Women I wooed from foreign lands. Comrades in rest, companions of the road…"[36] The Greek term used here is Thiasos (*θίασος*), which refers to a religious cult groups that are dedicated to Dionysus and his processive celebrations.[37]

Another image of Dionysus' corruptive influence is visible on a kantheros currently held in the Louvre which shows two satyrs and a Bacchante dancing around the side of the bowl—her head thrown back in ecstasy as she grasps *thyrsus* and a torch (Fig. 3). The two silenoi, or satrys, that flank her are distinguishable as inhuman by their pointed ears and tails. This is another wine storage vessel; the iconography exhibits Dionysus' abilities to overcome human customs and individuality and free them from social and cultural constraints. The woman, seen as human by her jewelry, finely done hair and patterned clothing, exposes a breast in her fervent dance and literally begins to shed her refined qualities in the liberation that Dionysus offers. The exposed breast may be a representation of the nurturing, fertility powers of the Maenads in the *Bacchae* who would breastfeed small creatures.[38] Women of the ancient world would meet each winter for these ritualistic dances that were focused on sweat and exhaustion rather than anything violent or sexual.[39] Dionysus' influence is the antithesis to the Greek ideal of sophrosyne (*σωφροσύνη*), defined as moderation and control over the mind and body, and he offers respite from the strict boundaries of women in the ancient world.[40] Although depicted considerably sexual throughout the Renaissance, the ancient cult was feminine based and empowering for those under strict social and cultural restrictions.

Figure 3. Two satyrs and a maenad. Side A from an Ancient Greek red-figure kylyx-krater from Apulia, 380–370 BC. Louvre, Paris. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/93/Satyroi_Mainade_Louvre_K19.jpg.

In the *Bacchae*, the women are punished for Pentheus' insult to Dionysus and perform both terrible and wonderful acts. In the production, they abandon their children and homes to nurse animals at the top of the mountain and perform mystical acts such as summoning streams of milk and honey directly from the soil. The most heinous act of all comes from the mother and aunts of king Pentheus, who rips him to pieces in an animalistic frenzy. Ritualistically known as

sparagmos (*σπαραγμός*), there are depictions of both Dionysus and his followers rending flesh from a live creature that was supposedly followed by *omophagia* (from *ωμός* meaning raw), an eating of the raw meat.[41] The scene of the gruesome death of Pentheus is depicted on another red-figure *kylix* attributed to the Douris painter from around 500-460 BCE (Fig. 4 & 5). A single register wraps around the bowl of the cup showing the *sparagmos* of Pentheus performed by his mother and the other Maenads under Dionysus' influence. He remains only as a torso and arms, his innards spilling from his abdomen with what appears to be a bone jutting from his ripped flesh. Agave and her sister, Ino, hold Pentheus by his head and arms, bracing to tear his corpse further in ritualistic sacrifice. The obverse side of the vessel shows Dionysus, seated and bearing a long handled *kantheros* cup as Maenads bearing legs and other limbs dance erratically around him. A satyr stands at his side and plays an *aulos* (*αὐλός*), a double-ended pipe flute. The savagery of *sparagmos* and *omophogia* was rarely actually performed by any cult followers at the time that Euripides was writing and is used in the production to symbolically emphasize the animalistic qualities of those that have spurned Dionysus who has influenced them to the point of madness.[42] These images created by ancient sources were commentary on the danger of Dionysus' control and cult and the power he provides to his female followers, who were free from masculine influences during his celebrations and festivals.[43]

Figures 4 and 5. Atributed to the Douris Painter, Red-Figure Cup Showing the Death of Pentheus (exterior) and a Maenad (interior), Greek (active c. 500–460 B.C.) Terracotta. https://www.kimbellart.org/collection/ap-20000.

6. Transformation of Dionysus

Dionysus is mythologized with a mutative gender; his imagery and mythology suggests that he transcends gender entirely, despite his connection to the phallus and its powers of fertility.[44] His appearance is repeatedly referred to as "feminine" in the *Bacchae*, and the young King of Thebes remarks on his beauty, such as his long hair and pale skin.[45] Later in the production, Dionysus inspired Pentheus to dress himself as a maiden in order to spy on the rites of the possessed women on the hill, which would result in his death at the hands of his wild mother and aunts.[46] Dionysus has great powers of transition and transformation, which is seen in many of his myths and his own mutable iconography, thus manifesting in images of theatrical masks, wine and the ivy vine.[47] The creation of the Parthenon in the fourth century increases the depictions of a youthful and feminine Dionysus, instead of an older male but he continues to fluctuate between both versions. Sculpture of Dionysus begins to assimilate this style before painting, but his appearance deviates between both images. His own imagery is constantly in flux between old and young, masculine and feminine, and his mythos emphasizes his power to manipulate and change the nature of men and women under his control.[48] His imagery appears to align to his mythology and represent these traits in both painting and sculpture.

Dionysus' ability to mutate himself and others is also demonstrated in his cult and ritualistic practices. His transformative powers are also referenced in the Greek and Roman fertility cult holiday, called the Lupercalia by the Romans.[49] The event took place on the fifteenth of February revolving around fertility and the apotropaic powers of bloodletting and pain. Men would sprint through town, often nude, bearing sticks or hides with which to whip the backs of women in an attempt to facilitate fertility.[50] There are references about this event and other Dionysian festivals that would possibly include cross-dressing between males and females to inspire Dionysiac powers of fertility.[51] In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus dresses as a woman in an attempt to infiltrate the sacred feminine rites the Bacchantes practiced. Dionysus drives the young king insane, which creates an opportunity to influence and persuade him to dress as a woman despite Pentheus' previous mocking of Dionysus effeminate appearance.[52] Although it

inspires some humor and mockery in the production, it could possibly imply a deeper exploration of the sexuality and gender roles exhibited by Dionysus and his ability to transform others and defy cultural expectations. His symbolism and iconography focus on his transformation, such as theatrical productions in which men play all female roles, as well as winemaking and the fermentation process, often the job of women.[53]

Dionysus transforms humans and other creatures in several of his myths, as it is a common trope in many mythological narratives. However, as seen in the myth of the Tyrrhenian pirates, Dionysus' power over nature and transformation elucidates more about his control over himself and others' physical bodies. This myth is depicted on a *kylix* (*κύλιξ*), a drinking vessel with a wide shallow bowl. Here the image is found on the inside of the cup, called the tondo, where Dionysus sits on the ship of the pirates (Fig. 6 & Fig. 7). He is larger than life, nearly taking up the entirety of the image. The ship is a stylized trireme, the nose of the vessel painted to appear like the beak of a dolphin. In the center, dolphins jump in a sea and a large grape vine grows from the center mast of the ship. The vines bear heavy fruit that dangles over the head of the god as he reclines in the ship as though it is a couch. Dionysus is bearded and grasps a horn, his head crowned with ivy, both symbols of his godly status.[54] Currently held in the Staatliche Antikensammlungen Museum in Munich, this black figure vessel was used at large drinking parties, known as symposia, where diners would discuss the political, social and artistic events of the time.[55] This imagery would be found at drinking symposia where men would imbibe powerful wine that would change their personalities, as Dionysus changes those under his persuasion.[56] His ability to transform those under his control and exhort his influence over humans is a powerful reminder to those drinking not to overindulge lest they completely lose control. In this myth, not only does Dionysus transform others but he also changes himself into a lion and magically summons a bear onto the ship. His power over nature and ability to constantly shift and manipulate his form is exhibited in this story and further defines his mercy to pious individuals and ferocity against those that ignore his godly status and heritage.[57]

Figures 6 and 7. Attributed to Exekias, Dionysus Kylix, black figure kylix eye-cup, tondo and close up of eye detail. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysus_Cup#/media/File:Dionysos-Schale_2.jpg.

7. Theatrics of the Symposium

Male dominated drinking parties would often include various vessels designated for drinking, mixing, and pouring wine. Nearly all of these vessels would have been decorated in scenes of combat and mythological narratives, equally decorative and utilitarian in function. Cups such as the *kylix* (*κύλιξ*) are often decorated with scenes in the tondo of the shallow bowl as well as on the outside of the vessel. The *kylix* has an extremely common motif of a distinctive pair of exaggerated eyes placed on the outside of the bowl. Like the vessel that references Dionysus' abduction by the Tyrrhenian Pirates (Figs. 6 & 7), these ceramics are referred to as "eyecups." The Amasses painter enlarges the eyes to give a manic, frenzied expression that mimics the features of the Maenads found on his aforementioned amphora and other pieces.[58] The base of an eyecup is often painted black which appears like a gaping, screaming mouth with a small nose and decorative patterns around the rim and base. When lifted the cup appears like a mask over the drinker's face and transforms them into a Maenad of Dionysus, imbibed with his power and spirit.[59] These pieces appear

comical, but were used to warn diners not to overindulge or become as uncontrollable as a Maenad. Theatrical productions are able to transport a viewer or transform an actor into another person or gender, just as wine would change a person's behavior and personality.[60] Dionysus is directly related to masks through theatre and productions, which were worn in all Greek and Roman comedies and tragedies.[61] Dionysus uses an allegorical mask in the *Bacchae* by hiding his true power and abilities from Pentheus until he reveals himself at the end of the play. The mask conceals as much as it reveals, a physical representation of the god's duality and transformative powers.[62] This direct reference to Dionysus' influence over an individual, which is exhibited through the consumption of wine, is apparent when the cup is lifted to the drinker's face and reminds other diners the close proximity to Dionysus.[63] These men would be symbolically transformed into Maenads, Greek women, by drinking and losing their inhibitions during the symposia.[64] These pieces served to remind males not to overindulge and become drunk and lose control as the Maenads are driven mad and unknowingly perform wild acts in the *Bacchae*.[65]

8. Bacchus vs. Dionysus

Dionysus' inconsistent iconography seems to be further divided in the Roman world. The Greek Dionysus was a transformative and mutable god with correlations to ritualistic ecstasy and freedom through exhilaration and physical exertion.[66] His gifts to humans were as glorious as his punishments were terrible, and his connection to wine and theatre kept him extremely close to human behavior and control.[67] However, after his arrival in Rome through the Greek settlements in Sicily and Greek tradesman, he took root as a chthonic deity connected to agricultural cycles as well as death and rebirth.[68] Bacchus became both a god of the vine and the god of death, his new abilities of resurrection an important facet in the rapid growth of his Roman religion.[69] In Greek religion he was a symbol of freedom to women often confined to their home and private spaces, but his arrival to Rome exceeds this transformative ability to resurrect the dead.[70] His transcendence over death furthered his mystery cult in Italy and is mirrored in his iconography through the consistent appearance as an idealized youth that never ages nor dies.[71] Cult symbols such as wine and resurrection was too closely connected to Christ in Catholicism, which required the Church to demonize the pagan god.[72]

9. Etruria and Rome

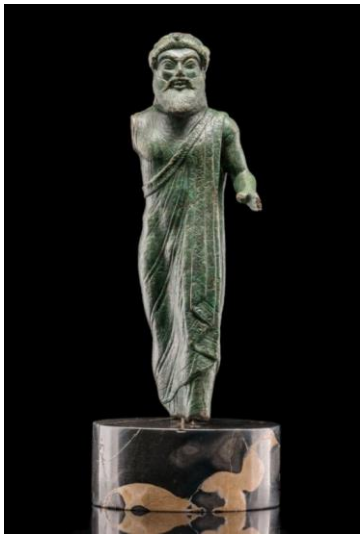

Figure. 8. Statue of Fufluns, 480 BCE, bronze, Modena, Galleria Estense Palazzo Dei Musei. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f6/Etruria_settentrionale%2C_fufluns%2C_480_ac_ca.jpg.

Dionysus' influence and power extended across the Mediterranean, and he was known as a traveling god. In the *Bacchae* he describes his travels, a reference to his triumph over the East.

> After leaving the gold-rich fields of the Lydians and Phrygians, I moved on to Persia's sun-parched plataux and Bactra's walls and the land of Medes (Asia) and opulent Arabia and all of Asia Minor whose parts hug the salty sea with beautifully-towered cities full of Greeks And barbarians mixed together.[73]

Dionysus travels to the Italian peninsula at an early date, either taking root or assimilating with the Etruscan god Fufluns, a chthonic god of agriculture, through an influx of Greek trade in the early sixth century. Depictions of Fufluns found on a number of bronze mirrors and sculptures demonstrate the duality of Greek Dionysus, which fluctuates between youth and old age.[74] One such example is the bronze statue of Fufluns currently held in Modena, in the Galleria Estense Palazzo Dei Musei (Fig. 8), which has similar iconography to older depictions of Dionysus, combined with Etruscan stylization. His eyes are heavily lidded and dominate his rotund and cherubic face. He has a soft, somewhat feminine mouth with large lips and a heavy beard that juts forward animatedly. Carved striations add texture to his hair and cloth of his robes, which imitates drapery on his himation. One arm is missing, while the other reaches out as if to take an offering. A leg steps forward under the heavy drapery of his robe, his hip curving in reaction to the movement. He also wears a headdress made of some kind of vegetation, a connection to his domain over the natural world. Much like the depictions of Dionysus, Fufluns also has a dual representation as both an aged man as well as a youth.[75] Fufluns connections to the underworld influenced the Roman version of Dionysus, renamed Bacchus, whose cult focused around revival and transcendence.[76] Artifacts that depict Fufluns show mythological scenes that relate to his conception and life. He is often portrayed with his wife, Ariadne, and his mother, Semla (Semele) who are both brought back from the underworld by Bacchus.[77] Their resurrection exhibits the god's power over death and rebirth, but it is only through death that they are immortalized and transformed. The connection gives Dionysus another facet and name, which furthers his cult on the Italian peninsula.

Figure 9. Marble Sarcophagus with the Triumph of Dionysus with the Four Seasons, 260-270 A.D. Late Imperial, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/55.11.5/.

The mystery cult of Dionysus flourishes in Rome throughout the rise of the Republic, which favors the imagery of a youthful, lithe, idealized version of Bacchus. Although later information written in the Hellenistic period (323 BCE to 31 BCE) has been found regarding male initiates, women are recorded most often holding organizational and leadership roles within the cult.[78] With such a strong feminine base, authors such as Livy commented on the authenticity of the religion and their secret meetings still held in the night.[79] His narrative found in his *Histories*, describes the violence that occurred to purge the celebratory cult of Bacchus from Rome and the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* which condemned the religious rites in 186 B.C.[80] This event was supposedly preceded by the belief that there was a plot within the cult aimed to deconstruct the authority of the Roman Senate, which led to the arrest and punishment of many members and leaders. Livy asserted that the practitioners were committing lascivious and sexual acts, but this is due to his own lack of knowledge and moral rigidity. These events were unsegregated and allowed both men and women to participate with wine and dancing, which gave concern to many high-ranking Roman officials. Livy records that the Senate proclaimed in 186 B.C. that "there should be no Bacchanalia in Rome or Italy."[81] The popularity of the cult did not die, however, and rites were performed in secret or petitioned to the Senate for approval. Later, as a man of the people, Julius Caesar reinstated the Bacchanalia to gain public support in Rome and its members increased once again.[82] The image of Bacchus in Rome is heavily associated with agriculture and cyclical rebirth. In mythology, Bacchus ventures to the underworld to fetch either his mother or his wife, Ariadne, and then transforms them into deities and immortalizes them. This is a common trope represented in sculpture, often depicted on sarcophagi and indicative of his power over death. The Badminton sarcophagus is currently held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which depicts Bacchus surrounded by personified manifestations of the four seasons (Fig. 9). Created in 260 A.D., it is decorated with a myriad of figures on one side in a chaotic, cramped scene with a young Bacchus seated comfortably in the center. He lounges on a massive panther as he grips his iconic thyrsus and fills a satyr's cup raised, requesting wine. Symbols of the Bacchic cult are littered throughout the scene, such as satyrs, dancing figures, cherubs that play flutes and horns or harass the other characters. Four idealized youths stand on either side of the lithe Bacchus, each with symbols that refer to which season they represent. On the far right of the image stands Winter, who holds a branch bereft of fruits or blossoms and two slaughtered ducks. Closest to Bacchus is Spring, who clutches a small baskets of flowers and a branch suspended mid-bloom, while Summer lifts a basket of wheat to inspect it. Fall stands on the far right of the image, a signature cornucopia in one hand a sacrificial hare in his other. Each season is crowned with a small ringlet and they wear only a very short lacerna, a cloak attached with a fibula at the right shoulder that was worn on journeys as protection from inclement weather. Bacchus, however, wears a toga and a skin across his chest, almost completely covered from the viewer. Between the main figures are multiple smaller characters crammed into all the available space, cherubs, satyrs, and even the insinuation of adults in the background with only their faces visible between the heads and shoulders of the four season and Bacchus. On the sides of the sarcophagi are more figures, the personification of the Earth and a river god, as well as more youths and mythological figures.

This study of Dionysiac imagery primarily focuses on painting, however, this artifact clearly represents the influence of the Bacchic cult in Roman funerary practices and his later relation to the Christ figure. This relief is believed to have used a stencil or come from a pattern book the sculptor utilized.[83] This image has a match in Hessisches Landesmuseum in Kassel, Germany, which depicts the same characters arranged in a similar format.[84] This motif shows the representations of the four seasons as males, when they are usually seen as females, which may be indicative of Bacchus' own fluctuation in gender and mutable sexuality, or it could be a personal choice of the sculptor. Their presence also relates to the god's powers over agriculture, the inclusion of a nature goddess and river god also as reference to the powers and cycles of nature. The indication that this image was taken from a pattern book shows that the triumph of Bacchus and the four seasons was a popular scene that was replicated multiple times, most likely due to the mythos around Bacchus as a deity that not only transcends death but transforms mortality into immortality. This narrative is extremely similar to that of Christ, whose entombment and resurrection from the dead is pivotal in the Christian faith, through which a human soul can overcome death when admitted into Heaven. The power of the cult in Rome was such a threat that it was publicly attacked due to its ability to transcend the barriers of gender, class and status. Bacchus himself was a powerful deity that not only controlled the growth of crops, but his mystery cult seemed to have assuaged the fear of death and promise rebirth, or perhaps even eternal life. His mutative, transgressive nature allows him to overcome social and cultural boundaries, as well as the human experience of death.

10. The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii

The Villa of Mysteries is a sprawling Roman house that once faced the ocean, but is now farther inland after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. The eruption coated the city in a thick layer of volcanic material, which aided

in the preservation of the frescoes until excavations began in 1909. The religious acts of the Dionysian mystery cult may be depicted in the frescos found in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii (Figs. 10-12). The direct interpretation of the frescoes is debated, although the main suggestion is that represent the initiation rites of the Dionysiac cult. The only human male in the room is a young boy, who reads intently from a scroll in the nude while an elegantly dressed Roman noble woman looms above him and another woman sitting beside him looks towards the viewer. The matron seems to looks past the two figures immediately beside her to glare at a woman handling a tray of indistinguishable offerings, sometimes interpreted as cakes. Beside her is a cluster of women who surround a table, as one woman pours something from a small decanter onto a piece of fabric or perhaps something obscured by a figure with her back facing the room. She turns halfway to expose her profile and appears to leer over at the drunken silenus figure with a lyre, his drapery slipping off his body to nearly expose himself. Next to him a cluster of three female figures, two seated and one standing. One joins in with the silenoi, playing pipes next to a seated nymph that offers her breast to a to a small fawn while a goat waits patiently for his turn, much as the Maenads suckled beasts in Euripides' *Bacchae*. These two are not human, as indicated by their sharply pointed ears but appear less animalistic than some other satyrs and silenoi figures around them. The final figure on the wall seems to face inward towards the corner, her eyes wide with shock as a fierce wind appears to fill the shawl she grips like a sail, looking towards the center images on the back wall.

Figure 10. Detail of the Villa of the Mysteries, Three women and a young child, fresco, c.50 A.D., Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy. https://www.archaeology.org/issues/124-1403/features/1813-pompeii-saving-the-villa-of-the-mysteries.

The fresco in the center of the room depicts Bacchus, young and beautiful as he lounges gracelessly against a female figure whose image has been heavily damaged, who is interpreted as his wife, Ariadne, or his mother, Semele. One of Bacchus' shoes has fallen off and somehow managed to land under the throne where the female figure sits. Bacchus here has fallen prey to his own powerful creation, wine, and lost

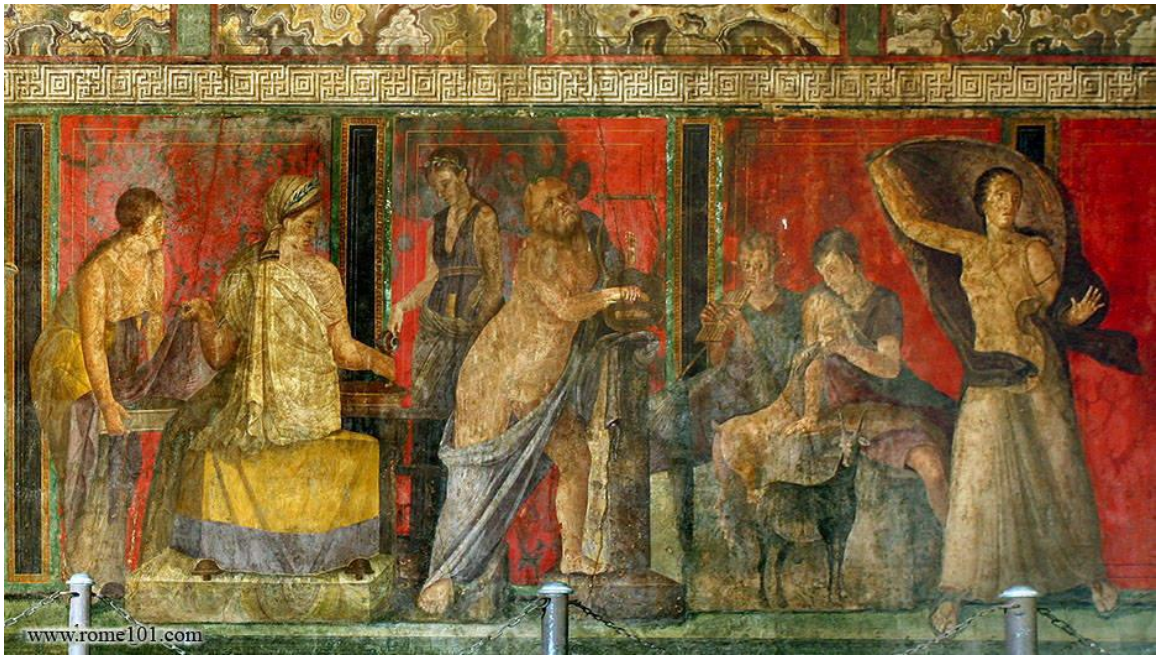

Figure 11. Detail of the Villa of the Mysteries, Women, Satyrs and Maenads, fresco, c.50 A.D., Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy. https://www.archaeology.org/issues/124-1403/features/1813-pompeii-saving-the-villa-of-the-mysteries.

control and is unable to support himself, his eyes nearly rolling backwards in unconsciousness. His thyrsus, adorned with ivy and ribbons, is thrown carelessly across his lap as if, perhaps, tossed from the female figure's hand in order to grasp the flailing Bacchus. Her arm is thrown over his shoulder to steady him in an intimate moment, his own arms stretched back behind his head to reach for her support as she cradles his ivy-crowned head. Her purple and gold robes match her decorative sandals and her single gold bracelet around her wrist, her other hand holding a bundle of the same colored cloth as her heavy *chiton*. Although Bacchus is an active participant, he remains somewhat passive in the scene as he is nearly overcome with drunkenness, the damaged female figure the centerpiece and focal point of the entire procession around the room. The other figures, while separate from the two center beings, also appear to participate in the scene individually. The shocked figure in the corner seems to lock eyes with another silenus, who holds a silver bowl before a young satyr to gaze into. Another young satyr behind them holds a Dionysiac mask, perhaps making a reflection show in the bowl, which may have been used as a type of divination technique. The two remaining figures on the right to the center female are full of contention and mystery, as one appears to be handling a cloth that covers some devotional item, sometimes interpreted as a phallus or it has been viewed as an interpretive image of Mount Vesuvius. The last image is that of a winged woman who bears a whip, her drapery in a whirlwind around her legs as she rears her arm back to strike the woman across the corner, this connects the scenes into a cohesive meander across the room.

Figure 12. Detail of the Villa of the Mysteries, Bacchus and Unknown Female Figure, fresco, c.50 A.D., Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy. https://www.archaeology.org/issues/124-1403/features/1813-pompeii-saving-the-villa-of-the-mysteries.

Although the exact meaning of these frescoes and symbols are still not clear, the prominence of Dionysus's cult in the Roman world is obvious in his prevalence as a household deity and the knowledge of his cult. The scene is often interpreted as a ritualistic wedding, the two figures dressed as brides were to be initiated into the cult by symbolically marrying Bacchus but what exactly takes place in the ceremony is unknown.[85] The women around the room are in various states of participation and they perform actions in anticipation for the ritual or perhaps they have just finished celebrating. Just as his placement in the scene suggests, Bacchus' influence extends to everyone around him, either in the midst of ritualistic practices or preparation. Bacchus leans back, arms above his head as an open, relaxed and feminine pose, open and inviting to the viewer. He is often depicted reclining, a passive catalyst—he inspires those around him but does not command them, which allows human choice to remain a continual factor in his cult and mythos. But he is the only one that is allowed to pass over the boundary line between acceptable drunkenness to nearly obscene, socially unrefined inebriation, despite even the satyrs and silenoi remaining upright and conscious. Thus, it is pertinent that the female figure that has hieratic scale and appears to be the orchestrator of the entire scene. Although her face has been lost, she maintains control while Bacchus is too drunk to support himself and seems to have little to no impact on the production that continues around them. The scene demonstrates that the women have power over the entire ritual, each with responsibilities in order to prepare to initiate more into the cult. The center figure, perhaps Semele or Ariadne, represents a connection to rebirth and Bacchus' ability to command death and life.[86] In mythology, Bacchus is able to bring his mother, and in some variations, his wife Ariadne, back from the Underworld.[87] This is evident in the ritualistic flagellation depicted, which is a symbolic representation of both wine and death.[88] Bacchus now offers the promise of resurrection and rebirth in the afterlife and he will become a popular motif on Roman sarcophagi, as discussed earlier. Here, the violence and chaos that is integral to the religion is represented through bloodletting and exertion.[89] Women remain the main players in the Bacchic cult, and he offers them complete freedom and autonomy. Likewise, he offers them power and freedom disallowed in the ancient world, and his appearance as overcome by his own creation is indicative of his symbolism as an outsider.[90] This representation of a being that breaks down barriers between gender roles and expectations will allow his motifs and depictions to continue into the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Bacchus' mutable form is further explored in a Roman fresco in a Lararium, where he is depicted as an apotropaic symbol and decorated as a cluster of a grapes (Fig. 13). He stands next to the looming facsimile of Mount Vesuvius. Found in the House of the Centenary in Pompeii, Bacchus stands in the background and is surrounded by the fecundity of a mountain and a garland of greenery frames the small household temple. Bacchus is adorned with a crown of ivy and is covered from the neck down in luscious grapes, highlighted as if they were shining in the bright sunlight. In one hand he holds a staff, decorated with a ribbon and a small sprig of leaves, banners flying in a breeze. His other hand pours wine to the earth, which is greedily lapped at by a panther at his feet. In the foreground, a snake slithers among tall grass, a broken pillar near his head. Bacchus symbolically gives life to the fertile earth, his staff plunged into the ground and he waters it with wine as the mountain blooms a vibrant green. Bacchus' form, now fruit, is indicative

Figure 13. Dionysus on Vesuvius, fresco, Pompeii from Casa del Centenario, before 79 A.D. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bf/Pompeii_-_Casa_del_Centenario_-_MAN.jpg.

of his ability to change physical form as well as his connection to the earth and its cycles. The Lararium is a household shrine that is utilized by the residents to praise and honor deities, usually known as the Lars, with offerings and gifts for prosperity, protection, and health.

11. The Renaissance and Baroque Periods

With the rise of the Humanist Movement, artists turned their attention to familiar motifs of mythological gods and goddesses. Despite the rise of Christianity and the influence of strict religious doctrine, figures such as Bacchus still remained as a popular subject and appears as a catalyst in paintings.[91] Bacchus, an image of freedom, violence, and the boundaries between divine and human, was monopolized and exacerbated in painting and he is often the centerpiece of wild, uncontrolled images fueled with wine and sexual abandon. Much as his imagery was used in the ancient world to discuss and display the prominence of his cult and his mythology, Renaissance and Baroque artists placed Bacchus among the fringes of society and out in the middle of nature. His ability to infect others, like a virus, permeates his now vibrant and detailed imagery, and he offers freedom from societal expectations and economic classes, races, and genders. His interpretation and message remain the same, however, his iconography and imagery shifts from the bearded, mature adult and the lithe, idealized youth to a younger and fleshier model, who now offers a sexual freedom to the viewer that was unexplored by ancient artists. Bacchus, as always, represents the outsiders and those that remain unaccepted or unacknowledged in society, and openly exudes and flaunts the darker, hidden parts of society that both intrigue and shock an audience. His renditions are both in this world and yet not, often in mystical, far off lands or floating in a darkened room. Equal parts solid and ephemeral, his influence visible but still intangible.

Just as Bacchus was an icon of chaos and freedom in Greece and Rome from the fifth century BCE to the first century AD, his revitalization in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods exploits his role as an instigator.

The artist Titian shows Bacchus' newfound freedom and popularity in multiple paintings, such as his image of the mythological island Andros and his rendition of *The Andrians* (1523-24) (Fig. 17). Philostratus, a Greek sophist in the Roman period and wrote about the mythical island so blessed and beloved by Bacchus, he crafted for them a river of wine. He describes the revelers in his "Imagines",

> …this river makes men rich and powerful in the assembly, and helpful to their friends, and beautiful and, instead of short, four cubits tall; for when a man has drunk his fill of it he can assemble all of these qualities and in his though make them his own.[92]

Figure 14. Titian, *The Bacchanal of the Andrians*, oil on canvas, c. 1526. Museo del Prado in Madrid. https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-andrians/c5309744-5826-48ac-890e-038336907c52.

Titian immortalizes "a world in which everyone is rich, powerful, generous and tall, at least in their own intoxicated imaginings."[93] The scene is chaotic, mindless and contains "no narrative" and there is a sexual tension highlighted by the nude figure in the foreground of the right-hand corner, offering herself blatantly to the viewer.[94] Her pale, nude body draws the viewer's eye and travels down her legs into the hectic scene, immediately confronted with a small boy who wears an ivy crown as he urinates on the ground near her feet. Two women recline next to a sheet of music, flutes limp in their hands as they converse and one offers her empty bowl to a man intent on refilling it. The sheet music relays the theme of the entire scene, "Qui boyt et ne reboyt/Il ne scet que boyr soit," which translates to "Who drinks

and does not drink again does not know what drinking is."[95] Men and women in every state of drunkenness are represented, dancing together in a wild cohesion of bodies. The moving figures evoke a sense of noise, shrieking laughter and loud conversations between dance partners and small groups that draw attention for a brief moment before being hurried onto the next. The mythical river is not shown, but multiple carafes full of wine depicted in the hands of revelers and the shattered ones on the ground suggest there is no shortage. There is no sense of time or space, the characters shown in Roman drapery, Renaissance dress, and nude, giving a sense that there is no beginning or end to the vivacious party. Bacchus has already arrived, and as Philostratus describes, has brought with him satyrs and silenoi and maenads to join in, but they are indistinguishable in the mass of clustered bodies caught in the height of pleasure. White sails are visible in the background, a single revelers hand and an a tree branch frame the fleeting ship as it appears to sail away from the harbor of Andros, his passengers now in the clutch of the drunken Bacchus. The figure of Bacchus is the orchestrator and catalyst of this event, but his participation is minimal as he reclines atop a nearby hill. He leans back in a relaxed position, in a pile of grapes and leaves, his head tilted towards his bacchanal but his eyes appear closed. This new aspect of Dionysus is different, however is utilized in much the same way as the ancients, as a token for freedom from culturally opposed conduct.

This image emphasizes Bacchus as an initiator, much as his gift to mankind frees those from restrictions, his appearance signals his ability to redefine the world around him. This world is apart from human plane, dictated by powers of society, government and cultural rule—but allows a viewer to insert themselves into the island of the Andrians and become a part of the erotic, chaotic fantasy presented by Titian. The artist "reinterprets these possibilities for an aristocratic Renaissance viewer who has no need to fantasize about social status. His fantasies take from a position of wealth and power to a place where all distinction of rank, gender, and time are dissolved in a free erotic mingling."[96] Although Bacchus is barely seen here, his influence is evident in every single figure depicted and his symbolism and iconography is shown through their behavior. It appears as if the revelers are under a kind of compulsion, an infection that has spread to the entire crowd and offers an open invitation for the viewer to join in, shed their own expectations of daily life, and join the Andrians in their never ending celebration. This picture inspired others, once it was moved from its private setting to the Ludovisi in 1621, and there are renditions by van Dyck, Poussin, Sacchi and Cartona.[97] Francis Bacon, an English philosopher and statesman, equates Bacchus to *'cupiditas'*, or desire and represented the boundless pursuit for whatever was deeply desired, whether it was "honour or fortune or love or glory or knowledge."[98] Although ancient followers of the Bacchic cult emphasized the hypnotic, compulsive quality of the god that demanded the revelers accede to the madness, these images defy tradition in their abundance of wealth, sex and freedom.

Maerton Van Heemskerk, who spent a considerable time in Italy before the creation of this particular work, painted the *Triumphal Procession of Bacchus* in 1573 (Fig. 18), at the height of Mannerism. Bacchus has become a fleshy, corpulent figure that has completely lost control of himself, nearly unconscious in his chariot pulled by cheetahs. Bacchus is unable to support himself as he is hoisted above the heads of the revelers who dance, sing and summersault across the canvas. One particularly festive follower even goes so far as to tweak the breast of the god while the others dance and do somersaults throughout the procession. Like with the island of the Andrians, there seems to be no distinct timeframe or a mixture of eras, the broken foot in the left hand corner a remnant from the Portico of Octavia in Rome.[99] Ruins that are in different levels of decay and destruction surround them, and sculpted fauns with erect phalluses hold up a mysterious unknown arch in the background. Through the archway, a collection of smaller figures can be seen carrying a body up the hill in another procession. There is madness and chaos among the figures in the foreground, a cacophony of sounds and shouts as the revelers engage themselves in singing and dancing, and some vomit or defecate between the characters. Panpipes, flutes, and trumpets are found in the hands of the revelers—bells on the feet of one nude figure in the midst of a flip—and some even bang rocks together to add to the clamor. Humans mix with mythological characters, like on the island of Andros, the furry legs of fauns peeking out between the bodies. The artist mixes ages, sexes and races, every creature is unable to withstand the command of Bacchus, who infects them with his power and controls them despite being even barely conscious. He is uncontrolled, wild, and unrefined; the artist has used him as a catalyst to refer to a distant past in order to discuss social freedoms discouraged in the present day.

Figure 15. Maarten van Heemskerck, *Triumphal Procession of Bacchus*, oil on canvas, 1536-1537, The Frans Hals Museum, Kunsthistor isches Museum, 56.3 cm (22.1"), 106.5 (41.9"). https://www.wikiart.org/en/maerten-van-heemskerck/the-triumphal-procession-of-bacchus.

This chaos, as seen in the ancient pieces where women dance and sing, extends to everyone that surrounds Bacchus and is part of his cult in an undeniable compulsion. These characters have given into the seduction of chaos and revelry, and every social construct has been destroyed in the god's wake.[100] There are no rules in these mythological worlds were time, space, or reality seems to be fully able to reach. But, here, unlike the island of Andros, the party has continued on too long for some of the revelers who are now vomiting and unable to hold themselves up. The broken foot in the corner reminds the viewer that Bacchus and his gift to mankind "destroys bodies."[101] The idea is mimicked in some of the more inebriated figures, and Bacchus himself is barely conscious. He is often seen reclining or sitting, as he is in the Villa of the Mysteries, but his power is visible in every figure that dances and drinks in his honor. His is a destructive force in this painting, and despite the pleasure he brings to those around him, his ability to destroy is evident in the ruins that are scattered around the feet of the partygoers. There are no boundaries among the figures shown, who intermingle between every race, gender and age, in such a way that would not have been socially or culturally acceptable among higher classes that commissioned such ornate pieces. The figures, and the patron, would be able to experience complete freedom and mobility when viewing this painting.

Caravaggio, an Italian Baroque painter and a pupil of Titian, utilized the imagery of Bacchus as a representation of his position as an outcast, and perhaps an instigator, in society.[102] The *Sick Bacchus* is a self-portrait he completed in 1593, after he had fallen incredibly ill and had spent time in a Roman hospital (Fig. 19).[103] His skin is jaundiced, an unhealthy greenish-yellow that immediately registers as sickness to a viewer. His lips are white and blue, and his eyes are ringed with dark bags and bloodshot, and appear wide and wild, unfocused. He leans against a hard, concrete table as he looks back at the viewer, as if he is about to laugh at the concern for his well being. He wears a toga, tied at the waist, and a ringlet of greenery in his dark hair as he desperately clutches a cluster of green grapes with two hands. The grapes and the other pieces of fruit, two peaches and dark purple grapes, are all bruised and past their prime, just nearly rotting. The background is completely dark; Caravaggio's typical tenebrism making this image incredibly more eerie. The light across the back and shoulder appears to be white and sterile, which emphasizes the green undertones of his flesh. His legs are just barely visible, almost entirely obscured by shadows and darkness in the right hand corner.

This imagery of Bacchus shows the god as human, but still utilizes the representations of the deity projected onto a human body. Here, he has made himself sick with wine and poor habits, and suffers from his own creation on earth. Caravaggio plays with the grotesque, evident in his exaggerated appearance. This Bacchus appears to be closer to a cadaver than a deity. This image of Bacchus serves as an equal warning as the eye-cups, whose hypnotic gaze warns fellow drinkers in the symposia not to overindulge—which, instead of passing over into the realm of the gods and endangering their anger, this portrait warns those that continue to drink and risk their lives.

Caravaggio's *Bacchus*, painted in 1596, depicts the god in an equally familiar and unfamiliar way (Fig. 20). Much like the Roman Bacchus, he is young with wide, shameless eyes that peer directly at the viewer. However, his body is not muscular or lithe, but soft and youthful with a round, cherubic face that denotes a fairly young age. Caravaggio

uses a model he was known to have used in various paintings, such as *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, and *Boy with Basket of Fruit*.[104] He lounges back on a couch, wrapped loosely in a white sheet barely attached with a tie at his waist like a Roman toga. He wears a heavy crown of grapes and leaves with his face flushed a brilliant red from inebriation. He extends his arm, offering his glass of wine, so full it nearly spills over the edge. With his other hand he fiddles with his toga, another offering to the viewer and flaunts himself with a blatant sexual undertone. His eyes are lidded and he may even be wearing some makeup across his brows and lips. The table before him appears to mimic his offer, as a bowl full of plump, ripe fruit and a glass carafe full of wine intensify the tension of the piece. Once again, the piece plays with *cupiditas*, or desire, perhaps homosexual in nature in which Bacchus represents the freedom to express sexual desire and tension.

Figures 16 and 17. Caravaggio, *The Young Sick Bacchus*, c. 1593, oil on canvas, Galleria Borghese, Rome, (67cm x 53cm) and *Bacchus*, c. 1595, Uffizi Museum, Florence, Italy, 95cmx85cm, oil on canvas. http://galleriaborghese.beniculturali.it/en/opera/self-portrait-as-bacchus-sick-bacchus. https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/bacchus.

This Bacchus may have some similar attributes to the god, but his overtly sexual air references a different kind of freedom explored during this new era. Despite his contemporary look, Dionysus remains an embodiment of freedom and continues to portray opposing cultural views. Caravaggio has brought Bacchus down from the hilltops and mountains, shown him as a young man with a farmer's tan. He has given the god tangibility, an earthly and physical presence that makes his offer more real to the viewer. This, in truth, is not a version of Bacchus so much as it is a portrait that utilizes his traits and appearance to mythologize a scene. But how his imagery is applied indicates his symbolism as an outsider god, one who defies all expectations blatantly and his iconography immediately implies a rejection of cultural norms.

The Spanish Baroque artist Velazquez painted a rendition of Bacchus much like Caravaggio's entitled *The Triumph of Bacchus* or *Los Borrachos* in 1628 (Fig. 21), he appears as a young man amidst everyday people. He is incredibly pale among the farmers, with fabric draped loosely over his lap and wears a thick crown of grape leaves. He is surrounded by followers and one man bows to receive a wreath of ivy as the others around him drink and speak together in a huddle. There are empty pitchers around Bacchus' feet, and those around him hold earthenware bowls and cups full of wine. One figure looks towards the viewer with a bowl raised in offering, as if to entrance us into the picture and join Bacchus and his cult in celebration. This is an intimate view, a secretive meeting much like the earliest triumphal processions on Greek pottery, but this figure is not a man masquerading as Bacchus but appears as the god

himself among farmers. The humans around Bacchus seem to have spent the entire day working in the sunlight, tilling in the fields just barely seen over the shoulders of the figures. One man is sprawled behind the seated Bacchus, holding a long stemmed glass full of a pale liquid, and gazing downward at Bacchus longingly. His other hand grasps the sheet wrapped around Bacchus' lap, who seems to be caught right before he turns to see the man behind him. Bacchus does not look directly toward us, but he wears a slight smile as if he knows that he is watched.

Figure 18. Diego Velazquez, The Triumph of Bacchus, c. 1628-1629, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain, 165cmx225cm, oil on canvas. https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-feast-of-bacchus/4a23d5e2-9fd4-496b-806b-0f8ba913b3d8.

This, like Caravaggio's works earlier, has a much quieter presence in comparison to van Heemskerck or Titian and appears much more intimate than the crazed, loud triumphs presented earlier. He is depicted soft and feminine, similarly shown as Caravaggio's *Bacchus* and how he was described in Euripides' *Bacchae*. And just like Caravaggio, there is a sexual quality represented here in the fullness of his lips and looseness of his wrap. The man behind him is holding onto the fabric, perhaps in the desire to remove it from the young Bacchus, and stand as representative of him being an outsider in the sense of his sexual desire for Bacchus. The others, however, seem to be pleasantly drunk and completely within control of themselves as they converse quietly in the growing darkness of the woods. No one is tumbling over themselves, sickened due to wine or passed out in the corner, but they are still deeply under his influence. Bacchus is a representative of these men who are outsiders and of a lower status. This is also connected to the Roman iconography that associates Bacchus to the cycles and seasons, an agricultural deity that is equally connected to the fields and wine production as he is to its effects and influences.

Figure 19. Juan Carreno, Eugenia Martinez Vallejo Naked, c. 1680, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain, 165cmx108cm, oil on canvas. https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/eugenia-martinez-vallejo-naked/8e2d05fe-8310-469f-9154-45a7706515fd?searchMeta=la%20monstrua.

After Velazquez, another Spanish Baroque artist capitalized on the imagery of Bacchus to discuss another figure outside societal acceptance. Juan Carreno painted a portrait of a young corpulent girl dubbed "La Monstrua" dressed in the guise of Bacchus (Fig. 22). Eugenia Martinez Vallejo was six years old when she was introduced to the Spanish court as an *hombre de placer*, a person frequently exhibiting physical abnormalities, to be touted for entertainment among the nobles.[105] She stands, nude, save a small grape leaf barely covering her sex from the viewer and a heavy wreath of grape leaves and fruit crown her head. She leans against a pillar, her head bowed and looking away. Her corpulent body is juxtaposed by the daintiness of her small and hand and fingers, and her face is set into a frown as she looks towards the right corner. In order to show Eugenia in the nude, Carreno depicted her in the guise of a god. This was part of dual portraiture commissioned by Charles II, one where the young girl was in the nude and the other where she is dressed in heavy, decorative finery. Her age is indefinite due to her heaviness and the roundness of her face, but she is depicted to seem rather short and squat, which could reference a young age. Her body also seems to lack any mature features, which makes her appear somewhat androgynous or even masculine. Next to her elbow is a selection of fruits bathed in the shadows of the background, just barely visible. She is portrayed to appear like Bacchus' corpulent images that are prevalent in the Baroque period.

Carreno follows previous portraiture of those exhibiting abnormalities, using the correlation with Bacchus to represent

her as a figure outside the expected or what is normal.[106] Her image is that of a young Bacchus, completely nude and bare to an audience that was full of ridicule and censure for her. Bacchus reveled in his own inebriation, his madness, and chaos in both Titian's and van Heemskerck's renditions of the *Triumph of Bacchus*—there was no shame in his depictions, and he openly flaunts what makes him an outsider among others. Even when he is used as a guise to refer to the artist's own position in society, such as in Caravaggio's pieces, he freely laughs at his own follies and mistakes in Renaissance and Baroque painting. However, he is a figure of excess, over indulgence, and even greed or *cupiditas*, which "La Monstrua" seems to represent in her relation to Bacchus. Perhaps that artist also was attempting to correlate her to his relation as an outsider god, a representative of the downtrodden and silenced by society. In the ancient world, this was mainly women who were able to organize and run the cult, as well as participate in events outside the home. In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, this included those of a lower class status, other races, and those not ordinarily accepted among society. His depiction here is both a commentary on excess and the grotesque parts of society most often not depicted, but it also incorporates his constant use as a god of those disregarded and powerless.

12. Conclusion

The many forms and guises of Dionysus continue to be used by artists to express freedom and to obliterate barriers between genders, sexes, social classes, and races. Whatever is expected as "normal" or mundane, Dionysus contradicts—he transforms himself and infects those that follow him, rewarding them with complete and utter freedom from the laws of man. Violence and bloodshed, exertion and freedom, and feminine power defined his cult and the art that surrounds him reflects this idea of chaos. During a time when women were considered best kept hidden away inside, he offered them an autonomy from male influence and control. What can be clearly said about the cult of Dionysus, particularly though the play the *Bacchae*, is very little. However, his perception of anarchy, chaos, madness and freedom portrayed in Euripides play has been used by artists for centuries to discuss and defy cultural restrictions. His youthful and idealized image preferred by the Romans used Bacchus an apotropaic symbol connected to cyclical rebirth and the natural rhythms of nature. He offered them freedom from death and societal restrictions, while women continued to hold a central role in the cult. His iconography and imagery are correlated to that of the Christ figure, which spurs a shift in his later renditions. When he is revitalized in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, he appears as both a sensual youth and a corpulent being of excess, remaining an icon of those outside society. These images highlight the extremity of Bacchus and his ability to infect and inflame those around him to madness and obliterate the cultural expectations between genders, races and classes.

13. References

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