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Margaret McDonald

Trinity University, mail@megmcdonald.com

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**Blood in a Wine Glass: Dionysian Vampires in Modern Horror**

**By Meg McDonald**

**Senior Honors Thesis**

**Classical Studies Department**

**Advisor: Erwin Cook**

**Research Supervised by: Benjamin Stevens**

## Introduction

In this paper I argue that Dionysus, as depicted in Euripides's *Bacchae*, has structural similarities and shared features with modern vampires, as depicted in works by Le Fanu, Stoker, and Rice. I do this by presenting broad categories of comparison, in which I lay out parallels between Dionysus and vampires which are present within that category. In the first section, 'Altered States and Substances,' I connect the altered state of being a vampire and the state of Dionysian mania and examine the structural parallels between those who experience these states. As well, I briefly explore the similarities between Dionysus's relationship with wine, and vampires' relationship with blood. In 'Twice Born or Death and Rebirth,' I draw out the direct connection between Dionysus's two births and the process by which vampires are reborn when they are created. During 'Social Transgression,' I outline the ways that both Dionysus and vampires reject and subvert social standards in many of the same ways. In 'Youthful Form and Mature Mind,' I explore the parallels between the youthful physical appearance of Dionysus and vampires that are juxtaposed by having mature minds which don't align with their bodies. Lastly, in 'Xenophobia,' I argue that Dionysus and Dracula are both treated as foreigners through similar stereotypes and rhetoric, despite Dionysus being Greek.

At first glance, it may be difficult to imagine direct connections between Dionysus, an ancient Greek god, and vampires, blood-sucking monsters. The study of how cultural products from ancient Mediterranean societies are translated and transformed into modern art and culture is called Classical Receptions. While reception studies has become increasingly prominent in the field of Classics, there are still entire genres of literature and film that remain largely unstudied, including modern horror.

Vampire fiction begins with the novella *Carmilla*, written in 1872 by Sheridan Le Fanu, which inspired Bram Stoker's genre-defining *Dracula* in 1897. While the influence of *Dracula* continues into the present day, a moodier variety of vampire came to prominence in 1976 with the release of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, the first book in her series *The Vampire Chronicles*. Throughout these books she poses vampires as the protagonists, with formats such as the eponymous interview of the first book, a first-person memoir in the second and several later books, and a collection of stories based on shared consciousness and interviews amongst vampires in the third. Through direct accounts from vampires about their experiences, Rice's books explore the good, bad, and often sexy realities of being an immortal vampire living in a human world. The protagonist of *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis, paved the way for a host of other morally tortured vampires, from Ford Francis Coppola's interpretation of love-sick Dracula to Stephanie Meyer's self-loathing Mormon vampire, Edward Cullen. Stoker's and Rice's works continue to be adapted and updated for modern audiences, with season one of AMC's television adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire* debuting in 2022, and the horror-comedy film *Renfield*, starring Nicholas Cage as Dracula, releasing in 2023.

Since vampire fiction boasts a diverse and bountiful collection of works from across three centuries, I have needed to limit my survey of the material drastically. As mentioned earlier, my core texts are Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, and some recent film adaptations when relevant. Although each of these texts build off of its predecessors, they all provide distinct and influential conceptions of vampires which, in both overlapping and individual ways, are connected to Dionysus. By choosing three canons which each help define vampire literature in subsequent decades, I demonstrate even with this fairly small selection that significant parallels between vampires and Dionysus exist across the

vampire genre as a whole, not only in a single text or as a fluke. Regarding Dionysus, I have chosen Euripides' *Bacchae* as my main text due to its coherent portrait as a single source, its representation of aspects of the god well suited for my project, and its popularity as part of a humanities education. The *Bacchae* also stood out as an ideal choice since, due to its status as a play, Dionysus himself reveals his nature in conformity with the presentation of vampires in modern literature. While a play such as Aristophanes' *Frogs* does so as well, the *Bacchae* includes features of himself and his cult that broaden and strengthen his connection to vampires. Although I have generally focused on this text, I have supplemented my argument when relevant with vase paintings, Orphic traditions, and *Dionysus in '69*, a modern reception of the *Bacchae*, which are able to provide additional cultural and religious context to my analysis of Euripides. While a general knowledge of Ancient Greek mythology has long pervaded the collective consciousness of Western society and made connections between modern and ancient texts inevitable, the relationship between vampires and Dionysus draws on an at least basic familiarity with ancient literature. Although it would be nearly impossible to know for certain if Carmilla, Dracula, or any of Anne Rice's vampires were originally created specifically with Dionysus in mind, all three authors are known to be well read. Both Le Fanu and Stoker attended Trinity College in Dublin and, during their time there, were both elected auditor of the College Historical Society, a distinguished student organization for debating. As well, Anne Rice was college-educated and incredibly well read, which is reflected in her work. While *Dracula* is littered with fleeting references to Classics, the most explicit parallels come from Anne Rice's second book in her *Vampire Chronicles*, "The Vampire Lestat," which features an epilogue-esque section titled "Dionysus in San Francisco" that can only be understood as a direct reference to *Dionysus in '69*, an explicitly homosexual interpretation of the *Bacchae*. Although the

eponymous Lestat is first introduced in *Interview with the Vampire*, he is almost entirely reimagined in *The Vampire Lestat*, going from cruel and impenetrable to charismatic and sympathetic. With the context of this section title, it is not a stretch to believe that, despite not being initially intended as such, Rice is reintroducing Lestat as a Dionysian figure. However, I will show that the connection between vampires and Dionysus is more extensive than a single allusion.

### **Altered States and Substances**

During Euripides's *Bacchae*, Dionysus creates an altered state for his female followers, allowing them to transcend standard human experiences. However, this transcendence differs between those women who willingly accept the manic state and those who are brought to that state involuntarily as a punishment. While his Lydian maenads who follow him voluntarily experience Dionysian mania as an escape from the standard concerns of mortals, his followers from Thebes, whom he possesses against their will, experience their manic state as savagery and violence. Similarly, vampires bring their victims to an altered state, namely death, which differs significantly between willing victims who are transformed into vampires, and unwilling victims who are simply murdered.

Dionysus's Lydian maenads display a positive form of mania due to their willingness to worship him. The chorus of maenads consists of "women, holy sisterhood, who left barbarian lands and Lydian mountain peaks for me [Dionysus], companions, helpers, fellow-travelers" (*Ba* 55-57). Dionysus's description of these women tells how they have voluntarily abandoned their home country to follow for his worship. "O, the happiness! To know the worship of the gods, to live the holy life, twining yourself with others, as a mountain maenad, blessed and sanctified" (*Ba* 73-9). This description provides a brief outline of the fulfillment to be found in voluntarily

worshipping Dionysus. While they are there of their own accord, the women are able to interact with each other and the god in a divine way. The maenads in the chorus also engage in ecstatic worship, and describe how, "like a filly running beside her mother in the pasture, we maenads leap and bound, kicking our feet in our joy" (*Ba* 166-9). While the motion of a baby horse is often ecstatic and wild, it is out of excitement and an interest in exploring the world. Much the same, the Lydian maenads dance with leaps and bounds as they celebrate the god and experience his divine transcendence.

Unlike the Lydian maenads, the Theban maenads experience Dionysian control in a negative way due to their lack of belief in the god. In his first speech, Dionysus declares, since his aunts denied his divinity, "I stung them till I buzzed them mad: I made them homeless, crazy, mountain-dwellers. I made them wear the uniforms of my cult: out of their homes, out of their minds, I drove all of the female Theban population" (*Ba* 32-6). While the Lydian women joined Dionysus voluntarily, the servitude of the Theban maenads is against their will and designed as punishment. As well, the chorus frequently sings about the need for justice on behalf of Dionysus, but they do not sing of violence they intend to commit themselves. However, the Theban maenads are described with a combination of Dionysian experiences, including nursing wild animals (*Ba* 699-702), producing water, wine, milk, and honey from the earth (*Ba* 704-11), and hunting like wild animals (*Ba* 731-2). While the first two are pleasant, the Theban maenads are almost entirely defined by their shocking displays of violence, as they kill and eat a herd of cattle raw while the herdsmen look on, horrified (*Ba* 728-769). By being forced to exit the city and leave behind their civility, Dionysus is subjecting these women to the laws of nature which can be beautiful when observed, but hostile when challenged.

The Theban maenads's mania continues with the dismemberment of Pentheus where, under the direction of Dionysus, and led by the daughters of Cadmus, the maenads pull the king from a tree rip him apart. While Pentheus understands his fate as it happens, the truly negative effects of the mania on Agave and her sisters come once their true senses have returned and the god's influence has worn off. When Agave returns to the palace, she is holding her son's head triumphantly and gloating about the success of her hunt, fully believing that she and the other maenads were instructed to hunt a lion. Upon first entering the palace, she engages with the Lydian maenads, telling them, "I caught this cub without even a net, this wild young lion cub" (*Ba* 1173-4). While Agave is completely oblivious to the horror of her actions, the Lydian maenads are perfectly capable of seeing reality and respond with horror when she encourages them to see her prize: "No, don't push me to look!" (*Ba* 1168). The choral maenads accept her as a dancing partner in celebration of Dionysus receiving justice (*Ba* 1172), but they once again react in disgust when Agave tells them, "Now share the feast!" They respond, "What, me? Me, share? What horror!" (*Ba* 1185). Nonetheless, even with the negative responses from the other maenads, Agave still proclaims that she is "full of joy" (*Ba* 1197), completely oblivious to reality until her father is able to walk her out of the manic state. Even though the effects of the god's mania have worn off of her physically, the true horror has only just begun, as she is finally able to recognize what she has done which is the real punishment for her rebuke of Dionysus. Perpetrating the violence was not difficult as "the god made easy everything they touched" (*Ba* 1128), but coming to terms with not only the violence that has been committed against her son, but the unbearable reality that she was the one to perpetrate it is even more difficult.

Dionysus's effects can be equated with wine, which is his altering substance. During the *Bacchae*, Dionysus is identified as being one and the same with wine, and characters celebrate



the effects of wine as a way to celebrate Dionysus. While attempting to convince Pentheus to honor Dionysus, Tiresias equates Dionysus with Demeter, explaining, "Young man, there are two basic human needs. Goddess Demeter – in fact the earth, but call her what you like– feeds mortal men on dry and solid food. Then came the son of Semele, who found the liquid counterpart, the juice of grapes" (*Ba* 274-9). Just as Demeter is the earth and the grain it produces, Dionysus is the wine. This is further solidified when Tiresias finishes his story: "this god is poured out as offering to the gods" (*Ba* 284), directly referring to Dionysus the god being poured like wine. This established unity means that, in spite of the report from the cowherd messenger reporting that the Theban women were "not drunk with wine" (*Ba* 687) because they were resting, the maenads were in fact intoxicated with wine, as shown by their being out in the countryside apart from their usual place in society, a liminal state which they are only able to achieve by way of Dionysus, who is wine. This is true for the Lydian maenads as well, who experience the positive effects of wine which inspires their dancing and singing, both pleasures which are given to mankind by Dionysus (*Ba* 773-4). Ultimately, through his status as god and divine substance, Dionysus inspires both the positive and negative effects of wine as he sees fit.

Much like Dionysus, vampires, especially in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, create an altered state for their victims which differs based on the willingness of the participant. The new state achieved by vampires is death which, for willing victims, is a euphoric beginning to an immortal existence, or, for unwilling victims, a painful final destination.

For willing victims, such as Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*, death is a welcome experience following the death of his brother. Louis describes how he "lived like a man who wanted to die, but had no courage to do it himself" (*Interview* 11), before finding his death in the form of a vampire. Louis tells Lestat, "I want to die; kill me. Kill me," but gets cold feet once

Lestat actually bites him: "I thrashed against him wildly. I dug my boot into his chest and kicked him as fiercely as I could" (*Interview 18*). In response to this hesitation, Lestat steps back, and says, "I thought you wanted to die, Louis" (*Interview 18*), and waits for Louis to collect himself and stop fighting back before he continues. After Lestat has drained Louis of nearly all his blood, Louis must again make a choice to become a vampire. Lestat bites his wrist and places it to Louis's mouth and tells him to drink, which Louis does (*Interview 20*). This choice marks his willing transformation into the living death of being a vampire instead of the final death which comes for others who are drained. Even as he begins to see the world in a completely new way as a vampire, Louis's human death is still taking place "I was dying as a human, yet completely alive as a vampire" (*Interview 21*). Yet, despite seeking out his death, he is distressed by watching his body die in front of him, and asks Lestat to explain, to which Lestat replies, "'You're dying, that's all; don't be a fool'... 'It happens to everyone'" (*Interview 22*). While Lestat's response is snarky, it also rings true: while Louis may have chosen death, it ultimately happens for everyone, but his choice to be killed and then reborn as a vampire is something he experiences only because of his willingness.

While every person drained by a vampire dies, most do not receive their death willingly. One such unwilling victim was a prostitute whom Lestat brought home to seduce and drink. Much like when turning someone into a vampire, Lestat begins to drain the prostitute of her blood, but before she has actually been drained to the point of death, in an imitation of the process, he lays her down in his coffin and tells her that she is dead, causing her to panic (*Interview 83*). Unlike Louis who discovered that his body was dying only after the fact, Lestat is reversing the process in a cruel mockery which will only distress the girl before she actually does perish. She quickly realizes that she is lying in a coffin and begs them to let her out, to which

Lestat responds, much in the same way he did to Louis, with "But we all must lie in coffins, eventually!" (*Interview* 84). Once again, Lestat is reversing the vampiric process, with his coy comment about death this time coming across as cruel instead of dismissive as he knows full well that death is not just a road hump on the way to vampiric immortality, but the terrifying final destination and end of her experience, which she has been tricked into thinking has already happened.

In the 2022 TV adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire*, the final episode of season one depicts a similar instance of unwilling victims which serves as another refiguring of the vampiric process. Louis, Lestat, and their daughter, Claudia, prey on the suspicions of some of the locals who have noticed the three not aging over the decades to lure the interested individuals back to the vampires' apartment with the promise of sharing the secret to eternal life ("The Thing Lay Still"). All of these individuals believe that they are going to be willing victims who will attain the eternal youth they have witnessed in the vampires. However, the secret is not what they had hoped, as they discover when the vampire family begins to devour the unsuspecting victims. In a dramatic reveal, the cover is flipped back from a bowl which the victims have been led to believe contains the elixir, only to find out immediately after seeing the bowl is empty that the true answer is their death, which none of them are ready for. The anticipated sharing of eternal life is replaced with an equally eternal alternative, both of which would have involved dying, the very thing all of the victims were there to avoid, turning them from enthusiastic and willing victims into terrified, unwilling victims.

While Dionysian mania is brought on by wine, blood is the substance of choice for vampirism. Vampires are defined by their need to consume blood to live, and the state of vampirism is brought on by that consumption as well. As briefly mentioned earlier, Louis's life

as a vampire begins once he drinks the blood from Lestat's punctured wrist (*Interview* 20). With hardly any human blood left in him, Louis gulps down vampiric blood and feels the change immediately, describing how he "saw nothing but that light then as [he] drew blood" (*Interview* 20). While metaphysically within the story, there is a transformative property to the blood, from a literary perspective, the act of consuming blood is itself the thing which causes the transformation. Since vampirism is defined by the consuming blood, when you consume blood, you become a vampire, a structure that fits other monsters as well, such as werewolves. The process for becoming a werewolf attested in ancient literature is simple: if you consume raw meat, you are a werewolf for ten years, and if you eat it a second time, you become a werewolf permanently (Burkert 85-6). This aspect of vampirism can be traced back to *Dracula* as well, where Van Helsing confirms that, since Mina drinks blood from Dracula, she is condemned to become a vampire once she dies (Stoker 247). Anne Rice has condensed the process significantly, with death happening at the same time as the consumption of blood instead of separately, but it is ultimately maintained that drinking blood is the means by which to become a vampire.

Ultimately, while the states induced by Dionysus and vampires differ on a surface level, the transformative nature and mode of both indicate a structural parallel which is significant but easy to overlook. Direct parallels are even posed in *Interview*, with every adaptation of the story including blood being poured into a wine glass for consumption as a center image of how blood is enjoyed like wine. However, the connection runs deeper than enjoyment when the transformative nature of blood is explored and wine is conceived of in an explicitly Dionysian context as done here.

## Twice Born or Death and Rebirth

Dionysus is unique among the Greek gods because of the unusual circumstances surrounding his birth that led him to be born twice. This aspect is so crucial to his divine identity that there are multiple traditions which provide differing narratives where he is born again following his first exit from the womb. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus's origin as born from both Semele and Zeus is referred to throughout, and the alternate tradition where his second birth happens after being dismembered by the titans is referenced through the *sparagmos* of Pentheus. Vampires also must be born again as part of the process of becoming a vampire since they die as humans before re-emerging as vampires. Although at first glance a double birth and a death and rebirth may seem different, in this section I explain how these two processes are actually equivalent for Dionysus and vampires, which proves a structural connection between their origins.

While both versions of Dionysus's double birth are referenced in the *Bacchae*, the play uses Dionysus's birth from Semele and Zeus as his backstory which explains why he chooses to establish his cult in Thebes before anywhere else in Greece. The complete description of Dionysus's birth comes from the chorus in their first antistrophe of the play:

Long ago lightning  
 flew forth from Zeus  
 to the woman, pregnant, a mother,  
 forcing her painful birth-pangs:  
 and left her life, struck by the blow of thunder.  
 But right away Zeus, son of Cronus,  
 took him and hid him in chambers of birthing,

tucking the baby inside his thigh,  
 fastened together with golden pins  
 to hide him from Hera.

And when the Fates fulfilled the time,  
 Zeus gave birth to a bull-horned god,  
 and crowned him with snakes for a crown. (*Ba* 88-101)

Though it seems completely logical that a premature baby would need to be incubated, particularly to modern readers who are accustomed to low infant mortality rates, it is worthwhile to analyze why Dionysus was placed inside Zeus's thigh. One potential answer, and probably the most obvious, was that Dionysus, as an infant, was not safe from the elements and general exposure to life as he was still underdeveloped. However, this leads to questions about Dionysus's divinity, since one might imagine that, as a god, mortal dangers like exposure would not be of concern. Another answer is simply technical: babies must stay in the womb for nine months before they are born and so, since Dionysus had not been in utero for the right amount of time, Zeus needs to incubate Dionysus for the remainder of his time. A third answer is that Dionysus is in danger of receiving the same fate as his mother because of the wrath of Hera, as suggested by this account of the story, and thus Zeus places him in his thigh solely as a means of protection from Hera. While any or all of these may be true, Zeus's hasty actions, and the fact that he decided to do it at all, indicate that Dionysus was not meant to, or not able to, survive without being in Zeus's thigh, showing just how critical it is to his origin and identity.

Dionysus's peculiar birth is part of his self-identity, as he refers to it when introducing himself at the beginning of the *Bacchae*. As soon as the play opens, Dionysus identifies himself: "I am come to Thebes: I, Dionysus, son of Zeus and son of Cadmus's daughter, Semele,

midwifed by the lightning's fire" (*Ba* 1-3). While most Greek men would identify themselves with only their father's name, Dionysus not only mentions his mother, but feels it is worthwhile to include the circumstances of his untimely birth. He returns to the subject a few lines later: "I see my thunder-blasted mother's tomb, here, near the palace, and the smoking ruin: her home, destroyed by Zeus's flame, still burning: the mark of Hera's everlasting hate" (*Ba* 6-9). During this introduction, Dionysus does not mention his second birth from Zeus, instead providing an account only of his first birth and framing it in the context of death and destruction. Without any reference to his second birth, this statement comes across as though he is visiting his own grave as well as his mother's. While this may not literally be his grave, his story poses it as such, suggesting that he thinks of his mother's death as being his as well.

Although he does not mention it initially, Dionysus identifies with his second birth as well. The chorus describes how Dionysus earned his epithet:

the infant child of Zeus,  
 when his father snatched him  
 from the immortal flaming thunder  
 to hide him in his thigh, and called aloud:

"Come, Twice Born, and enter

this, my manly womb.

I will proclaim to all of Thebes

that this shall be your name: The Lord of Dithyramb, the Double Gate! (*Ba* 522-529)

As he is about to place the fetal Dionysus in his thigh, Zeus has already given him Twice Born, justifiable both by the circular nature of causality regarding gods and as a testament to how crucial this will be to Dionysus's divine identity. Being twice born is a critical aspect to Dionysus

as a nature god as it mirrors the natural cycle of grape production. The vines that grow wine grapes are born twice each year since they flourish for part of the year, fall dormant, and then are born again to produce more grapes in the new season. As well, wine adheres to this framework of double birth since it is squeezed from grapes in the fall, stored away to age— specifically underground in large pots called *pithoi*, which were also used for grain storage and as urns for the dead— and then brought back out again for people to drink. Exhuming the aged wine from the ground was a defining aspect of the winemaking process that was ritualized in the Athenian religious festival of the Anthesteria. As well, this festival, which featured a day where spirits of the dead were thought to return to earth, literalizes the symbolic connections between the winemaking process and the process of death and resurrection (Parke 107-112). Due to the dual nature of *pithoi* as both wine-jars and urns, opening them serves as a resurrection for both the wine and spirits, further connecting the image of a second birth with a return from the dead. Continuing with an anthropological perspective, in *Rites of Passage*, Arnold van Gennep describes how the earth is "the home of children before they are born— not symbolically as a mother, but physically, as it is the home of the dead" (van Gennep 52). By identifying the home of the dead as being where children are before they are born, this conception reaffirms the idea that, like the bringing up of wine from the ground and spirits walking the earth, the exit from the womb marks a change from death to life.

Another story of Dionysus's birth, often referred to as the Orphic tradition, frames a double birth as key to Dionysus's origin: here the son of Zeus and Persephone, Dionysus is torn apart by the Titans, boiled, and tasted. His heart is brought to Zeus in a casket and his limbs are collected and entrusted to Apollo to be interred before he is reborn from his heart (West 74). Although the *Bacchae* does not use this version as part of Dionysus's story, it is referenced



through Pentheus's *sparagmos* which follows the same structure of violent dismemberment followed by the gathering of pieces. After being torn apart by the maenads (*Ba* 1125-33), Cadmus hears of his grandson's fate and collects the pieces of Pentheus's body before returning to the palace and announcing: "I labored hard searching and searching for the pieces, scattered on Mount Cithaeron's slopes and in the woods: no easy search as they lay so far apart" (*Ba* 1218-21). There are several parallels between the Orphic tradition and Pentheus's death, including the separation of pieces, not just from the body during dismemberment, but from one another during consumption or scattering, as well as the collection of the pieces to be buried together. These would have been recognizable as a reference to the Orphic tradition, with Pentheus serving as a stand-in of similar age and the same family to be sacrificed instead of Dionysus, with the punishment of not being revived.

Vampires also go through a process of death and rebirth which marks their transition from mortal to vampire. Because she writes about vampires from their own perspectives, Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* feature the most in-depth descriptions of the process of becoming a vampire. In *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis describes in great detail his transition into a vampire:

"I saw as a vampire'... 'I saw [Lestat] as I could not have possibly seen him before. [...]

And then I saw that not only Lestat had changed, but all things had changed. It was as if I

had only just been able to see colors and shapes for the first time." (*Interview* 21)

As a vampire, Louis's senses have changed completely, showing him the world in a whole new way. Not only his sight had changed, but his hearing as well: "Then Lestat began to laugh, and I heard his laughter as I had never heard anything before. ... It was confusing, each sound running into the next sound, like the mingling reverberations of bells, until I learned to separate the sounds, and then they overlapped, each soft but distinct, increasing but discrete, peals of

laughter" (*Interview 21*). Like a baby, Louis must learn, or in this case, relearn, how to understand the sounds he is hearing, and is engulfed in a sense of wonder as he experiences an existence that is completely different from his prior one as a human. However, his body has not transitioned as quickly as his mind: "As for my body, it was not yet totally converted, and as soon as I became the least accustomed to the sounds and sights [of being a vampire] it began to ache. All my human fluids were being forced out of me. I was dying as a human, yet completely alive as a vampire" (*Interview 21*). Although Louis experiences the transformation of his body after death as a slow process which he notices only after the wonder and distraction of his new senses has faded, his death occurred as soon as he was turned into a vampire. Because, in the *Vampire Chronicles*, vampires are only able to drink blood from a person until right before the person's heart stops beating, since drinking blood from a dead person will poison a vampire (*Interview 30*), we can determine that Louis's death occurs right after Lestat finishes draining all of his blood. While what Louis sees as his body dying should probably be identified as decomposition, Rice has explicitly identified death as being part of the process of becoming a vampire.

Another instance of the transformation from human to vampire occurs to Lucy Westenra in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. After she has been repeatedly attacked and fed on by Dracula, Lucy eventually succumbs to her blood loss and dies, despite the best efforts of the group of men working to save her. However, as noted by one of the men, Dr. Seward, "all Lucy's loveliness had come back to her in death, and the hours that had passed, instead of leaving traces of 'decay's effacing fingers,' had but restored the beauty of life" (Stoker 148-9). While the men had all seen Lucy die just hours before, Dr. Seward, who is keenly aware of the standard process of human decomposition due to his status as a physician, explicitly describes how Lucy had not only defied

the natural decay, but had returned to a life-like appearance even more lively than she had when she died. Despite her appearance, Van Helsing, another member of the group and an expert in both natural and supernatural phenomena, regularly makes distinctions about Lucy's status in regards to life and death: "I did not say she was alive, my child; I did not think it. I go no further than to say that she might be Un-Dead" (Stoker 183). However, this is functionally a non-difference since to be un-dead is to be alive, and the distinction Van Helsing is attempting to make is more as an adherence to the religious sensibilities of his comrades. Further, when they return to her tomb to put her to rest for good, the group of men discover Lucy missing from her coffin, and watch as she walks back into the mausoleum, even more strikingly beautiful when she was alive but now evil. Despite Van Helsing's attempt to suggest that Lucy is no longer herself, she is able to call out to her previous fiancé by name, singling him out from among the group as though she remembered that he would be most easily swayed by her (Stoker 188). While her mannerisms and motives appear to have changed quite drastically, and she has become a monster that these men must slay as much as a soul to be saved, it is clear that she has come back to life in many ways following her untimely death.

Despite the initial disconnect between Dionysus being born twice and vampires dying and being reborn, when further explored, we find that Dionysus's double birth is often conceived of as a death and rebirth, which illuminates the connections between the two. This structure also is shown to be a crucial part of the origins of both vampires and Dionysus since they are defined by their status as reborn.

### **Social Transgression**

As a god of boundary-crossing, Dionysus is innately linked to social transgressions, a theme central to Euripides's *Bacchae*. Social transgression is expressed throughout the *Bacchae*

through Dionysus allowing women to forgo their standard place in society, the portrayal of homosexual desire, and description of non-traditionally masculine physical appearance. Vampire stories also regularly explore themes of transgression, including through depictions of female vampires who take advantage of social expectations for women in order to lure in prey, transgressive forms of sexuality, and atypical expressions of gender.

The first way that Dionysus facilitates social transgression is by allowing his female followers, maenads, to abandon their expected place in society. Prior to the beginning of the *Bacchae*, Dionysus: "out of their homes, out of their minds, I drove all of the female Thaban population" (*Ba* 35-6). In Athenian society, the ideal woman stayed inside and managed the home, so by sending them away from their home, particularly outside of male supervision, Dionysus is causing them to abandon their social roles and obligations. Since these new bacchantes have now been physically and mentally relieved of their social expectations, they dance in the countryside with their hair "let... down to their shoulders" (*Ba* 695), while socially conforming women would have had their hair done up in braids. Not only are they abandoning their duties and male supervision, but, even when men are present, the women are not submissive and cannot even be subdued by the men. When a messenger reports back to Pentheus about the actions of the maenads, he recounts his group's attempt to catch them, ultimately concluding:

"We made a quick retreat— we didn't want  
those maenads tearing us apart. The women,  
holding no swords, attacked a grazing herd  
of cattle." (*Ba* 734-7).

Women were expected to be submissive, but if they weren't, there was at least an expectation that they could be controlled by violence if necessary. However, Dionysus's maenads cannot be

controlled even by force due to their preternatural strength and their proclivity for violence. War, fighting, and other forms of aggression were reserved exclusively for men in Greek society, hence the pervasiveness of stories about the horrors of women who commit acts of violence, including the mythic tradition around the Amazonomachy and Euripides's *Medea*. The maenads' violent tendencies do not stop at cows, however, and lead the women of Thebes to rip Pentheus apart at Dionysus's behest (*Ba* 1121-41). Pentheus's mother was the "first to fall on him" (*Ba* 1115) despite the fact that Pentheus identifies himself and begs for mercy. Completely consumed by Dionysian madness, Agave cannot recognize him and does not stop. While violence is always transgressive for women, Agave has forsaken her role as a mother as well. Agave's actions illustrate how Dionysus causes women to transgress against the social order at large as well as their familial roles.

Dionysus also embodies social transgression through his gender expression, which is unconventionally feminine for his age. Once Pentheus captures Dionysus, he begins describing Dionysus's features: "Your hair is long, unsuitable for wrestling: it ripples down your cheeks so alluringly" (*Ba* 455-456). Dionysus is often depicted as having long hair and no beard which is typical for ephebes. However, boys of all ages are well documented as having engaged in athletic activity, with no common assumption that their hair hindered their abilities. Therefore, it is all the more peculiar that Pentheus would make this suggestion if only to emphasize Dionysus's femininity by claiming he is unable to engage in the masculine activity of wrestling. Pentheus continues: "Your skin is white: you must take care of it, avoiding sunlight, staying in the shade, hunting Aphrodite with your beauty" (*Ba* 457-459). Now Pentheus is not only attempting to emasculate Dionysus, but actually describes him as a woman by implying that he, like a wealthy matron, stays in the house and away from the sun all day to achieve such pale skin (Martin

174-175). Pentheus even uses the word καλλονῆ, a rare feminine form of a noun which means beauty, instead of κάλος, the standard masculine form (“καλλονή” 869), emphasizing the femininity of Dionysus's beauty. Pentheus describes only features of Dionysus which make him appear feminine, emphasizing how Dionysus subverts the social expectations for gender presentation in adult men.

The context of Pentheus's comments highlight Dionysus's association with homosexuality as well as his gender presentation. Before describing Dionysus's feminine features, Pentheus tells Dionysus, "I can see you are attractive, to women anyway– that's why you came here" (*Ba* 453-454). Pentheus believes that Dionysus has come to Thebes to steal away the women for sexually illicit purposes and insinuates as much. However, Dionysus is not actually engaging in sexual acts with the women, so it seems necessary to consider other options, the most obvious being that Pentheus meant exactly what he said: he finds Dionysus attractive. As soon as he says it, Pentheus tries to qualify his statement since homosexual attraction was not seen as socially acceptable, especially by a person in a position of political power (Winkler 57) like Pentheus. Despite clearly believing it is inappropriate to have, let alone express, attraction, Pentheus's almost immediate comment on Dionysus's appearance shows just how easily Dionysus draws out the socially transgressive aspects of those around him.

No discussion of social transgression in the *Bacchae* would be complete without Pentheus's cross-dressing. Near the end of the play, Pentheus has been persuaded that he wishes to spy on the Bacchantes. Dionysus also convinces Pentheus that, since the rites are only for women, he will have to disguise himself as a woman to go (*Ba* 810-41). Dionysus's humiliation of Pentheus by dressing him in women's clothes turns Pentheus's socially acceptable reluctance into excitement as he asks Dionysus: "How do I look? How is my posture? Is it like my aunt's or

my mother's way of standing?" (*Ba* 925-6). He also worries over his hair after practicing his Bacchic reveling (*Ba* 930-1), which is completely at odds with his prior statements about Dionysus and his followers. Seducing Pentheus into not only wearing women's clothes, but enjoying and dancing around in them, results in an ironic display of joy from Pentheus. While he is blinded by his own enthusiasm, he is unable to see that he is being lured into a false sense of security in his social transgression, only for it to be used against him for public humiliation when he is willingly paraded through the streets.

Richard Schechner's infamous *Dionysus in '69* interprets the whole of the play as an explicit homosexual awakening for Pentheus at the hands of Dionysus. While the play draws heavily from Euripides for its version of the conversation between Dionysus and Pentheus, comments and physical motions have been added that indicate a reciprocal interest from Dionysus in order to solidify the homosexual subtext into concrete plot. At the pivotal moment for Pentheus, instead of persuading him to cross-dress, Dionysus convinces Pentheus to make love with him. Their conversation is accompanied by physical wrestling where, after facing off, Dionysus kisses Pentheus before putting him in a headlock. After he lets go, Pentheus agrees to have sex with Dionysus and they disappear off stage to follow through (De Palma). While the original play debuted a year earlier, Brian De Palma's filmed version is a combination of two performances, one from both June and July of 1969, with the Stonewall riots taking place in June of that same year. Evidently, homosexuality was emerging into the public consciousness in this period, and was thus a relevant and modern topic to be explored through an ancient text. However, despite the social relevance of presenting Pentheus's homosexuality as a chief interest of the production, *Dionysus in '69* has correctly identified the *Bacchae* as a socially transgressive

text and simply drawn on the subtext already present in order to adapt it to be relevant for modern audiences rather than alter it entirely.

Like the *Bacchae*, social transgression is a defining feature of vampire fiction which it uses to cause fear in its audience. By utilizing readers' mistrust of the unfamiliar and the inconspicuous, vampire stories create a sense of unease by indicating a threat to the social order. This approach to horror, along with other innate aspects of the act of vampirism, associates vampires with many types of marginalized people participating in acts which are deemed socially unacceptable, including women, homosexual individuals, and those who do not conform to prescribed ideas of gender presentation.

Modern vampire stories subvert social expectations of women by portraying female vampires as powerful threats not only in spite of, but with the help of, their docile or alluring appearances. One of the oldest and most notable instances of a female vampire is Carmilla, in Le Fanu's eponymous novel, who is able to gain access to her long-term victims using her appearance as a teenage girl. The protagonist, Laura, and her father witness a carriage crash in front of their estate and find "a young lady, who appeared to be lifeless" for which Laura's "dear old father was ... tendering his aid and the resources of his [manor]" (Le Fanu ch. 2). Laura's father is generous to take in Carmilla, particularly for three months, but as a man of high enough status to have an estate, it is expected that he would be willing to extend his kindness to a helpless young girl. Laura's father presumes that Carmilla will be good company for the socially isolated Laura, who does not normally get to spend time with other girls her age (Le Fanu ch. 2). However, these very assumptions enable Carmilla to seduce and prey on Laura and, despite her strange sleep schedule and an oddly timed plague which appears nearby soon after Carmilla arrives, she is not suspected until months later, because it is inconceivable in the context of



societal conventions that she could be the cause of any harm. By subverting the docile social role she has been assigned and instead harming those who have extended kindness to her, Carmilla becomes more monstrous socially as well as physically.

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, female vampires transgress social expectations by harming children. During his time as Dracula's prisoner, Jonathan explores the castle, and one night finds a group of women who seduce him. However, before they can drink his blood or otherwise harm him, Dracula fends them off since he is not yet finished with Jonathan. As Dracula takes him away, the women ask "Are we to have nothing tonight?" They then point to the bag which Dracula has tossed on the floor which "moved as though there were something living within it" and produced a "wail, as of a half-smothered child" (Stoker 43-4). Upon seeing the women pounce on the bag, Jonathan passes out in distress as he concludes that they are eating a baby. The image of women consuming babies is one of horror rooted almost entirely in transgression of the social order. While babies are inherently vulnerable and there is a societal interest in keeping them safe, the role of protecting and caring for babies has historically been held solely by women. Even for those who are not yet mothers themselves, the most transgressive act a woman can commit is harming a baby. The horror of female vampires threatening children continues when Lucy is turned. Following her transformation, local newspapers begin reporting on the mysterious "bloofer lady," British toddler-speak for 'beautiful lady', who is luring children away at night, only for them to return dazed and sickly claiming that they had been with the bloofer lady, or not to return at all (Stoker 159). When the group of men find Lucy returning to her grave with an infant on her chest, they are shocked to see that she is not dead, but her former fiancé is quickly entranced by her beauty. However, he is shaken from his stupor when she tosses the baby to the ground callously (Stoker 188), an action so unacceptable it almost immediately

undermines her beauty. Not only is this lack of maternal instinct generally unsettling, it was particularly relevant in the 1890's when *Dracula* was written, as explained in a footnote in the Norton Critical edition. Since the trope of women harming children was a common feature in literature of the time, particularly in texts by conservative pundits who feared feminism would undermine women's maternal drive (*Dracula* 188n4). While none of the female vampires in *Dracula* are depicted as mothers, this transgression aligns closely with Agave's murder of her own son as both threaten the maternal identity of women.

Another way in which vampires defy social expectations, especially in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, is through their portrayal of non-traditional gender. One of the most prominent examples of androgynous vampires is Lestat, who is described as having "a graceful, almost feline quality to his movements" (*Interview* 13) and is consistently portrayed as highly emotional with a flair for the dramatic: all traits which are stereotyped for women. In the recent TV adaptation of *Interview*, Lestat, with the intent of ruffling feathers, goes so far as to dress up like Marie Antoinette, complete with corset, powdered wig, and a crown ("The Thing Lay Still"). Lestat's joy at the shock and horror caused by his cross-dressing only serves to emphasize that he is aware of the power of rejecting social standards.

Another depiction of gender fluidity comes from *The Vampire Lestat*, where we meet Lestat's mother, Gabrielle. Only one night after Lestat turned Gabrielle into a vampire to prevent her from dying of consumption, Gabrielle, in her new immortal form, killed a boy of about her size then "tore off the pink velvet girdle and skirts right there and put on the boy's clothes... And to describe it more truly, as she put on his garments, she became the boy" (*TVL* 171). Although Rice does not identify it as such and even minimizes it by having Lestat continue to refer to Gabrielle using feminine language, Gabrielle is presented as a transgender man, which,

especially in the 1980s when the novel was written, was yet another non-traditional and regularly vilified form of masculinity. After Gabrielle cuts her hair, Lestat remarks, "She was a young man now certainly, the short hair curling against her cheek" (*TVL* 174). The contrast that is clear in Lestat's narration between the masculine boy he sees Gabrielle to be and the mother he thinks of her as only emphasizes the transgressiveness of her gender expression.

Sexuality, which was already seen as scandalous, is a key aspect of vampirism throughout all periods, which leads naturally to further transgression in the form of homosexuality when vampires drink from someone of the same sex. Vampires feed by biting their victim, usually in the neck area, which, on top of being a form of penetration in a sensual location, simulates the kind of sensual domination and submission of penetration-based intercourse. Because of these connections, modern vampirism is closely associated with sex and promiscuity, as well as more traditional ideas of romance and seduction, particularly when that seduction is taboo in its own right.

To return to Le Fanu, Carmilla's predation of Laura is both sexually and romantically charged, with an unmistakably homosexual plot which would have been particularly scandalous in 1872. Though Carmilla bites other victims on the neck throughout the book, Laura describes the experience of being bitten: "I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast" (Le Fanu ch. 6). While one placing their mouth to someone's neck is already a sensual act, placing one's mouth on another's breast is even more sexual, particularly when the biting is identified as an act of penetration. Carmilla always attacks at night and is therefore implicitly on top of Laura in her bed during these encounters, further reinforcing the sexual aspect of these vampiric encounters. Their relationship is not one-sided, though, and is not merely sexual as shown when the girls, curled up together, exchange teasing praise of one

another before broaching the topic of love. At which point Carmilla declares, “I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so” (Le Fanu ch. 5). Laura's interest in having a social relationship with Carmilla facilitates their extended sexual and vampiric relationship, to the extent in which they are thought to be separate at all. Although Laura is Carmilla's romantic interest for the duration of the story, her homosexuality is evident in her choice of other victims, who are all young women. Therefore, Carmilla is consistently depicted as homosexual which, when compounded with the inherent sexuality of vampiric relationships, makes her even more of a threat to the social well being of Laura than a predator who only comes at night.

Ultimately, the *Bacchae* and modern vampire fiction both explore similar kinds of social subversion, even if the cultural context differs almost entirely between fifth century Athens and the nineteenth, through twenty-first century English speaking world. By identifying the interest of both works in social transgression, and exploring the similar tropes which they utilize, we can confidently acknowledge the structural relationship between Dionysus and vampires.

### **Youthful Form and Mature Mind**

Dionysus's appearance as an ephebe is juxtaposed throughout the *Bacchae* by the maturity and power of his mind and actions. This dichotomy between his physical appearance and his actual being lead people to reject his divinity, much to their detriment. Similarly, vampire fiction shows a consistent interest in issues of subversion of expectations based on appearance. The *Vampire Chronicles* in particular explore this issue through the same juxtaposition of physical age and mental maturity.

Throughout the *Bacchae*, there is a duality between Dionysus's appearance and mind. This difference is regularly exploited in his interactions with Pentheus, whose immaturity and arrogance contrast with Dionysus's cool confidence and self-assurance. Dionysus and Pentheus

are visually similar since they are both cousins who, still beardless, seem to be the same age. After receiving a report that the maenads are still in the countryside and committing violence when confronted, Pentheus commands his troops to attack them: "we'll run those Bacchantes down. It's just too much that I be treated in this way by women!" (*Ba* 785-6). Here, Pentheus acts rashly and inappropriately by trying to respond to a civic issue—the introduction of a new cult—with military action. Not only does Pentheus arrogantly reject Dionysus's divinity, he reacts as though the maenads are acting out of spite against him specifically. While Pentheus is outraged by a perceived dishonor against him, Dionysus responds calmly, but firmly, to the actual dishonor being done to him: "Though you hear my words, you still ignore them, [Pentheus]. Though you did me wrong, I'll speak. Do not raise your arms against the god" (*Ba* 787-9). Unlike Pentheus, Dionysus does not have to overreact in order to hold power and can be confident that, thanks to his godhood, Pentheus will ultimately pay the price for his lack of respect.

The contrasting dynamic between Dionysus and Pentheus is consistent throughout the beginning of the *Bacchae*. Another instance is when Pentheus's servant captures and binds Dionysus to be brought to Pentheus. The servant reports how Dionysus "held out his hands willingly. . . . He smiled and let us tie him up and lead him here. His patience made my job so easy I felt bad" (*Ba* 437-41). Dionysus paradoxically displays his power by calmly submitting to Pentheus and his servants. Dionysus's subtlety is immediately opposed by Pentheus: "Untie his hands. He's trapped inside my net. He can't run from me now. He's not so quick" (*Ba* 451-2). Unlike Dionysus, Pentheus flaunts his power, which itself is not so great as he believes.

Vampires portray the same duality of age between a mind that matures while their bodies stay the same. The most striking example of this phenomenon is the vampire Claudia in Rice's

*Interview with the Vampire*, a little girl who was transformed as a five year old to be a daughter to Louis and Lestat. Claudia's age is first contrasted by her bloodlust, as she was a "fierce killer ... capable of the ruthless pursuit of blood with all a child's demanding" (*Interview* 96). Not only is Claudia extraordinarily violent despite her age, but her actions are exacerbated by ravenous hunger. As time passes though, her body maintains its child-like form, but her mind develops beyond dolls and fairytales, and she comes to expect Louis and Lestat to treat her as an intellectual equal. Despite her resentment at being seen and treated as a child by her vampire companions, Claudia exploits her appearance when she hunts: "She would sit alone in the dark square waiting for the kindly gentleman or woman to find her .... Like a child numbed with fright she would whisper her plea for help to her gentle, admiring patrons" (*Interview* 99). In her larger quest for knowledge, she becomes fixated on the origins of vampires and whether or not the only ones in the world are those living with her. These existential concerns are equally at odds with her appearance, betraying a distinct maturity and complexity. Unlike the *Bacchae*, where Dionysus always has the upper hand because of his deceptive appearance, *Interview with the Vampire* frames Claudia's experience as a tragedy. While she is able to utilize her appearance in the service of being a vicious predator, ultimately the unchanging state of her body is a disappointing and frustrating hindrance to her independence from parents she has grown resentful of. While Claudia's anger is mostly focused on Lestat, when Louis reveals that he killed her, leading Lestat to turn her into a vampire, she responds: "'And here it is,' she said under her breath. 'And I hate you both!'" (*Interview* 114). Like any child desperate to grow up, she wants to go on her own adventures and find an identity separate from her parents. However, due to her persistently youthful form, she remains subservient to her guardians since she cannot freely participate in human society like other vampires. This bleak portrayal of Claudia's struggles

originates from Anne Rice's grief over watching her young daughter mature mentally as she suffered from cancer and was forced to grapple with her own mortality.

In contrast to Claudia's negative experiences as an eternal child with an adult's mind, the vampire Armand's juxtaposition of youthful appearance and mental maturity seems to align more closely with Dionysus's. The first time that Lestat sees Armand in *The Vampire Lestat*, he describes how Armand has "the figure of a young boy, not a man" (TVL 200). It is later explained that Armand was about seventeen years old when he was turned, about the same age as Dionysus and Pentheus appear to be. Lestat continues: "his face was shining white, and perfect, the countenance of a god it seemed, a Cupid out of Caravaggio, seductive yet ethereal, with auburn hair and brown eyes" (TVL 200). Here Lestat compares Armand to paintings of a pre-pubescent cupid, suggesting just how youthful he appears to be. As well, comparing Armand to a static piece of artwork can be interpreted as a metaphor for his predicament since his appearance, like that of the painting, is frozen in time. Lestat's perception of Armand as thoroughly childish is confirmed when he stands in front of Lestat and Gabrielle and requests that they all love one another: "There was something naive about it, his sending the summons as he stood there" (TVL 201). However, Lestat's opinion of Armand quickly changes: "I held fast against him. ... And yet I felt such a longing for him, such a longing to fall into him and follow him and be led by him, that all my longings in the past seemed nothing at all. ... he was beautiful, indescribably beautiful, and there seemed in him an infinite complexity and depth" (TVL 201). Despite Lestat's initial perception of a young boy who, though beautiful, seemed naive, Armand appears to be emotionally complex and charismatic, having subverted Lestat's expectations in the same way that Dionysus's appearance does.

Nonetheless, Armand too is barred from the same success of other vampires because of

the age he was turned. While Claudia is confined by her physical age and retains only an insatiable appetite from her childish origin, Armand is empowered by his physical appearance, but suffers from his youthful pride. When Lestat and Gabrielle, his mother, are able to imitate Armand's supernatural movement on the first try:

"I think we both found it simpler than we had imagined it would be. Yet he was clearly startled when he saw us at his side. And in the very act of being startled, he gave me a glimpse of his great weakness, pride. He was humiliated that we had crept up on him, moving so lightly and managing at the same time to conceal our thoughts. But worse was to come. When he realized that I had perceived this... it was revealed for a split second... he was doubly enraged." (*TVL* 202)

Much like Pentheus's rage at the actions of the disguised Dionysus and his maenads, Armand's confidence is invalidated, revealing a prideful temper which is inconsistent with the confident power that Dionysus wields. Although Armand is physically stunning, and far more powerful than the vampires in his coven, he is easily outdone by Lestat's effortless skill. His pride and need to assert himself is typical of a teenager who has found success in their small circle, but is outshone when in larger groups, and five centuries of vampirism have done nothing to remedy this. In this way, the juxtaposition of Armand's appearance and immaturity is deceptive in the exact opposite manner from Dionysus.

Ultimately, while the contrast between appearance and maturity demonstrates different things about each character, the consistent development of youthful appearance accompanied by adult discernment marks a meaningful similarity between Dionysus and vampires. As well, the fact that vampires are capable of having these juxtapositions indicates that they share innate structural connections with Dionysus, whose status as a transitional god allows him to utilize this



striking aspect of himself.

### **Xenophobia**

While a form of Dionysus's name has been found in the Linear B tablets, which indicates that he has been worshiped in Greece since the Bronze Age, the conception of Dionysus as a religious import from the Near East was so pervasive within his mythos that many scholars believed it to be true before Linear B was deciphered. Therefore it is unsurprising that Dionysus is consistently treated poorly in the *Bacchae* for arriving from the East, despite his Theban lineage being publicly known. Similarly, xenophobia plays a large role in *Dracula* to make the vampire more horrific.

Throughout the *Bacchae* Dionysus and his followers are regularly described as coming from the east and derided for it. When Pentheus first enters, he describes the "craziness" (*Ba* 224) he believes the bacchantes are participating in up in the mountains, including wine and sex (*Ba* 222-3) before moving on to describe the man who has brought this debauchery, who we can presume from the accusations must be a scandalous person. Pentheus describes this scandalous person as "some stranger [who] has arrived in town, a wizard of some kind, from Lydia, with perfume in his hair and yellow curls, [face red with aphroditic charm]" (*Ba* 233-6). Pentheus, after identifying Dionysus as a ξένος, stranger, in this instance specifically one from outside Greece, continues his description by further separating Dionysus from Greek people and their customs. He starts with calling him a γόης, 'wizard', which is a term also used by Theseus in Euripides's *Hippolytus* to deride and distance himself from his son (*Hipp* 242). Pentheus then describes Dionysus's hair as being perfumed, which would have been atypical for a Greek man, and yellow, which was a hair color regularly assigned to heroes, such as Achilles in the *Iliad*, to make them stand out. As further physical description, Pentheus refers to Dionysus's face as being

the color of wine, suggesting that his cheeks were rosy from intoxication. It is also worth noting that descriptions of physical appearance are almost exclusively reserved for those who stand out in one way or another, as argued in Mark Griffith's article "What Does Aeneas Look Like?", so the presence of any description at all sets Dionysus apart in his own right. Finally, Pentheus comments on Dionysus's charm, an aspect which would not have been explicitly foreign, but justifies Pentheus's narrative that Dionysus is corrupting the women of Thebes with sex. Pentheus continues threatening potential violence against the newcomer and questioning his origins before concluding: "Whoever he is, this foreigner deserves to hang for such outrageous wickedness" (*Ba*246-7). All of these accusations Pentheus has made against Dionysus are based on hearsay and his prejudice against Lydians and foreigners in general.

Pentheus continues to stoke fear and associates Dionysus being a foreigner with his potential to harm the polis: "catch that girly foreigner, who brings that new infection to our women, taints our beds" (*Ba*352-4). Pentheus makes more accusations about Dionysus in the context of him being a foreigner, starting with his femininity. As discussed earlier, Dionysus's appearance does not align with that of a traditional Greek man, and by directly connecting the conception of Dionysus as a foreigner to his transgressive gender expression, Pentheus suggests that this, along with all other aspects of Dionysus which may be contrary to Greek culture and values, must be connected to his status as a foreigner. Pentheus continues his accusations by stoking fear of infection from foreigners, something which is still a common tactic in societies today, and moralizes it by limiting the infection to women, and claiming that it will taint their beds. Pentheus is surrounded by men, so by discussing an infection specifically of women, Pentheus is creating a fear both of literal infection as well as of ideological infection which might challenge the established social order, and therefore the roles of these powerful men. Similarly,

Pentheus claims: "The maenad's shocking actions catch like fire: they're spreading closer to the shame of Greece" (*Ba*778-9). Here Pentheus identifies the maenad's worship with yet another destructive force, the spread as fire, and as with the characterization of Bacchic ritual as infection, he moralizes the issue by indicating that Greece will be worse off with the introduction of these rites.

Despite being perceived and treated as a foreigner, Dionysus uses language which separates himself from the women he has brought since he is still Theban. When Dionysus addresses his maenads, he refers to them as: "Women, holy sisterhood, who left barbarian lands and Lydian mountain peaks for me" (*Ba*55-56). Even as he praises them for being his followers, he refers to their homelands as barbaric, a term which is already full of nationalist sentiments and negative perceptions of foreigners. As well, Pentheus says to Dionysus, "Foreigners are much sillier than us," to which Dionysus replies, "Their customs aren't the same, in this they're smarter" (*Ba* 483-484). While it sounds like Pentheus is referring to himself and his people as us, Dionysus injects himself into that collective by referring to foreigners as they instead of we. Even though Dionysus praises the foreigners and their customs, he still purposefully separates himself from them and ambiguously goes as far as to include himself in Pentheus's us. Dionysus's comments may also leave room for criticism, since, by stating that a specific set of foreign customs are ideal in a particular instance, instead of phrasing his comment as a broad praise, he is suggesting that the Greek customs are often, or at least sometimes, smarter than the foreign ones.

Although Bram Stoker provides a generally nuanced discussion of foreignness, Dracula and his human helpers are consistently depicted as undesirable foreigners who endanger the lives of British citizens, particularly women. As he travels across Europe to Transylvania, Jonathan is

met by many concerned locals who try to deter or dissuade him from continuing towards Dracula's castle, all of whom show some sort of Christian, largely Catholic leaning, either with a crucifix or by making the sign of the cross (Stoker 12-17). While Jonathan's Anglican sensibilities do not allow him to partake in such practices, there is a strong sense that, up until he is in the carriage with Dracula, he is surrounded by good people who are at the very least sorry to have helped him reach a destination they believe he won't return from. However, this feeling changes once he enters Dracula's castle since, once inside, he only has access to people, or vampires, who wish him harm. Jonathan describes in his journal a group of nomadic people who have set up camp in Dracula's courtyard, whom he describes as "fearless and without religion, save superstition," and that they "attach themselves as a rule to some great noble or *boyar* and call themselves by his name" (Stoker 45). Despite knowing their propensity for loyalty, he drops two letters and some coins through his window in a desperate attempt to send for help, in hopes they will post them without telling Dracula. However, he is unsuccessful as, unlike the Christian folks who were interested in his wellbeing, these nomadic peoples are socially and supernaturally devoted to Dracula, not the Christian god.

Due to the story being confined to Jonathan's point of view while we are introduced to Dracula, we do not get to see much of what has inspired such universal terror in the people near his castle until Dracula arrives in London. Once there, he preys upon Lucy, a young British woman who has captured the affections of three men, all of whom come to her aid after she falls mysteriously ill. These suitors, two British men and a Texan, are all reasonable choices for her to marry but they, and even the older Dutch doctor, Van Helsing, are ultimately all surpassed by Dracula, as their blood transfusions can only extend her life for a matter of days while she is repeatedly attacked and drained of her blood by the vampire. As discussed earlier, vampirism is a

sexual act, and so Dracula's corruption of this British woman works both as a physical illness which is killing her and as a sexual corruption in which the foreign Dracula has taken this woman for himself when she would have otherwise been able to marry any one of her three suitors. While the collection of men who are fighting to keep Lucy alive, and will ultimately fight to keep Dracula out of England, include two foreigners. However, their foreignness is not a detractor like it is for Dracula and his followers since they share religious and cultural ideals with the British characters.

Dracula's corruption extends beyond just the women of Britain since, much like the Brides of Dracula in his castle in Transylvania, Lucy's vampiric taste is for children. Following Lucy's death, local newspapers began reporting on the case of the "bloofer lady" (Stoker 159) whom many small children in the surrounding area blame for their mysterious disappearances during the evenings. Much like in Lucy, the sickliness of the children after they have returned to their families is reminiscent of a growing plague, and literalizes the moral corruption of the populus as a physical illness from which the children have to recover. Even indirectly, Dracula's introduction to the city has brought foreign influence which corrupts women and endangers children, the very people that proper British men were supposed to dedicate themselves to protecting.

Another condemnation of Dracula for his foreignness comes in the form of his boxes of Transylvanian earth. In order to survive, Dracula must be able to rest on the ground from his homeland, so he brings along with him fifty boxes of earth. When Van Helsing explains this phenomenon, he refers to the places that Dracula can rest as "his earth-home, his coffin-home, his hell-home, [and] the place unhallowed" (Stoker 212) and the way to make these boxes unusable for Dracula is to "sterilize the earth" (Stoker 213) by placing a communal wafer in it.

Once again, the religious impiety of the foreign Dracula serves as his undoing, as he has to physically import unholy earth from his homeland to be able to remain in London. Much like the mysterious illness in the children, the boxes of dirt serve as a literalization of the corruption that the city is facing. The importing of unholy land, representing the foreign influence which has snuck into the city, and, much like Dracula who has learned perfect English, remains unnoticed by the public except for these exceptional vampire hunters.

The xenophobic sentiments which are directed at Dionysus and his foreign followers follow similar rhetorical strategies to the sentiments expressed against Dracula and his followers despite the two thousand year gap between these texts. While Dionysus's treatment as foreign is not exactly the same as Dracula's, since Dionysus is in fact not foreign at all, but has returned home, both the *Bacchae* and *Dracula* construct narratives which seek to outline conceptions of good and bad kinds of foreign which are often defined by religious practices.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have only been able to represent a small subset of the texts in the vast corpus of vampire fiction, and thus only a subset of the connections between Dionysus and vampires as well. While I believe that I have identified several of the most important connections between vampires and Dionysus in 'Altered States and Substances', 'Social Transgression', and 'Xenophobia', my initial frameworks will need to be adapted as well as expanded as I incorporate a wider variety of texts. For texts regarding Dionysus, I intend to introduce Aristophanes's *Frogs* and aspects of Dionysus's rich artistic tradition. In addition, I believe it would be useful to factor other modern receptions of Euripides' *Bacchae*, such as Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* in order to study the connection between how Dionysus is directly depicted in modern literature and how vampires are depicted. For further texts regarding vampires, movies like *The Hunger* (1983), the

*Twilight Saga* (2008-12), and the older film adaptations of *Dracula* (1931), *Dracula* (1958), and *Dracula* (1979). After I have expanded my survey of the work to catalog all the major connections between Dionysus and vampires, and what kinds of works they show up in, my ultimate goal is to study the ways in which Dionysus, through the lens of vampire fiction, is received in monster horror as a broader genre. This will include monsters like werewolves who go through a transformation after a transgression, and mummy and zombie stories that feature resurrections.

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