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**REIMAGINING THE COSTUME:  
THE ROLE OF FASHION IN ADAPTATIONS OF EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE***

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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## Introduction

Nearly naked bodies are thrashing and moaning as they roll around the converted factory stage. Jockstraps, a few scattered black turtlenecks, and bare skin are the only costumes seen in Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in '69*. An adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Dionysus in '69* left its audience members' jaws on the floor as they watched Pentheus, king of Thebes, clash with Dionysus, god of wine, excess, and drama. Euripides' *Bacchae* and its receptions embody the subversion of identity that codifies my 21st-century understanding of fashion. This project is interested in this subversion and examines how characters' identities have been portrayed through the costume choices of *Dionysus in '69*, *The Bacchantes*, and *The Backanterna*. Specifically, I scrutinize how costumes can visually represent the constant struggles between excess versus modesty, binaries versus fluidity, and worship versus condemnation that are thematic throughout this play.

I explore the boundaries of the *Bacchae*'s interpretations to uncover a dialogue between visual narratives and the audience's experiences. Through a close analysis of color theory, queer theory, and Critical Fashion Practice, the ways costumes can impact the reception of Greek tragedy is determined and makes a case for a queer interpretation of the play through these 21st-century lenses. My interpretation and addition to the costumes for Dionysus, Pentheus, and the Maenads highlights the role of fashion in characterizing ancient-turned-modern characters to provide an understanding of the denigration of queered characters in ancient Greek tragedy. The costume can capture the very essence of a character, shaping and altering its reception, and creating a space to apply modern theory to ancient text.

## **An Intersection of Critical Fashion Practice and Classics**

The costume has been and continues to be a vital aspect of theater, silently shaping the reception and impact of the play. In brief, costumes and fashion are some of the first aspects of the audience's perception of the play, long before the plot unfolds. The silent dialogue that occurs with costume design, specifically in modern adaptations of ancient plays, is essential for expressing a director's interpretation of a text. Moreover, a director's inclusion, (or exclusion), of gender, race, class, social hierarchy, etc., are some of the key components that dictate the play's mood and direction. In the world of theater, costumes are thought of as "secondary" to the acting".<sup>1</sup> While the importance of the acting skills of cast members can't be discredited, the costume also plays an important role in the narrative of visual storytelling. As Rosie Wyles asserts, clothing transforms the actor from a "man" into an icon as the costume becomes "an essential part in the creation of meaning".<sup>2</sup> In tragedy, a character's identity is linked to the costume's iconographic signs, a "semiotic representation". Throughout the 20th century reception of Euripides' *Bacchae*, scenes of cross-dressing play with the notion of a stable identity, shifting so drastically as costumes are added that when removed, the alteration is irrevocable that upon removal, it "is not enough to reassert his identity—the semiotics of his assumed costume are too powerful", forever altering the character as the power of the costume lingers posthumously.<sup>3</sup>

Tragedy was not alone with such sartorial concerns; Angeliki Varakis draws attention to the costumes in Aristophanes' plays and how they were used to exaggerate the bodies of the cast

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<sup>1</sup> Honauer, Michaela, and Eva Hornecker. "Challenges for creating and staging interactive costumes for the theater stage." *Proceedings of the 2015 ACM Sicchi Conference on Creativity and Cognition*. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Rosie Wyles dives into the role of the costume in Greek Theatre in her book, *Costume in Greek Tragedy*. Taking a diachronic approach, she examines the history, impact, and reception of costumes and their implications found in the text.

<sup>3</sup>See again, Wyles, Rosie. *Costume in Greek Tragedy*. Bloomsbury Academic. 2011.

members, thus becoming satirical characters eliciting laughter from the audience.<sup>4</sup> Varakis also notes the importance of advancing the costume past the typical mask worn by actors in plays because it “flourishes the creative minds of the audience”, stressing the importance of the aspect of clothing in the costume. An in-depth costume removes some of the weight of imagination asked of the audience by providing more visual information. The costume is a supplemental aspect of the audience’s experience, deepening the character’s reality and the audience’s experience.

This project relies heavily on color theory in its analysis of costume choices for Euripides’ *Bacchae*. Color theory is the study of colors and their relationships with each other that influence emotions and reactions.<sup>5</sup> DeJong lays out key aspects of color theory’s application to fashion and outlines how to utilize contrasting colors to portray character relationships, (especially conflicting relationships) and characterize the historical time periods.<sup>6</sup> Certain colors were used at certain times to mark socioeconomic status. For example, in *The Bacchantes* Pentheus is draped in golds and reds, marking his status as a wealthy king. Among the other characters dressed in pastels and whites, the gold and red of his royal attire sets him apart, indicating an othering from the Theban people, (both in wealth and character).

The practice of drawing information and context from the costume is commonplace within Critical Fashion Practice, or CFP, a movement in fashion to go beyond “stylishness”, and to turn fashion into an art form. CFP applies the context of history, opinion, and social perception onto a garment . As Marco Pecorari states:

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<sup>4</sup> Varakis, Angeliki. “Body and Mask in Aristophanic Performance.” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 53, no. 1 (2010): 17–38.

<sup>5</sup> Jeanette deJong outlines her appreciation and use of color theory as a costume designer in her book, *A Working Costume Designer’s Guide to Color*.

<sup>6</sup> DeJong, Jeanette. *A working costume designer's guide to color*. Routledge, 2021.

CFP is a mode of contextual practice that fashion designers use to bring attention to the way that clothes participate in critical discourses and political action. It engages with socially discursive dimensions, as well as placing a priority on the articulation of taste and creative innovation. CFP values, like all critical research, a discourse that is speculative and discursive over an aesthetic of resolution and completeness.<sup>7</sup>

The practice critiques a conventional understanding of fashion as a superficial experience, while additionally putting its social and political stances proudly on its sleeve. My goal is to critique the values of versatility and commerciality and argue for the application of queer theory onto *Bacchae* adaptations through observable queer-coded garments, ergo, stressing the queerness of the characters. This engagement with CFP creates a narrative that references the political, social, and personal realities that have been imposed upon the *Bacchae*, as articulated in its adaptations. CFP opens the door for a reconsideration of gender roles and presence in this project's styling, because it requires direct communication between the gendered implications of the text and the audience's reception. The sources I use to understand past receptions of this play explore gender in terms of the switches among gendered costumes and identities; however they remain within an Oedipal framework and restrictive understanding of gender and social connotations. Studying the function of the costume through the lens of CFP highlights rather the ability of the costume to deconstruct binaries represented within the text. Contemporary styling provides for a more dynamic portrayal of gender as a reflection of potential queerness in the *Bacchae* because it incorporates more of the sociological ideologies that interact with it, i.e. queer communities, dominant heterosexual communities, etc.

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<sup>7</sup>Geczy, Adam, and Vicki Karaminas. *Critical fashion practice: from Westwood to Van Beirendonck*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

Queer theory and the role of queerness in fashion are at the foundation of understanding the *Bacchae*. It not only is a way of understanding past receptions of the work, but in addition, it provides the framework for envisioning the *Bacchae* for the future. Central to the tragedy are cross-dressing, ostracism from society for deviant desires, and binaries such as feminine/masculine, worship/condemnation, excess/modesty. Thus, it is impossible to address this work without addressing the implications of queerness on the stage—queerness on stage and queerness in fashion translates into the relationship of costumes with the audience's perception. This relationship returns to queer culture because just like its role on stage, fashion has been used to identify and signal community, in specific, queer community. As Valerie Steele writes, “creativity and resistance to oppression expressed by LGBTQ subcultural and street styles, which have often transgressed sex and gender roles”, understands that the interconnection between queerness and fashion can suggest, “how dissident ways of relating to fashion as a cultural form have resulted in a gay or queer sensibility that embraces both idealizing and transgressive aesthetic staples”. Fashion, like other art practices, provides a forum space where queerness can be expressed, embraced, and understood. Through the embodiment of queer fashion, dramatic characters such as Dionysus can embody this history of queer resistance in his clothing, as well as align the character with those in the audience who understand and see the expression as a form of rebellion. Beyond its effect on those with a predetermined understanding of queerness’s role in society, the queerness of the costumes pushes the boundaries of those without this acceptance by drawing out discomfort and pushing the binaries/boundaries (they believe) remain rigid on stage. By understanding the role of fashion in the queer experience, this project can project the role of queerness in the history of fashion, understanding its indispensability as a foundation for this styling of the *Bacchae*. As I will argue throughout, Dionysus’ portrayal as queer presenting is

both a reflection of his character's queerness and of the possibility for understanding queerness within the Athenian capacity for gender and sexuality in comparison to modern reception's portrayal.

There is a lack of discourse around queer ideologies within the culture in Euripides' time. There was neither homosexuality nor homophobia; however, there were "normal" and "abnormal" performances of sexuality, just as seen in Western modern society. For a man, sexual intercourse with another man was a way of achieving separation from the female sex.<sup>8</sup> To the male upper class the relationship between a beloved (ἐρώμενος) and a lover (ἐραστής) was as natural as childbirth and was also construed as a form of intellectual affection and stimulation, as Plato's *Symposium* demonstrates. This passing of knowledge from older to younger males was considered akin to childbirth in that it is a continuation of a man's legacy.<sup>9</sup> While the abnormal remains in the private sphere of a household or behind closed doors for both points in time, yet what is hidden has fluctuated. To fully grasp the Athenian conception of sexuality and gender, indirect methods of relying on textual, archaeological, and inference can be used to infer sexual normalities and abnormalities.

Natalia Theodoridou recognizes the shortcomings of directly applying contemporary queer theory to Ancient texts, and thus uses these indirect methods to understand the queer-coded garments in the *Bacchae*.<sup>10</sup> She does so by paying attention to "value and vigorousness of plays on contemporary stage(s)" to illuminate the past and present.<sup>11</sup> While Theodoridou provides a perceptive approach to understanding how Euripides' theater utilizes binaries to subvert identity,

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Hunter provides a study of the social and sexual dynamics described in Plato's *Symposium*, see more: Hunter, Richard L. *Plato's Symposium*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> See again *Plato's Symposium*, lines 208e.

<sup>10</sup> Natalia Theodoridou work is among a collection of Postgraduate essays on Theatre and performance, see more: Zeitlin, Froma, John Winkler, and David Halperin. "A Queer Reading of Euripides' *Bacchae*." *A Postgraduate eJournal of Theatre and Performing Arts Vol. 3, No. 1 Spring 2008* (2008): 73.

<sup>11</sup> Similar to Theodoridou, I am relying on modern interpretations to understand ancient texts, while being conscious of the imperfections of applying these theories to periods in which the concepts did not exist in the same sense.



she remains limited in her understanding that queerness only *crosses* binaries, (instead of dismantling the binary altogether). Theodoridou provides a framework, however, of how to draw out and use the word “queer” in ancient work, a tool essential for penetrating the *Bacchae*.

Theodoridou breaks down her endeavor into queer theory in three distinct instances. First, Theodoridou uses Judith Butler’s argument that “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts”, to conceptualize how gender is a construct. This theory allows Theodoridou to discredit Marjorie Garber’s definition of Ancient Greek and Shakespearian theater as “transvestite theater”, by claiming that gender has always been a performance even if the ancient Greeks held a different understanding of it; thus Greek performances, where modern society sees a crossing of gender binaries, saw a crossing of clothing.<sup>12</sup> This theory provides an interesting lens to view performance, however, it discredits the power transvestitism can hold within performance. Dionysus’s role as the effeminate character is perpetually linked with performance, and performance of gender, because the actors in Athens were men, who played all female roles. Therefore, performances, or “false realities” held a multitude of binary crossings. The actor playing Dionysus dresses up as a god, thus dissolving the binary lines between man and god in a rite of transvestitism, because the very crossing of identity is a rebellious act of transness. Dionysus’s character is subjugating the normal, creating his own, fifth-century model of queerness.

Theodoridou provides examples of Pentheus’ cross-dressing to compare the similarities between Dionysus and Pentheus. This comparison suggests that Pentheus is a mirror of Dionysus and therefore becomes an embodiment of Dionysus’ queerness. “Queer” here refers to an

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<sup>12</sup> Cross-dressing, while not casual, was not abnormal. An example of this is at the beginning of the play as Cadmus and Tiresias are, by willful choice, dressed in maenad clothing. This is therefore not a reason for Athenian spectators to bat an eye, what would have been more eye catching was Pentheus’ reaction to the act and his sudden submission to something he once disdained.

inversion of reality, a stepping out of the “normal” and into the “abnormal”. The power differences between Dionysus and Pentheus, according to Theodoridou, is an example of the dynamic between sexual lovers, as seen between man and woman, lover and beloved, and master and slave; Dionysus and Pentheus do not need to be explicitly lovers to have a sexually charged dynamic .

Greek theater provides an opportunity to invert human experience through its allowance for the redefinition of gender, power, and identity. This inversion is part of Theodoridou’s argument that “gender b(l)ending also blends reality and performance, effectively deconstructing both”, effectively creating a space in accordance with CFP, enabling the styling of the *Bacchae*’s costumes to surpass, destroy, and incorporate queerness.<sup>13</sup> Costume design creates a dialogue between reality and performance because it relies on both the audience’s individual lived experiences and the story. The conversation executed by the costume elevates the story by incorporating the audience, creating a completely new narrative.

Victoria Wohl continues Theodoridou’s deconstruction of binaries placed on the *Bacchae* by contrasting two ways of interpreting the text’s displays of gender, first through a traditional Oedipal reading, and then through an “Anti-Oedipal” understanding.<sup>14</sup> Using Charles Segal’s analysis of the *Bacchae*, Wohl identifies first how this play has been understood in the past, and next, provides insight into how this play does not just cross boundaries of identity but rather destroys them. For Segal, the paradox of sexual difference should not be dissolved, and that it “seems to reinforce rather than eliminate that sexual differentiation”; Wohl presents his loyalty to binaries as an illusion of his structuralist theories.<sup>15</sup> Instead, she argues, “the play’s blurring of

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<sup>13</sup> See again, Natalie Theodoridou’s work “A Queer Reading of the *Bacchae*”.

<sup>14</sup> Wohl, Victoria. “Beyond Sexual Difference: Becoming-Woman in Euripides’ *Bacchae*.” *The Soul of Tragedy: Essays on Athenian Drama*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2005): 137-154.

<sup>15</sup> See again Segal’s work on *Bacchae*, Segal, Charles. *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides’ Bacchae*. Princeton University Press, 1997.

masculine and feminine serves not to solidify and intensify this opposition but instead to undo it and ultimately to open an imaginative space beyond it”.<sup>16</sup> These gender possibilities in the *Bacchae* create the foundation for this thesis’s portrayal of queerness as a duality that holds both multiplicities and singularities.

Wohl’s analysis critiques the Oedipal schema that “graphs sexual difference along separate axes of desire and identification,”<sup>17</sup> the schema in which tragedies can be identified and categorized. Further, it relies on either-or situations, (desire your mother and kill your father, and vice versa), to introduce sexual binaries to otherwise non-rigid sexual orientations. This can be traced through psychology and “to the patriarchal and patrilineal structure of Athenian society.”<sup>18</sup> By regarding the *Bacchae* through this lens, “we might see Pentheus’s tragedy as a failed Oedipal transition,”<sup>19</sup> as he separates himself from patriarchal traditions, desiring his mother and identifying with her. This is “negative Oedipality”, not a reversal of the typical Oedipal construct but a continuation of the either-or situation. Throughout the text, Pentheus attempts an “absolute polarization of the sexes”, as he defines the maenads as others, and himself as the legitimate man in opposition. Viewing the text through a negative Oedipal lens, it can be argued that he never relinquishes his manhood, and thus, “the struggle between Pentheus and Dionysus is played out in part as a war between the sexes, (732, 764, 848)”,<sup>20</sup> as Dionysus, in contrast, is embodied through the women of Thebes. This reaffirms the bacchantes and Dionysus’ knowledge that Pentheus can not transgress into womanhood, suggesting that “sexual difference is... more than skin deep: clothes do not make the man”,<sup>21</sup> and his attempted transgression can be

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<sup>16</sup> 138. Wohl, Victoria. "Beyond Sexual Difference: Becoming-Woman in Euripides' *Bacchae*." *The Soul of Tragedy: Essays on Athenian Drama*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2005): 137-154.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 142.

quickly removed with the removal of his feminine costume. This reception reinforces the either-or narrative that claims “Pentheus may ‘play the other’ but he cannot become it”,<sup>22</sup> there is no in-between in sexual differentiation.

In sharp contrast to this absolutist understanding, an anti-Oedipal lens argues that this is not an either-or situation, but rather, both-and. This is demonstrated in Pentheus’ perplexing attraction to Dionysus as he remains within his masculinity, as he acknowledges Dionysus’s beauty through a feminine gaze. By comparing this complex attraction to the standard desire of an Oedipal lens described above, Pentheus becomes codified as an embodiment of queerness as his attraction switches between feminine and masculine:

You are not unattractive physically, stranger,  
At least in a woman’s eyes and that’s what you came to Thebes for.  
Your hair is long — you are clearly no wrestler—  
And flows over your cheek, full of desire.  
Your skin is deliberately pale,  
Since you spend your time in shadow, not in sunlight,  
Hunting Aphrodite with your beauty.<sup>23</sup>

For Pentheus, Dionysus’s “effeminacy arouses desire”,<sup>24</sup> as he admits that he sees and understands the stranger’s attractiveness. His description of what is desirable, “at least in a woman’s eyes” contributes to the new identity taken on as he dons his feminine costume. Pentheus becomes a mirror image of both the stranger and his mother, as “desire and identification converge in a narcissistic doubling in which Pentheus becomes what he desires”,<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>23</sup> Lines 453-459 of *Bacchae*.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 144.

once again reinforcing binaries of desire within the binaries of gender. However, an important distinction is to understand this concept without a binary within this convergence, thus desire and gender soon overlap. Wohl proposes, “if Pentheus desires the woman in Dionysus, he also desires Dionysus as a woman”. He has taken on the role of a woman, (“in a woman’s eyes”), and recognizes the beauty of the stranger, and by understanding the desire, he has “become(s) the woman he desires in the god”. Wohl claims that the merging of gendered desires collapses the axes of desire and identification.

Where the Oedipal complex understands the fact of sexual difference as the origin of lack, alienation, and castration, here that fact generates novel desires and pleasures; it is the occasion not for exclusionary binaries but for lustful identification that cross and confuse boundaries.<sup>26</sup>

Wohl uses Deleuze and Guattari’s theories on subjectivity, and their notion of “becoming-other”, the transformation of how something is perceived into an “other”. It is not a game of imitation but rather a swapping of identities with what is desired. Wohl goes on to give many examples of the “becoming” throughout the text: Woman becoming-maenad, Old Cadmus becomes-young, (the future prediction of his soon adventures), Dionysus becomes-multiple, (embodiment of the chorus, becoming-stranger, becoming-god, Pentheus becomes-double, (seeing the double Thebes, being woman and man), etc. This model of “becoming” opposes the Oedipal configuration, and therefore, portrays the possibility of a lack of binaries. Thus, Pentheus can be both man, woman, and in-between.

The “becoming-double” outlined above is thematic throughout *Bacchae* and its adaptations as it references self-recognition and the doubling-effect.<sup>27</sup> This doubling is not

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>27</sup> Wohl’s article above discusses some aspects of this doubling effect, and further discussion into how the doubling effect is the overarching theme of the play is presented by Simon Goldhill as he identifies other key moments of

limited to character portrayal in its relevance but for this project purpose, I am focusing on how this term embodies the dualities of Pentheus Dionysus.<sup>28</sup> The first example of this duality is that Pentheus and Dionysus are cousins, and inherently reflect each other in their shared maternal lineage. Duality is also uncovered in their sexual orientations, Pentheus desires to both become and (sexually) possess Dionysus. This results in both a duality of how Pentheus perceives Dionysus and a duality in how he views himself. Doubling of identity is expressed throughout all three adaptations in the costumes of Pentheus and Dionysus through mirrored colors, shapes, and imagery; an essential aspect to include to provide visual access to the portrayals of the cousins and to open the door for contemporary gender and sexuality interpretations.

Applying these insights into the gendered performances and the role of “becoming” in *Bacchae* to a critique of costume design provides a space to move between gender and desire and into a third realm of queerness. This move suggests that crossing into the boundaries of all genders in the costumes does not infer the twisting of gender portrayal, but rather implies an intersection, inclusion, and subsequent destruction of gender binaries.

### ***Bacchae*: A Foundation Without Material Context**

The *Bacchae* begins in Thebes after a plague has taken over the city's people. In a divine prologue, Dionysus reveals himself to the audience as a god taking the form of a man to enact revenge on the city, specifically, on Pentheus, the King. As the son of Semele, and cousin to Pentheus, Dionysus has returned to his familial kingdom in search of recognition of his divinity in honor of his mother. Pentheus does not want to recognize Dionysus as a god, believing his

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doubling within other characters and within the text of the play itself. According to McIntyre, doubling is a “fracturing of the other” and a separation of the self. Read more here: Goldhill, Simon. "Doubling and Recognition in the *Bacchae*." *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* 3, no. 1 (1988): 137-156.

<sup>28</sup> See again Goldhill's discussion of the far-reaching impact of the doubling effect to understand the full grasp of its importance within tragedy: Goldhill, Simon. "Doubling and Recognition in the *Bacchae*." *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* 3, no. 1 (1988): 137-156.

own mother's lies that Semele lied about Zeus impregnating her. Upon Dionysus's arrival in Thebes, the city's women, including Agave, Pentheus's mother, are driven into the mountains in a bacchanal mania, (μανία). Dionysus slowly deteriorates the sanity of Pentheus, until he too is lost under the bacchant spell. Dionysus convinces Pentheus to dress in the clothes of a woman, and encourages him to follow the women into the hills of Mt. Citheron. By doing so, he leads Pentheus to his inevitable death at the hands of his delirious mother. The power Dionysus holds over the entire city of Thebes is undeniable as he infiltrates the city's minds, even of those who do not acknowledge his divinity.

The *Bacchae* stands out as a glaringly violent, erotic, and intellectually stimulating performance of gender and identity. A dominant theme is the power dynamics between divinity and man. This theme is fostered and bolstered between Pentheus and Dionysus, Dionysus and the Theban woman, Zeus and Semele, and other instances of divinity's relationships to humans. In these cases, the power of sexuality is brought to the surface as a preeminent motif that creates and disturbs tension.<sup>29</sup> Out of Euripides' tragedies, the *Bacchae* draws my attention above all else with its scenes of cross-dressing and costuming to portray the "loss of sanity" in the followers of Dionysus. Due to the lack of direct costuming directions for most of the play's characters, I will be comparing textual costume references with iconography details from ancient vases produced in the years before and after the initial production. Much of the testimonia with depictions of bacchant narratives predate Euripides' production of the *Bacchae* which infers both that this story comes from long before Euripides's time, and that for Euripides, the costumes for the

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<sup>29</sup> See Segal, C. "Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides Bacchae" (1997)., for commentary on Pentheus' sexuality. While I disagree later with Segal in my analysis of Victoria Wohl's work, he does provide keen insight into a traditional reading of Pentheus's queerness.

characters were a pre-established representation.<sup>30</sup> These presentations of bacchant characters allow for a certain level of congruency in their ensuing interpretations.

Many depictions of Pentheus are inconclusive for his potential costume. Pictured below, (fig. 1), is Pentheus's dismemberment in which his clothes have already been ripped from his body, the only remaining piece of costume the headband from his maenad costume around his head. The maenads' costumes are cohesive with their other portrayals, i.e. animal skin, long peplos, and headbands, however, this scene lacks ivy imagery. Another portrayal of Pentheus in "costume", (fig. 2), identifies the same scene just moments before, while he is still intact.<sup>31</sup> In this depiction Pentheus is draped with a chlamys, (χλαμύς). It is slung over one arm and hangs down his back. Again, this depiction shows him almost completely in the nude, signifying that a specific divergence from the *Bacchae* is occurring in his nudity. In Euripides's interpretation, the beheading of Pentheus occurs after he is dressed as a maenad, without mention of a subsequent undressing. There is no allusion present, (beyond the feminine headband in fig. 1), of his earlier costume, instead, a connection between Pentheus and hero iconography is formed.<sup>32</sup> Heroes are often depicted naked against the contrast of their clothed enemies, and by maintaining Pentheus's depiction in the nude across multiple vases, he becomes framed as the hero within this story. Whether this is an accurate representation of Pentheus's character is unclear, however, it appears to be a window into how he was perceived in the Classical period. In the case of the role of Pentheus's costume, the lack of costume is what has made the largest impact on these artifacts' audiences' perceptions of his character.

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<sup>30</sup> There are a number of vases, depicting parts of the myth of Pentheus and Dionysus that pre-date Euripides's production. Fig. 1 & 2 are roughly from 480 B.C.E. and 450-425 B.C.E, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> Death of Pentheus - Luigi Ademollo, (1764-1849) - illustration from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Florence, 1832 - PD-art-100

<sup>32</sup> See more about the implications of male nudity here: Bonfante, Larissa. "Nudity as a costume in classical art." *American Journal of Archaeology* 93, no. 4 (1989): 543-570.





Figure 1, *Red-Figure Cup Showing the Death of Pentheus (exterior) and a Maenad (interior)*,  
c. 480 B.C. Douris (painter), Greek



Figure 2, *Pentheus torn apart by Agave and Ino*. Attic red-figure lekanis (cosmetics bowl) lid, ca.  
450-425 BC.

Dionysus is pictured below on a sixth-century amphora with a maenad, (fig. 3).<sup>33</sup>

Dionysus is portrayed in long, regal robes with a kantharos in hand and a maenad next to him with an animal skin and an ivy vine in hand.<sup>34</sup> This portrait provides another example of the extensive iconography portraying these characters across time. In his long chiton and beard,

<sup>33</sup> "Dionysus and the Maenads," amphora by the Amasis Painter, c. 530 BC; in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris.

<sup>34</sup> A kantharos is a cup used for wine, often depicted with Dionysus since it was comically large for one person, and only Dionysus would be able to consume that amount of wine. See more: Elderkin, George Wicker. *Kantharos: studies in Dionysiac and kindred cult*. Vol. 12. Princeton University Press, 1924.

Dionysus is presented as strong and regal, whereas in other depictions he is a younger, more feminine character.<sup>35</sup> These connotations of power and regality denote Dionysus as a far more respected member of the Theban royal family than as portrayed in Euripides' *Bacchae*. By doing so, the artist has created a persona of a serious power-figure, a dramatic contrast to the stranger described in Pentheus's address.



Figure 3, "Dionysus and the Maenads," amphora by the Amasis Painter, c. 530 BC; in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris.

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<sup>35</sup>Dionysus has been represented frequently across art in two different iconographical appearances: beard and clean shaven. Henrichs, Albert. "Dionysus." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics*. 2015.



Figure 4, "Dancing Maenad," Attic red figure, white ground kylix, cup.

Attributed to the Brygos Painter, Late Archaic period, ca. 490 BCE,

Munich. Antikensammlungen.

A maenad is typically portrayed with familiar iconography of animal skin, ivy, and thrysi. The maenad pictured on the kylix, (fig. 4), demonstrates all three of these components with animal skin on her back and a thyrsus wrapped in ivy in her hand. Gripped by the maenad is an animal, seemingly caught with her own bare hands, creating a portrait of a woman taken by mania. While this depiction has an unknown (seemingly leopard) animal skin, fawnskin is a commonly identified component of the maenad's costume.<sup>36</sup> Fawnskin is the primary recurring animal skin due to its symbolism related to Dionysus:

It protected them during their cold winter rituals on the mountain;  
it brought them into communion with the world of nature; it helped  
them assume a new identity, (namely that of a wild animal whose

<sup>36</sup> I am using Stephan Esposito's translation of the *Bacchae*, referring to his in-depth prologue with his analysis of the text and reference to costumes.

bounding swiftness and freedom of movement [[lines] 24, 66-72, 866] were virtues that would naturally be attractive to these spirited devotees of Dionysus.<sup>37</sup>

The fawnskin combines nature with disguise, an intriguing combination because, for these performances, man-made masks were used to identify what characters were being portrayed. As a union of disguise and nature, fawnskin takes concealment one step further and creates a new and feral costume. This animalistic presentation associates wild, sexual, and free beings with animals, eliminating the possibility of the maenads being considered within the “traditional” archetype of characters the audience would be familiar with.

Along with the deerskin adornment, maenads are often depicted with some iteration of ivy. The maenad pictured above has ivy wrapping the end of her thyrsus, as well as ivy imagery along the border of her peplos. Ivy can be a marker of death and immortality, as well as a symbol of longevity and eternal life.<sup>38</sup> Many of Dionysus’s appearances across literature and media portray ivy or vine wreaths of some fashion and are a main source of the symbolism associated with the god himself. In the *Bacchae*, an ivy wreath is an extremely important distinction between the maenads, and Pentheus’s cross-dressing to disguise himself as a maenad as his new costume does not (textually) include a wreath of ivy. In its place, the stranger dresses him in a feminine headband.<sup>39</sup> While it is an appropriate aspect of the costume to appear as a woman, it lacks the cultural significance of an ivy wreath. Therefore while the other maenads and bacchant followers, including Tiresias and Cadmus, wear a crown of ivy, Pentheus sticks out like a sore thumb in his lack.<sup>40</sup> This distinction creates an “othered” identity of Pentheus in his costume, not

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<sup>37</sup> Read more of Esposito’s determination of importance of fawnskin on page 28 of his translation.

<sup>38</sup> Ferguson, 1961, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Esposito uses Dodds’ research into the feminine uses of the headband. (Dodds 177). A headband is “typically worn by women to bind their hair, consisting of a piece of cloth wrapped around the head”.

<sup>40</sup> See this reference on line 178, Esposito.

only queering him from society in his feminine garb but further queering him from the maenads in his failure to appear in the same costumes as them.

For the final aspect of the maenad costume, the weapon of the maenads, the thyrsus, becomes a tool for the destruction of gender binaries. A thyrsus is a fennel staff, wrapped in ivy and topped with a pinecone.<sup>41</sup> It is wielded by the maenads as both a destroyer and creator of life with its abilities to both kill their prey and spring life from the ground. Deepening this dichotomy, the phallic nature creates a transfusion of gender binaries as it is wielded by overtly feminine women.<sup>42</sup> The maenads, having departed from the sanity of society, have crossed from the confinements of gender into the divine ability of transversion.<sup>43</sup> As committed followers of Bacchus, the maenads exist between humans and gods, and by incorporating this fusion of gender into their costumes, they become entities othered.

Without the privilege of 20th-century recordings of costumes, these artistic interpretations and depictions are the foundation for understanding costumes of early *Bacchae* productions. Their influence on modern adaptations is profound, noticeable in the smallest costume choices of color and flow, to the largest overwhelming choices in ivy and animal-skin imagery that creates a line of symmetry through all interpretations of the text that creates a path to this thesis's interpretations today.

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<sup>41</sup> The actual components and appearance of the thyrsus is debated between scholars as it appears in a multitude of variations across literature and media. For the sake of coherence, I am using the description found in Esposito's translation. The presence of the pine cone, as well as the identification of the fennel is debated.

<sup>42</sup> The transformation of Pentheus and the Maenads upon association with the thyrsus is analyzed continuously, an invitation of the phallic nature is discussed here: Kalke, Christine M. "The making of a thyrsus: the transformation of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*." *The American Journal of Philology* 106, no. 4 (1985): 409-426.

<sup>43</sup> I specifically reference the divine ability of transversion because ancient Greek gods are commonly seen changing gender and queer orientation.

### ***The Bacchantes: Classical Interpretation of Classical Styling***

The film, *The Bacchantes*, is a loose adaptation of *The Bacchae*, produced in 1963 by Giorgio Ferroni.<sup>44</sup> *The Bacchantes* is set in Thebes with familiar bacchic characters yet is set apart from the other adaptations by introducing other plotlines and characters (forbidden love and a third heir to the Theban throne). Most of the overt queer-coded garments are eliminated, which in turn means the othering of Pentheus relies on subtle costuming details (color ways, contrast, etc.) instead of more overt queerness that can be seen in later adaptations. *The Bacchantes* shows a clear discomfort with the “queerness” of *Bacchae*, and in a further removal from queer interpretation, *all* cross-dressing scenes are abolished, instead any discernible gender fluidity is portrayed by relying on Pentheus’s masculinity and the stranger’s feminine appearance. The costumes follow traditional, vaguely 5th century attire, primarily presenting characters in *himatia*, tunics, *peploi*, and as hoplites.<sup>45</sup> Due to this stylistic choice by the film’s costume designer, Nadia Vitali, a foundational building block for analyzing the costumes throughout these 20th-century receptions becomes accessible.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to *Dionysus in ’69* and *The Backerterna*, classical styling affords the audience a clearer conception of life in 405 B.C.E., and a backdrop of more historically accurate depictions to contrast the later adaptation’s costumes.

The first costume analyzed is Pentheus’s. In contrast to the *Bacchae*’s plot, Pentheus does not cross-dress in this adaptation, thus the costume is stagnant throughout, which puts this portrayal in sharp contradiction to any other Pentheus and their theoretical queerness, (fig. 5).

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<sup>44</sup> Ferroni was an Italian film director with multiple movies surrounding Greco-Roman myths; *Hercules vs Moloch*, *The Trojan Horse*, *Hélène de Troie* (Helen of Troy), and others. He was the primary screenwriter for many of the 30 films he directed.

<sup>45</sup> For further differentiation between types of tunics and himations, read Abrahams, E. B., M. M. L. Evans, *Ancient Greek Dress*, and L. Llewellyn-Jones. “Clothing and Appearance.” *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (2003): 96.

<sup>46</sup> Vitali holds an extremely notable career within Hollywood as stylist for *Dune* (1984), *Requiem for a Secret Agent*, and *Machine Gun McCain*. This movie was among a long list of period pieces.



This costume is a short and dark red chiton with a loose-fitting golden breastplate worn on top. Draped over both of his shoulders is a white himation that falls far past the chiton to his knees. He wears simple sandals that extend above his ankles.



Figure 5, Pentheus in *The Bacchantes*, 20:55

As the current king of Thebes, Pentheus' costume must command attention and power from the audience. While Vitali remains within classical styling choices for Pentheus's costume, the colors chosen for his chiton are a divergence from a more traditional understanding of classical Greek color theory.<sup>47</sup> In the fifth century B.C.E., kings are more commonly found in purple rather than red chitons. Examples of purple imagery such as robes and cloth are closely tied with royalty because the dyed purple was one of the most highly coveted colors of the time.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, red was used as a color symbolizing change or a transitional period in life.

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<sup>47</sup> Color theory is the study of color's role in perception, both in emotional reactions and physical reactions, to read further, see Agoston, George A. *Color theory and its application in art and design*. Vol. 19. Springer, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Lyell, Ellena. "Perceptions of Power: Purple in Archaic Greek, Ancient Mesopotamian Inscriptions, and the Hebrew Bible." *Avar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Life and Society in the Ancient Near East* 1, no. 2 (2022): 283-311.

Red can be found on a bride's veil, or burial shrouds.<sup>49</sup> Red, a color closely linked to purple, could allude to the same royal connotations, however, with the additional allusion to impending change, this chiton's colors become a link to the approaching change in his royal life. By ever so slightly stepping out of the lines of the expected color imagery, Vitali has foreshadowed the immense change Pentheus faces through his chiton.

Following Pentheus's chiton, the next important aspect of his costume is his golden layer of armor. While many of the other characters seen on the screen don't wear their hoplites until the climaxing battle, Pentheus's warrior status is established in the constant appearance of his armor. The gold of this armor not only implies wealth and power, but it is a divergence from historically accurate costuming. The armor, in classical Greece, would have been constructed from bronze due to its resilience in battle, while in contrast, gold is soft and malleable.<sup>50</sup> The effect of this is a striking hoplite that catches the eye of the audience yet is a marker of Pentheus' appetite for appearance over practicality. To Pentheus, self-presentation in all of its masculine forms is vital to being a strong king, yet the *appearance* of power has become more important in this costume than the actual presence of power. This characterization frames Pentheus as power-desperate and ignorant, a narrative that continues throughout this film.

The next piece of the costume to consider is Pentheus' white *himation*. White, in both classical Greece and society in the 1960s, when this costume was being designed, is a sign of divinity, innocence, or virginity. In *The Bacchantes*, Pentheus is assigned to the role of the villain, and therefore, this contradiction with his villainousness to white clothes provides insight into how Pentheus was intended to be received. If the color white is a reflection of Pentheus's mental state, the character of Pentheus takes on the potential virtue of innocence in his actions. In

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<sup>49</sup>Gage, J. *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*. Boston, 1993.

<sup>50</sup> For deeper analysis of armor and its composition, read d'AMato, Raffaele. "Arms and Weapons." *A Companion to Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2016): 801-816.



removing malicious intent, Pentheus is deeply misunderstood and acting out from a place of fear, not anger. If adorned in dark *himatia*, this innocence is not blatantly present, and therefore, if this movie is interpreted solely through the lens of color theory, it is the fault of fate, not the characters themselves, for bringing despair to Thebes.<sup>51</sup> The white is also reflected in Dionysus' costume as the stranger, (fig. 6). This mirroring of each other's costumes reminds the audience of the shared lineage, a doubling effect seen in every adaptation analyzed here, and reproduced within the final project.



Figure 6, Dionysus as the stranger in *The Bacchantes*, 4:41.

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<sup>51</sup> Classical Greek myth stems from a fatalist society, using the inescapable fate as a reason to perpetuate tragic storylines. The role of fate in removing vilinancy from Pentheus is debated by Daniel Dennett; A fatalist society is “the rather mystical and superstitious view that at certain checkpoints in our lives, we will necessarily find ourselves in particular circumstances (the circumstances 'fate' has decreed) no matter what the intervening vagaries of our personal trajectories.... It is widely agreed that this sort of fatalism has absolutely nothing to recommend it”, Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), p. 104.

Next, we turn to a similar and yet conspicuously divine costume, Dionysus's predominantly white tunic, and bright red himation, pictured above. Despite having taken human form as the stranger, his garments mark him as undeniably divine and of royal blood. Set against the Theban crowds, his chiton shines brighter and louder, setting a tone of divinity, and assuming innocence as the tragedy unfolds. An assumption of innocence for Dionysus is what motivates and orchestrates the plotline forward. For the audience to root for the underdogs in the film, (the stranger and Lacdamus), they have to ignore the fact that the drought is being caused by Dionysus. The god claims outside forces, (Pentheus), motivates him to take such drastic action, but in the end, it is his divine doing that is harming the land and people of Thebes. Therefore, despite knowing Dionysus is chiefly responsible for the drought, the audience can find a subconscious message of innocence being portrayed in the whiteness of his costume. The question of whether this impression is well-founded is not clear, however, when this color theory cooperates with the plotline, an underlying sense of trickery becomes apparent. Again, a doubling of identity occurs and reminds the audience of the thematic narrative of duality.<sup>52</sup> The red of the himation, similar to Pentheus, marks an impending change that is coming with his presence in the scene. With the double meaning of the white "innocence" of his other garments, the stranger becomes an emblem of foreshadowing. This foreshadowing is further employed when Dionysus and Pentheus's costumes are taken into consideration side by side, as discussed above. As cousins, they share maternal blood, and technically share the responsibility of being a part of the royal Theban family. Therefore, the doubling is like a mirror, the white in each of their costumes emphasizes the other's foreshadowed fate and imposes their own colorways onto the other.

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<sup>52</sup> See footnote 17, Goldhill, Simon. "Doubling and Recognition in the Bacchae." *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* 3, no. 1 (1988): 137-156.

In contrast to the power and innocence portrayed in Dionysus's and Pentheus's costumes of reds and whites, the Maenads costumes retain neither, dressed in colorful and playful attire, (fig. 7). Their peplos range from light turquoise blue, to lilac purples, bright reds, and emerald greens. While in classical Greece these colors can be associated with power and wealth, the implications of these colors in a film produced in 1963 alters the meaning of these costumes. Unlike the men's costumes that exude power, the Maenads colors are childlike, eradicating importance and power from their perceptions. They are draped in ivy in an homage to Dionysus, wrapping long tendrils around their torsos, arms, and within their hair. A clear transition from Theban women into Maenad is created as ivy is adorned onto those who previously had none. This distinction is important as the maenads slowly come to hold more power than their female Theban counterparts. The distinction becomes further defined with the inclusion of the Maenads thyrsi. A thyrsus can be a gender-bending symbol of power.<sup>53</sup> It is a magical weapon used by the bacchan women to spring life from the ground and to kill their prey. Due to the thyrsus's masculinized physical design, it helps neutralize the gender of the maenads, a powerful combination of female anger and masculine rage.<sup>54</sup> Despite the power given back to *The Bacchantes'* Maenads through their costumes, they remain passive in the overall arc of the movie as they have no role in the death of Pentheus. By dismissing the infamous murder of Pentheus at the hands of his mother, and by dressing the women and Maenads in bright playful colors, Ferroni and Vitali have successfully deprived the female characters in this film of their power despite their costume's possibilities of equality.

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<sup>53</sup> See Moreau for an introspection into the role of the thyrsus, "the thyrsus is the representation of ... astonishing duality", pg. 66. Moreau, Gustave. "ORNAMENT AND THE ARABESQUE FROM LINE TO MELODY." *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (2013): 64.

<sup>54</sup> See above for an overview of Victoria Wohl's deconstruction and mergence of gender; the thyrsus acts as an embodiment of this merging.



Figure 7, Maenad in *The Bacchantes*, 1:25:38

Ferroni's adaptation of the *Bacchae* de-queers the story's characters and plot line by removing cross-dressing scenes, however, an imposed othering remains. A resounding instance of queer coding in the original text is Pentheus's cross into womanhood through his costume change, intersecting (or eliminating) gender binaries both physically and emotionally. In *The Bacchantes*, this entire plotline is left out. Instead of a gendered costume change, a switch occurs as he adorns himself with armor and regal military attire. Diverging from cross-dressing and replacing with further masculine garments allows Pentheus to maintain his masculine power status as he never loses control over his physical or emotional presentation. This interpretation and subsequent alteration of the storyline opens the door for discussion of interpreting Pentheus as a non-queer-coded character, however, Pentheus remains othered in his costume and character and thus this adaptation does not present a strong argument to discredit the queerness of

Pentheus. It does, however, remain important for understanding the reception of Pentheus' queerness and the queer-coded garments throughout the play. It is the *lack* of obvious queerness that speaks volumes about the reception of the play in the early 60s. In contrast to the overtly sexual narrative that arrives just 8 years later in *Dionysus in '69*, as discussed below. *The Bacchantes* attempts to remove a plotline that has been performed for over two thousand years. Hence, the importance of considering *The Bacchantes* contribution to the styling of the *Bacchae* throughout history as an example of the discomfort with queerness emanating from the director and culture of this adaptation.

### ***Dionysus in '69: Escaping Conformity in Richard Schechner's "Street-Clothes"***

The next adaptation I will be investigating is *Dionysus in '69*, which first opened for the stage in 1968, directed by Richard Schechner in collaboration with The Performance Group. The play draws on the dramatic, excessive side of Dionysus and intentionally chooses to skip the use of "formal" costumes; instead it relies on street clothes, matching jockstraps, and the performers' naked bodies. In contrast to the other examples studied in this paper, Schechner did not want the cast to rely on costumes to tell a story; however, the street-clothing costumes do create a narrative that speaks to the intended audience's reception and the troop's perception of this Euripidean tragedy.<sup>55</sup> *Dionysus in '69* goes a step further in othering the characters in *Bacchae* by leaving no costume un-queered and no audience member comfortable. This adaptation made a visceral interpretation of the dynamics between power and submission, sexuality and chastity, and excess and modesty by warping the audiences' sense of emotional direction and understanding of reality. The work was a collaboration between the actors, the text, and Richard

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<sup>55</sup> Schechner describes the intentional decision for the use of street clothes, read more: Aronson, Arnold. "An interview with Richard Schechner on the 50th anniversary of *Dionysus in '69*." *Theatre and Performance Design* 4, no. 4 (2018): 290-307.

Schechner's vision of how the *Bacchae* could reanimate a culture of individualism lacking in ritual and collective sensibility. .

Richard Schechner formed a theory on the varying functions of performance. These ideas can be seen as foundational for any performing art, but as the list continues, Schechner's specific and unique artistic style becomes apparent. The seven functions of performance are:

1. To entertain 2. To create beauty 3. To mark or change identity
4. To make or foster community 5. To heal 6. To teach or persuade
7. To deal with the sacred and demonic.<sup>56</sup>

According to Schechner, at the bare minimum, three of these functions must be present in a performance for it to have worth or meaning. In the case of *Dionysus in 69*, the Performance Group sets out and achieves all seven of these functions. The group used a style of performance coined by Schechner as "environmental theater", which occurs as "the performer discovers his or her true power of transformation".<sup>57</sup> This style, combined with Schechner's seven functions, created a troop that created their own rules and pushed the boundaries of the audience, performance, and themselves. Environmental theater breaks down the binaries between performer and spectator, actively incorporating both into the production of the play. They abandoned the classical idea of costume and instead opted for what they called street-clothes. These costumes were pulled and inspired from their own wardrobes, thrift stores, and friends and consisted of similar, but not matching, tank tops, underwear, jean shorts, jockstraps, and turtlenecks.

Similar to his presentation in *The Bacchantes*, Pentheus does not undergo a *gendered* costume change, instead the *non-gendered* altering of his costume must take on the role of

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<sup>56</sup> Schechner, Richard. "Ritual and performance." *Companion encyclopedia of anthropology* (1994): 613-647.

<sup>57</sup> Schechner, Richard. "6 axioms for environmental theater." *The Drama Review* 12, no. 3 (1968): 41-64.

portraying his changing mental stability status as he moves between bare skin, jockstraps, and denim cutoff shorts. Our first introduction to Pentheus is during his birth, through and over the legs and bodies of his fellow actors.<sup>58</sup> Pentheus slides out of the womb of humans wearing nothing but a very small black jockstrap.<sup>59</sup> The jockstrap, while shocking to the audience, is completely at home on stage among the other actors dressed in similar forms of undergarments.<sup>60</sup> This creates two effects on the audience and the play's reception. First, it creates an intense state of vulnerability. Nakedness is an intimate act that the audience is only familiar with in the comfort of their own homes.<sup>61</sup> To see this openness on a stage, out of the private and into the public light, is both unsettling and freeing. It is unsettling due to its unfamiliarity, and it is freeing due to its innate humanness. The human body arrives naked and is naked in life's most private moments: sex, sleep, bathing, etc. This state of vulnerability is impossible to ignore by the audience and sets the tone of intense intimacy for the play, as well as Pentheus's character. The second effect that this costume has is its role in the characterization of Pentheus. By dressing Pentheus in a black, loudly sexual, and creatively small jockstrap at the onset of the play, characterizing him as both promiscuous and conformitive. However, because all the men on stage are dressed in the same black strap, this costume frames Pentheus as just another character,

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<sup>58</sup> The birth scene, and parallel death scene, is a visual interpretation of the birth canal that incorporates the actors bodies into the role of womb, god, and the world outside. Read more: Brecht, Stefan. "Dionysus in 69, from Euripides' *The Bacchae*." *The Drama Review* 13, no. 3 (1969): 156-170.

Schechner based this ritualistic birth scene on an Asmat Birth ritual, from West Irian, (now Indonesian province of Papua). Read more on his choices and inspiration for this scene here: Gillitt, Cobina. "Richard Schechner." *Asian Theatre Journal* 30, no. 2 (2013): 276-94.

The ritual first births Dionysus, before spitting Pentheus out later in the play. As the two characters who come from this carnal ceremony, they are further doubled as coming from the same bloodline, they have been birthed from the same lineage. See footnote 17 for further reading on this theme of doubling.

<sup>59</sup> Within two months of the play being open to the public, they transitioned to being fully nude for this scene. For the sake of this project, I am relying on the film's portrayal. I am relying on visual sources and therefore, it is more direct to only reference the play as it was during the filming.

<sup>60</sup> See Brecht again for his experiences as a spectator as he describes the energy as the actors approach them in the beginning until the absurdity of the play becomes jarringly apparent. Brecht, Stefan. Review of "*Dionysus in 69*", from Euripides' "*The Bacchae*," by The Performance Group. *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 3 (1969): 156-68.

<sup>61</sup> Schechner explicitly states that he does not use the term nudity, intentionally. He reserves nudity for a museum. His characters are naked. Read this interview here: Lavalette, Chloé. "From Dionysus in 69 to Imagining O: discussing nakedness with Richard Schechner." *MIRANDA* 16 (2018).

a face among the crowd. This is an extremely intentional attempt of portraying Pentheus as a follower, despite his tyrannical ruling.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the play, as we will explore soon, it is Dionysus who stands out in his costume, just as it is Dionysus who is the only character to remain clear headed throughout the play. Pentheus's costume is the same as every other masculine body on the floor and therefore, he is being cast as just another follower, with a mind that can be controlled.

The next costume that Pentheus is dressed in is a pair of black jean shorts, worn over his black jockstrap, remaining otherwise shirtless and shoeless, (fig. 8). The rest of the cast remain either in their minimal undergarments or have begun stripping to bare skin. Pentheus's shorts are cutoffs, and the audience, either subconsciously or consciously, can't deny familiarity with the short's life and journey.<sup>63</sup> These shorts become his most defining costume, creating a character that is both childish in their informal-ness and a self-reflection of his identity. A pair of cutoffs is inappropriate to wear to a work setting because they lack conformation to social understanding of hierarchy.<sup>64</sup> They also become personifications of Pentheus himself as they exist within an altered state of reality as a piece of clothing that has been mutated from its original state.

*Dionysus in '69* creates a sharp contrast to the Pentheus introduced by Euripides, a tyrant king who desires power, respect, and control who has been contorted into a childish imitation of the original.

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<sup>62</sup> To read more about the dichotomy of ruling and being ruled, see Seaford, Richard. "Tragic tyranny." In *Popular tyranny: sovereignty and its discontents in ancient Greece*, pp. 95-116. University of Texas Press, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Morgado, Marcia A. "Fashion phenomena and the post-postmodern condition: Enquiry and speculation." *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 1, no. 3 (2014): 313-339.

<sup>64</sup> Jeans are a widely debated garment when worn in the workplace. While some days it is completely inappropriate, other days marked as "casual" allow. This distinction is brought up in Pentheus' outfit as he is wearing jeans, and further amplified as they are cut off. See more discussion on workplace dress here: Miller-Spillman, Kimberly A. "Dress in the Workplace." *The Meanings of Dress:-with STUDIO* (2019): 209.





Figure 8, Pentheus, (left), Dionysus as the stranger, (right), *Dionysus in '69*, 37:50.

Dionysus's series of costumes stand in contrast to Pentheus's bare skin and jeans short combination as he is dressed in a costume that creates and continues his mind-altering persona, (fig. 8). He too is birthed from the womb of joint human bodies wearing nothing but a black jockstrap, yet after the bacchanal rites of ecstasy are performed, Dionysus dresses himself in a dark green long-sleeve turtleneck. This turtleneck is contrasted against Pentheus' bare chest in an assertion of power as the privilege to cover oneself implies sexual power and domination.<sup>65</sup> The orange of the shorts is distinct to the rest of the men's costumes in their sea of dark colors. When understanding this outfit in terms of color theory, dark orange color is seen in a dichotomy of a positive and negative light. With unfavorable connotations, pride, childishness, and stubbornness are projected onto his character. Conversely, oranges can hold the favorable connotations of

<sup>65</sup> In contemporary times, I am referencing how nudity has been used to disempower women in the media as their body becomes an object to purchase or possess. In ancient times, nudity versus clothing took on different meanings, however, when analyzing Athenian art, a woman's exposed breast is a sign of domination and lack of power. Later in Roman art it can be seen as empowering, although for the purpose of this project, I am using Athenian and contemporary lenses. Read more: Beggan, James K., Jennifer A. Vencill, and Sheila Garos. "Vulnerable but aloof versus naughty and nice: Contrasting the presentation of male and female nude models in Viva and Playboy." *The Journal of Sex Research* 51, no. 3 (2014): 265-279.

physical strength, solace, and extroversion.<sup>66</sup> The overtones inferred from his orange shorts are set against the dark green of his turtleneck, a color representing life and growth.<sup>67</sup> Together, the green and the orange create a division in the portrayal of Dionysus in their varying ideologies that are attached. The colors not only symbolically clash, but they visually clash as well. Oranges and greens sit near, but not touching, on the color wheel. Therefore, they are neither complementary colors nor analogous colors. Instead, they conflict, unsettling the viewer in their similarity. This becomes an extremely accurate representation of Dionysus in his human-not-human form. He neither makes sense nor does he confuse and with these colors worn in modest attire, his power is further asserted. He stands between divinity and man and creates issues for Pentheus that only someone of earthly divinity can do.

The supporting cast of men and female Maenads use their bodies and minimal costumes to create a silent dialogue with Dionysus. Similarly to Pentheus and Dionysus, the men are dressed in black jockstraps for the birthing rituals and slowly dress themselves in street clothes as this commences.<sup>68</sup> The women begin in matching red kitons, a type of long tank top, with black underwear, (fig. 9). As the dancing ensues, they strip themselves on stage, either to just their black underwear or to fully naked form before redressing themselves in tank tops and underwear. The distinction for all of the women to be dressed in bloodstained color establishes an allusion of blood to the audience. Red has the capacity to hold a multitude of possible nuances, but in the styling of this adaptation, the connotation of blood is constant and consistent as the movement of bodies within their red costumes create an overwhelming effect of spilt blood as the women roll across the floor, their colors are splashing across the ground and running

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<sup>66</sup>Clarke, Tom, and Alan Costall. "The emotional connotations of color: A qualitative investigation." *Color Research & Application: Endorsed by Inter-Society Color Council, The Colour Group (Great Britain), Canadian Society for Color, Color Science Association of Japan, Dutch Society for the Study of Color, The Swedish Colour Centre Foundation, Colour Society of Australia, Centre Français de la Couleur* 33, no. 5 (2008): 406-410.

<sup>67</sup>See again footnote on color theory. .

<sup>68</sup> See again the citation of TPG saying they chose "street" clothes on purpose.

into each other. Just before the close of the play, during Pentheus's death rites, the women are drenched in realistic blood-like liquid. It drips down their lifted arms and seamlessly into their costumes, creating a visceral image of their entire bodies being coated in blood. In this moment, the costume has become larger than a set of clothes, it has *become* the story, and this story is entirely reliant on the silent narrative found within its costumes.



Figure 9, The Maenads forming the death canal, *Dionysus in '69*, 1:25:17

The role of the costumes in *Dionysus in '69* is to both create and diffuse reality. The casual, hyper-sexual, and uniformity of the costumes perpetuates a reality in which the lines of man and god become blurred, and sanity and madness sound the same. Schechner and The Performance Group intentionally incorporate their own humanness into their characters, as Schechener articulates, “I wanted as much personal expression as possible in a play that deals so effectively with the liberation of personal energy” so that “the performance mask falls away and

the person playing the role is revealed”.<sup>69</sup> It is these intentional boundary crossings that constitute the play’s entire wardrobe as queer-coded despite nothing remaining or being recognizable in the constructs of the known, but rather, allowing the eccentricity to create a subliminal space of recognition. The cast’s willful contribution to creating the altered reality of the play brings the audience to the realization that despite the content of this play, it is not actually far from their own realities. They see themselves in Pentheus, Dionysus, Agave, and the supporting cast. They watch as a man dressed in jean cutoff shorts is wooed into insanity by another man, dressed in the same clothing that they too dress themselves in. This recognition of themselves is the most profound role of the costumes on the audience’s perception of the play. It carries them deep within and spits them out again, as if they too have passed through the corporal womb.

### ***Backanterna*: Minimalism vs. Maximalism to Create Divine Division**

*The Backanterna*, an opera produced in 1993 by Ingmar Bergman, presents an interesting dichotomy of heavily detailed costumes worn by the Maenads/Theban women to simplistic monochrome costumes worn by Dionysus and Pentheus.<sup>70</sup> This dichotomy provides an interesting space for conjecture because of the connotations of simplistic styling for royalty and deity figures and the significance of these visual choices. Similar to *The Bacchantes* and *Dionysus in '69*, Bergman’s opera provides a unique understanding of a play through musical

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<sup>69</sup> Schechner wrote about the experience and choices behind this play in Richard Schechner, *Dionysus in 69*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970.

<sup>70</sup> Bergman was a Swedish filmmaker and theater director, directing over 60 films and 170 theatrical productions. Bergman believed other adaptations of ancient myth reduced the stories to “easy to comprehend”, and is quoted claiming his production shows the “unadulterated classics in all their explosive energy”. For this thesis, I rely heavily on Francesca Schirnoi’s work as a classist looking deeply at Bergman’s work, see more here: Schirnoi, Francesca. "Staging, Interpreting, Speaking Through Euripides: Ingmar Bergman Directs the Bacchae." *International journal of the classical tradition* 23 (2016): 127-157.

interpretation.<sup>71</sup> The adaptation is the closest interpretation of the original text with near-exact lines translated into Italian operatic songs. Its loyalty to the text presents it as an important inclusion in the analysis of *Bacchae* adaptation's costumes because by following the text, it takes liberties in stylistic alterations. This divergences in costume and adherence to the text is in opposition to *The Bacchantes*, and when analyzed together, they round out a growingly complex portrayal of queerness in the play itself.

Pentheus's costumes are an interesting depiction of the balance between power and submission within his character. His character begins in all-black, skintight attire with matching black leather cuffs and belt, (fig. 10). The only visual contrast to this costume is the large gold necklace sitting close to his neck. His other accessories, large black cuffs, blend seamlessly into his costume, all together creating the portrayal of a powerful and dark king. In sharp divergence from his clothing, a notable feature of Pentheus's appearance is his long blonde hair, kept in a low bun before his transition.<sup>72</sup> Pentheus's hair, in comparison to his dark costume, reminds the audience of Pentheus's youth and its length is an intimately feminine trait. The combination of its youth and femininity creates an image of Pentheus in conflict with his otherwise austere portrayal. Further tied to his hair is the mirror image of his cousin, Dionysus. Both characters have long blond hair, a mirroring that links their identities together, as will be discussed below. The all-black costume is a stark reminder of two things: his impending death and his negligence in honoring his godly cousin. The overt monochrome in the costume can not be untied from the

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<sup>71</sup> To understand more on the importance of operas in the performing arts, Tom Sutcliffe outlines the "liberation of imagination" that opera provides, read Sutcliffe, Tom. *Believing in opera*. Princeton University Press, 1997.

<sup>72</sup> In this case, transition refers both to his cross-dressing, as well as the transition from sanity to insanity. According to an interview with Bergman, this was an extremely intentional choice to draw a direct line of visual similarity between Pentheus and Dionysus, who is also portrayed with long blond hair. Schironi, Francesca. "Staging, Interpreting, Speaking Through Euripides: Ingmar Bergman Directs the *Bacchae*." *International journal of the classical tradition* 23 (2016): 127-157.

motif of death attached to the color black.<sup>73</sup> This costume uses the color black and in direct reference to Pentheus' dismemberment, isolates his arms and head from the rest of his body. Visually, he has already been dismembered and thus Pentheus's costume carries a foreboding impression of a death on the verge of occurrence.

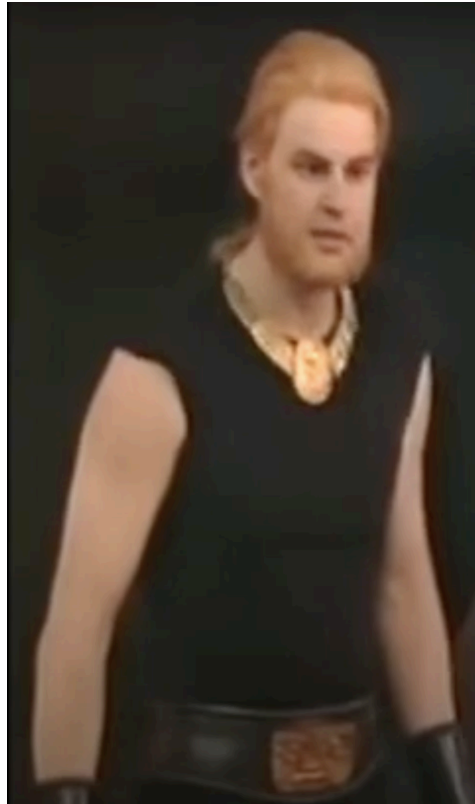


Figure 10, Pentheus in *The Backanterna*, 21:25

The second costume worn by Pentheus, his Maenad attire, furthers the childish and seemingly innocent side of his character, (fig. 11). Instead of a full wardrobe change, Pentheus is dressed in a light purple tunic-like *over* his black costume. The choice to have him remain in black clothing, instead of switching completely into feminine clothing infers that Pentheus has not fully departed from his sanity or sense of self. While his character is acting strangely and unlike himself, the audience is unable to forget about who he was before, due to the constant

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<sup>73</sup> To read more about how Black can symbolism both life and death, and a multitude of other motifs, I am using John Harvey's work in *The Color Black* to acquire a holistic understanding of the color

reminder of the dark and powerful king constantly present below his new persona. The color of the dress is also an intriguing choice. The color purple can be used to portray royalty; however, the shade of this costume is far lighter than a royal purple, instead taking on a new joint portrayal of both royalty and forced tranquility.<sup>74</sup> Layered on top of Pentheus's all-black costume, this aligns with the childlike innocence that I believe Bergman was attempting to portray. He is at peace with his lack of sanity, he has fully given himself, or been forcefully given, and is now unable to respond to Dionysus. He is being portrayed as at peace, despite the turmoil that is clearly under the surface. This layering captures the forcefulness of his surrender; he has not surrendered to Dionysus because he has chosen to change his ways, but because of the power the god has over his mind.



Figure 11, Pentheus post cross-dressing in *The Bacchante*, 1:18:18

Opposite to Pentheus, we see Dionysus dressed in a series of different costumes. When he presents in his godly form, his costume fluctuates from man to god through silver and white

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<sup>74</sup> A light purple alludes to tranquility. Lavender is highly associated with peacefulness, (think: a scent used to calm before sleep). It is a smothering blanket of forced calmness. See footnote 45.

symbolism (not pictured), when he performs as the stranger his simplistic attire marks him as human, (fig. 12). As the stranger, he is dressed similarly to Pentheus in all-black with a leather overcoat, both with strikingly long blonde hair. The simplicity of this costume is more compelling than that of Pentheus as it allows the stranger to assimilate into the role of a human. With the leather overcoat breaking up the color blocking, even the considerable blackness does not catch the eye. One of the most noticeable features among this tame attire is the hair, a feminine attribute firmly linked to the original text, and a loud reminder of his cousin's hair. This reminder makes the costume take on the shape of a mirror, reflecting back into the world a reflection of Pentheus. The stranger's long flowing hair, with an inability to be constrained, is the loose version of Pentheus's tied up long blonde hair, and thus, the stranger is the queered form of Pentheus's costume. The difference in constraint is omnipresent throughout all costumes of the two cousins' characters, but most amplified in this adaptation. Consequently, even before a crossing of gender occurs, the two mirrored costumes have begun the process of drawing out Pentheus's multiplicity of genders as an embodiment of becoming what is desired.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See again Victoria Wohl's demonstration of the orchid and the bee analogy.



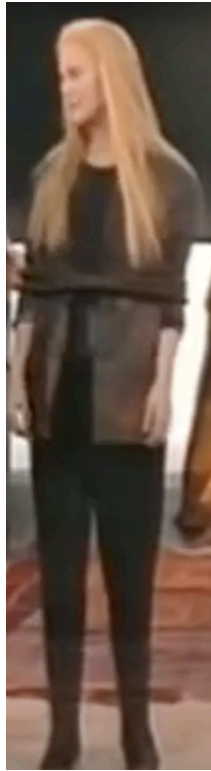


Figure 12, Dionysus as the stranger in The  
Backanterna, 33:53.

Dionysus's costume in godly form is delineated by an addition of a large and red open-front gown and a silver face mask, (fig. 13). The cumulation of these additions draws a strict line between man and god, however, they are clearly tied to Dionysus's human form as the black attire and long blond hair are seen in constant accompaniment to the costume. This composition is reminiscent of Dionysus's history, born from a human and god, he is an amalgamation of multiple identities and multiple costumes.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the godly costume of Dionysus is key to understanding his role throughout the opera as the character straddles the line between man and god, man and woman, enemy and friend, self and stranger. As seen within the styling, Dionysus is not meant to be one or the other, but rather, everything at once.

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<sup>76</sup>Read more of Dionysus as a man-god here: Versényi, Laszlo. "Dionysus and Tragedy." *The Review of Metaphysics* (1962): 82-97.



Figure 13, Dionysus in *The Backanterna*, 48:25.

Continuing the theme of red robes, the Maenads in the *Backanterna* are first dressed in long dresses of red and orange hues. As the storyline progresses, they float between Maenad and Theban women, and accordingly transition into robes of gray and muted whites as Pentheus moves between sanity and insanity, (fig. 14 & 15). The colors they are dressed in are directly linked to who the audience should be paying attention to, Pentheus versus Dionysus, and therefore, the styling of the Maenads becomes an embodiment of the relationship between the two. By reflecting the character's colors, they reflect simultaneously the actions of the two characters, and by this reason, they lose their singular identity and become embodiments of this relationship dynamic.



Figure 14, Maenads in *The Backanterna*, 8:47



Figure 15, Maenads in *The Backanterna*, 1:35:26

The simplicity of the styling of the *Backanterna* exemplifies the power clothing contains through correlation and parallel imagery. While relying heavily on movement and mass, it opens the door for an understanding of the relationship between Pentheus and Dionysus, and their subsequent impact on the characters around them. This movie is an important consideration

when exploring 21st-century styling of *Bacchae* because it provides an example of how to interact with the text without setting itself within a time that requires period costume as demonstrated in *The Bacchantes*, and further, it does not dive into the contemporary fashion period of when it was produced, as seen in *Dionysus in '69*. Thus, *Backenterna* is a prime model of how to incorporate Critical Fashion into Classics to continue themes introduced within the original text and to examine them through a contemporary lens.

### **Reimagining the Costume: A 21st Century Interpretation**

The culminating analysis of *The Backenterna*, *The Bacchantes*, and *Dionysus in '69* is the groundwork for my thesis's reimagining of the costumes of the Bacchae. A re-interpretation is designed to open the role of the costume to include explicit links and connotations to themes of the transformation of identity, othering, and self-referential history. These costumes do not require a chronological timestamp, fluctuating between past, present, and future interpretations of the text. My contribution to creative endeavors surrounding the *Bacchae* brings to light how far a costume can enrich the perception of the character and pushes the boundaries of normative expectations to articulate identity. The pieces accumulate to draw out-of-the-box connections between fashion and the contemporary world of Classics.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Classical text and art has been co-opted by far right groups to assert dominance over oppressed groups. They believe that these texts and sculptures are signs from the past that they have the right to be oppressors and attempt to use them to validate white supremacy. While introducing CFP to classical text adaptations does not fight this at the root, it is an attempt to restart the narrative surrounding classics. This work endeavors for contemporary theory being placed on ancient work to be a way to explore modern social understandings of gender, sexuality, identity, and personhood. The connections between classics and the modern world can be expansive, if they are used in a way that broadens the interpreter's lens instead of narrowing.



Figure 16, Pentheus.

Pentheus is visually attempting to assert dominance with both contemporary business attire and a royal blue cape signifying his status as king, (fig. 16).<sup>78</sup> In this project's adaptation, his character exists as a connection between modernity and traditionalism, and transcends neither gender nor power structures. For this look, I was inspired by Pentheus as portrayed in *The Bacchantes*, as an example of the military command Pentheus could theoretically hold. I also

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<sup>78</sup> Cape on loan from the Pomona College Theatre Department; button down shirt is Stafford thrifted; tie thrifted; shorts are h&m thrifted; model Isabel Kramer.

drew inspiration from the street clothes of Dionysus in '69 that opened the door of costumes based on everyday wear to articulate his role within the play and society.

The cape of royal blue with golden-green trim is a symbol of Pentheus's role as king. It is the strongest tie to his lineage and stands in contrast with the button-down and tie underneath it to create a transition between clothing periods.<sup>79</sup> The royal blue, denoting authority, captures a desire to force the impression of strength onto its audiences. This impression remains solely as a desire because the character of Pentheus does not hold the power that he wishes to command in the text, and adorning himself with a cape over his more traditional costume is like a child playing dress up in his father's business clothes. This costume is not designed to be seamless but instead begins the foundation of suspicion for the audience's impression of Pentheus's power.

Underneath the cape is the button-down and tie combination, participating in the more realistic and predicted image of Pentheus. Simplistic in nature, it holds connotations of power through its relationship to modern workspaces and masculinity.<sup>80</sup> A traditionally masculine uniform, (the shirt and tie) is equated with the 21st-century image of the hero. Heroes in media are presented differently depending on the current audience's perceptions. In classical media, the hero is often in the nude, whereas in modern media, we commonly see heroes through a capitalist lens. The success of a man is measured by money and achievements in the workplace and thus, Pentheus's uniform conforms to a normative idea of the patriarchal hero as a businessman.<sup>81</sup> While in other adaptations dressing Pentheus in white writes a narrative of innocence, in this circumstance, the color holds far less importance than the shirt's societal connotations. Further,

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<sup>79</sup>The short cape as seen in this look would have been in peak fashion during the fourteen hundreds; while the button-down became commonplace in the eighteen hundreds.

<sup>80</sup> For a traditional lens on the workplace uniform and its trajectory, see: Miller-Spillman, Kimberly A. "Dress in the Workplace." *The Meanings of Dress:-with STUDIO* (2019): 209.

<sup>81</sup> Examples of the modern hero being presented in business wear can be seen through the 20th century and into the 21st in Superman, Supergirl, and other's real-world disguises. This translates into a direct correlation between the hero and the businessman costume.

this uniform of the workplace suggests a lack of uniqueness and a lack of personal opinion. He is conforming to the social norms, dressed in the dominant ideal of professional attire. While the addition of the cape to this business wear almost discredits the normative appearance, the tie and button down imagery are so strong that an image of civility and contemporary heroism is nevertheless maintained and Pentheus' appearance remains in the masses of assimilation and submission.

Finally, the bottoms worn underneath Pentheus's white button-down are a nod to a continuous theme of nautical prowess that I have adopted for this adaptation.<sup>82</sup> The shorts have golden buttons running up the front in two lines, a visually similar 21st-century interpretation of sailor garments worn in the early 19th century. They connect Pentheus with the city of Thebes and incorporate the royal blue of the cape back into the outfit, for visual semblance. Similar to the shorts in Dionysus's costume helping identify him as "other" and as a foreigner, the shorts in Pentheus' costume help "other" his character in their potential for femininity, however, they are not intended to imply foreignness. They imply "a homoerotic masculine ideal",<sup>83</sup> following the adoption of nautical themes in queer history, and thus, further the narrative of Pentheus's repressed sexuality that is brought forward through Dionysus's influence. In contrast to their queer connotations, visually they lack stimulation and are able to blend into the costumes due to their color and size, creating further motifs of conformity rather than disturbance in Pentheus' character pre-cross-dressing.

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<sup>82</sup> A creative license that I took for the styling of this play was the incorporation of nautical themes. This theme was not adopted from textually based reasoning, but rather for the sake of congruence and for connecting the citizens of Thebes.

<sup>83</sup> The implications of sailor costumes are analyzed thoroughly through the lens of their impact within fashion and gay fantasy hero depictions, to read more, see: Geczy, Adam, Vicki Karaminas, and Justine Taylor. "Sailor style: Representations of the mariner in popular culture and contemporary fashion." *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture* 1, no. 2 (2016): 141-164.





Figure 17, Pentheus.

The costume of Pentheus as a whole is a bundle of dichotomies in his uniform of both submission to attempt conformity and child-like dress up to stand out. For the photoshoot, I present Pentheus as sitting on a stool, legs spread in a power stance, (fig. 17). The sitting position, as seen above, implies power with arms thrown outward, taking up space. While seated characters can sometimes be seen at a disadvantage in artistic representations, in cases like Pentheus, a seated pose implies familiarity with power in that he is able to leisurely sit while others do tasks that require standing for him.<sup>84</sup> Characterizing him in a position with dual

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<sup>84</sup> The impact of a figure's location, size, and pose can dictate who in an art piece holds the power. In many cases, power is implied with the seated figure because they have the leisure of sitting, versus standing in wait. This is



meanings allows for a stronger disturbance of identity to occur from the cross-dressing and loss of sanity as induced by Dionysus.

Pentheus's identity undergoes a clear shift into insanity as marked by his changing costume. As seen below in fig. 18, a new persona has emerged from the induced costume change from masculinity into femininity.<sup>85</sup> No aspect of the costume is finished, creating a character newly brought into existence in his unfinishedness. The costume attempts to remind the audience of his past through the use of a button-down shirt being reinvented into a feminine dress, however, most other aspects of his original identity have been lost in the transition. The royal blue found throughout his original costume has been removed completely, in turn removing his status of power and regal authority. While this characterization could have connections drawn between othering through drag's cross-dressing, the lack of organization in the costume was an intentional step away from this. Pentheus does not choose to identify with presenting as a woman, instead, it is forced upon him in harsh revenge. While Dionysus's revenge draws out a part of Pentheus that I believe is inherent, his new identity is not attained through determined choice-making and thus, I did not want to discredit the power and influence that drag queens have fought for in their personal style presentations. Pentheus's othering occurs as an act of revenge and in response to his actions, despite his arguable queer presentation, he becomes feminine through violence. As Victoria Wohl articulates, he has become othered as an embodiment of what he desires, however, without agency, he does not receive a costume that reflects a self-prescribed identity.

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discussed in depth here: Nagy, Helen. "Divinity, Exaltation, and Heroization: Thoughts on the Seated Posture in Early Archaic Greek Sculpture." *Studies in Honor of Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, KJ Hartswick and MC Sturgeon, eds., Philadelphia* (1998): 181-191.

<sup>85</sup> Button-down top is Thome Browne thrifted; skirt is Milly thrifted; tutu thrifted; tights on loan from personal closet; model Isabel Kramer.



Figure 18, Pentheus.

The button-down has been contorted and resuscitated from its former role in Pentheus's conformity and morphed into a new costume altogether. This is a result of both the restructuring of its interaction with the human body as well as a transformation of the colors present. To accomplish the restructuring, the shirt was kept buttoned, the front and back were reversed, and the fabric was laid directly onto the body without making use of the traditional fit of the shirt. In turn, this maintains some semblance of Pentheus's original costume but by undergoing these key changes, has taken on a new role in feminizing the costume. The color has changed from a simple white to patterned with red swirls, a divergence from the traditional workplace uniform.

The shirt's loss of functionality is a reflection of Pentheus's loss of sanity. It still exists, clinging to his body, but the identity of the "shirt" has been lost, and in its place, a feminine costume begins to form.

The bottom portion of the costume is a combination of skirt, tight, and tutu to create a disturbing yet strikingly familiar feminine costume through texture, movement, and shocking colorways. The texture of the sequin skirt disturbs his costume as it lurches the eye while traveling across the costume from top to bottom. After this stagnation, the eye is again caught on the outward jutting tutu wrapped around the leg. Finally, the eye meets the red stocking, smooth and simplistic in comparison to the rest of the bottom portion of the costume. Altogether, this costume attempts to recreate the "ideal" feminine form as the tutu follows the lines of wide hips before dipping back into the slender long-legged line of the tights. This impression would be successful if worn correctly, (the tutu on both legs over the hips and the stockings pulled up completely). This subversion from traditional wearing articulates Pentheus's character being forced into femininity and showcases his inability to achieve this. Thus, he has become othered from both identities of femininity and masculinity, becoming a third entity of ill-fitting gender distinction.



Figure 19, Pentheus.

The photoshoot stages post-cross dressing Pentheus in a bacchanalian state, with his head thrown back in ecstasy, (fig. 19). I wanted to bring Pentheus into the world of the Maenad and found the most successful way to do so was through somatic movement.<sup>86</sup> Eyes closed, Pentheus is immersed in the freedom he experiences within the insanity. This costume continues his inner mind's dissolution by confusing the audience members with conflicting identity points.

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<sup>86</sup> Maenads are often depicted with heads thrown back in dance throughout Greek art during the classical period, to read more, see: Hedreen, Guy. "Silens, nymphs, and maenads." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 114 (1994): 47-69.

In contrast to Pentheus's two costumes, Dionysus is embodied by the overt sexuality and power displayed with ease through his costume's narrative (fig. 20).<sup>87</sup> This costume intends to provoke desire within discomfort and achieves this through the ruination of the military jacket's practicality, combined with the exposed skin hidden underneath a layer of sheer tulle. Together, discomfort draws the viewer in and spits them back out again, a new person.



Figure 20, Dionysus.

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<sup>87</sup> Headpiece thrifted; Tulle accessory on loan from the Pomona College Theatre Department; Jacket is Military issued thrifted; Tulle undershirt on loan from the Pomona College Theatre Department; Bloomers on loan from the Pomona College Theatre Department; model Isabel Kramer.

The headdress worn in this look mimics a crown, uniting Dionysus to both his maternal and paternal lineage, (fig. 21). The green beads intend to be impersonations of ivy leaves draped around his face, resembling a crown of ivy worn about his head. The symbolism of ivy, as discussed above, is a familiar iconographic depiction linked to Dionysus. To morph this look into a modern look that does not need to rely on explicit ivy imagery, the headdress provides a nuanced approach to marking this costume as Dionysus. Further, the likeness to a crown serves as a reminder of the forces at hand, and the crown that Dionysus has decided is the enemy to his divinity. By wearing an embodiment of the enemy, a reappropriation of the crown, he recaptures the power it holds.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> This idea was inspired by my personal and academic experience of the reappropriation by oppressed communities claiming derogatory slurs as a form of building community and decentralizing the oppressor. I do not claim that Dionysus's experiences of defamation are the same as the experiences of the oppressed in the United States today, but rather parts of this reclamation can be seen through the story of queering otherness. To read more on this form of resistance, see: Jeshion, Robin. "Pride and prejudiced: On the reclamation of slurs." *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 97, no. 1 (2020): 106-137.



Figure 21, Dionysus.

Over his shoulder, Dionysus has thrown a bundle of tulle, originally designed to act as fabric spilling out of the circle cut out in the jacket, but became an accessory through its added benefit of movement. The visual effect of fabric spilling out of the jacket was intended to represent an inside-out narrative, a reflection of Dionysus's ability to draw inner desire to the surface and expose a bacchic follower's hidden identity. This costume styling is shown in fig. 22 below, however, it was dismissed to incorporate the vulnerability achieved through uncovering the stomach and chest.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Another noticeable difference in this secondary costume option for Dionysus is the golden tassels seen swinging at hip level. This was originally incorporated as reminiscent of armor, however, this was dismissed due to lack of connection to the overall narrative.





Figure 22, Dionysus, (dismissed).

The “navy” officer’s jacket is both a tying piece to the continuous narrative of nautical themes to connect the Theban community, as well as a socially significant mockery of power positions.<sup>90</sup> It was increasingly important to the congruency of the costumes that the characters were all marked as Theban, and therefore the incorporation of an official military/navy jacket

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<sup>90</sup> This jacket is an authentic army jacket, marked with a military sponsored insignia on the inside. The yellow stripes on the sleeve do signify the army with the red signifying bloodshed of the Battle of Chapultepec during the Mexican-American War. While this jacket is tied to army insignia, I am still using it for navy symbolism because of my limited resources by shopping second hand. Therefore, if this was an official proposal, a navy jacket would be used. A certain amount of imagination from the viewer is requested. To read more on the cultural significance of the colors of an army officer's jacket, see: Emerson, William K. *Encyclopedia of United States Army Insignia and Uniforms*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1996.



allowed Dionysus's character to assert power over other characters' maritime presentations. Consequently, the power commanded by the jacket in comparison to Pentheus's nautical shorts or the maenad's blouse, (discussed shortly), mocks the power dynamics at play. It claims faculty over the other characters yet does so with a satirical maneuver, rendering Dionysus into a position of both command and vigilant self-satire. This was inspired by the end scene costumes in *Dionysus in '69*, in which Dionysus ordains himself with the attire of someone running for president in a satirical play on power. The impact is resounding; Dionysus knows that to avenge his mother, he must stoop to Pentheus's level.

The revealed stomach, as mentioned above, acts as a window into Dionysus's identity and mirrors the viewer back onto themselves. The hole acts as a window to both vulnerability and to Dionysus' θυμός, one part of his tripartite soul.<sup>91</sup> Θυμός is the center of the soul's passion and expresses desire. By opening a direct line of sight to the soul, a direct visual line is linked to his θυμός as well. The hole becomes explicitly sexual in its naked vulnerability, the skin *almost* allowing the audience into Dionysus's body, yet at the last moment, with a veil of tulle, denying access. The circle nature of the cutout forces it into self-containment; the costume keeps a tight rein on how much the viewer is allowed to understand. Without a cutout, the costume becomes stagnant in the implications of a Navy jacket. By removing the practicality, the jacket's role is subverted, and the hole becomes a mirror.

The final aspect of the costume is the bright yellow bloomers, a staunch reminder of Dionysus's perceived foreignness.<sup>92</sup> The shorts are a variation of the legging pants that were used

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<sup>91</sup>For a discussion on the tripartite soul and the extended meaning of each part, see Cairns, Douglas. "The tripartite soul as metaphor." In *Plato and the Power of Images*, pp. 219-238. Brill, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Dionysus is said to have arrived to Thebes from foreign lands, as well as having hailed from Thebes as a son of Semele. Read more of his geographical history here: Cole, Susan Guettel. "Finding Dionysus." *A companion to Greek religion* (2007): 325-341.

in classical Greece to portray foreignness in artwork.<sup>93</sup> Despite the connecting theme of maritime garments, Dionysus is kept separate from the other characters, he is the stranger, and thus his depiction must vary to acknowledge this distinction. The harsh yellow of the shorts adds to the confusion of the costume, and they add to the narrative of things not making complete sense in the representation of his identity. Yellow has historically been a positive color, associated with pleasure, joy, and friendship.<sup>94</sup> Conversely, it can be associated with jealousy, betrayal, illness, and danger. The bloomers in Dionysus's costume hold conflicting meanings: a reminder of the plague preceding his arrival, the pleasure found within bacchic ecstasy, and the betrayal of Semele by her own sisters. Despite its physical size, the yellow takes up visual space in contrast to the other aspects of the costume, as well as visually linking the jacket to the shorts in colorways. The bloomers act as a continuation of confusion as well as a continuation of foreshadowing with their combination of antagonistic symbolism.

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<sup>93</sup> Read more about the iconography of foreigners through Greek art representation: Hoffman, Gail L. "Defining identities: Greek artistic interaction with the Near East." *Crafts and images in contact: studies on Eastern Mediterranean art of the first millennium BCE* (2005): 351-389.

<sup>94</sup> The life of Yellow is significant to color theory in that it is directly linked to the sun and therefore is found cross-culturally and holding various meanings, read more in: Pastoureau, Michel. *Yellow: The History of a Color*. Princeton University Press, 2019.



Figure 23, Dionysus.

Dionysus's costume as a whole works to draw the audience into a visually induced state of pleasure and disorientation. Undisguised sexuality is apparent, and the power displacement that is attained encompasses an overarching theme of emotional turmoil that supersedes the kingdom of Thebes. The costume relies on colorways and the audience's perception of power to understand the far-reaching implications of the garments, as well as to achieve a vulnerable characterization of Dionysus. For the photoshoot, Dionysus is posed in a seated kneeling position, (fig. 23). Through this self-assured pose, the narrative of a powerful divinity looking for revenge is maintained.

The final costume styled for this thesis's interpretation of the costume's implications is the Maenad, the Dionysiac follower, (fig. 24).<sup>95</sup> Her costume captures her disorientation, ties to Thebes, and affiliation with bacchant rituals. Her femininity is profound yet despite its presence and her nudity, her sexuality isn't overt. The costume is an accumulation of identities as she stands between Theben woman and Maenad threshold, with stark lines dividing the garments and thyrsus in hand.



Figure 24, Maenad.

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<sup>95</sup> Women's sailor blouse on loan from the Pomona College Theatre Department; Tutu on loan from the Pomona College Theatre Department; Pentheus's cape on loan from the Pomona College Theatre Department; Thyrsus created for a project from scavenged objects; model Isabel Kramer.

The thyrsus and golden crown in her hand are the strongest ties to traditional bacchant iconography throughout all costumes designed for this project. The thyrsus, iconic in its ivy and pinecone imagery, is a standalone item for recognizing followers of Dionysus.<sup>96</sup> For this costume, it has taken on a golden nature to continue the divine narrative that has begun. The crown alludes to the royal retention of the Maenad multitude, specifically, the inclusion of Agave and Ino, the royal sisters. This allusion reminds the audience of Dionysus's power in his ability to command the minds of anyone, including the royals. The distinction relies on the fact that she is not wearing the crown, but rather holding it in her hand. She has removed this identity by adorning herself in a bacchant costume, yet not releasing the identity altogether.

A further tie to her Theban community is her nautical shirt, following the maritime motif to keep in accordance with Dionysus and Pentheus. Beyond this overt link, the sheeriness is reminiscent of Dionysus's sheer tulle covering of his jacket cutout. In contrast to the visible yet limited portal the cutout provides, the sheeriness of her top makes her body underneath *almost* discernable. Both costumes are subversions of garments to allow the audience member to peer into the identity, (sexually, gender, and otherwise), of the characters.

The skirt is a conglomeration of colors, textures, and identities that when linked create a visual illustration of the Maenad's role. The top layer is a soft blue with a peach waist, a sheer gateway into the rest of the skirt's complexities. The lines running horizontally across the top and bottom of the tutu run parallel and in contrast to the blue lines running across the blouse. Underneath this layer is a half-formed green, only covering the right leg, reminiscent of an apron or armor. These two pieces are layered on top of black underwear, allowing the left leg to be bare to the world.<sup>97</sup> The overall impact of this assemblage is better discerned as the Maenad moves

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<sup>96</sup> See again the phallic nature of the thyrsus, see Kalke.

<sup>97</sup> This look's incorporation of underwear is inspired by the Maenads and Dionysus in '69, who wore simple black underwear with their tank tops and matched their male counterpart's jockstraps.

across the stage, revealing that the light green underlayer is the cape from Pentheus's original look, turned inside out. Similar to the royal implications of the golden crown discussed above, the subverted cape reminds the audience of the past lives of the Maenad. However, it is important to note the overlay of the blue tutu. The blue superimposes the green, removing its power and forcing the once-Theban woman into frenzied Maenad. In conjunction with the bare leg, a portrait of a wildly ecstatic woman is depicted, (fig. 25).

The Maenad's costume reflects her place directly inside the unification of Pentheus and Dionysus. She is both Theban and Maenad, lucid and gone, she is made in the image of what they both desire, to be and to have. Her costume embodies this juxtaposition and furthers the complexity of her role. Stylized in the photoshoot, the Maenad is laying down with her thyrsus swinging above her head, (fig. 25). Capturing the essence and power of the costume, the Maenad has become one with the costume and one with the movement of her chaos.



Figure 25, Maenad.

## Conclusion

This project is a conglomeration of multiple creative minds, culminating in my personal contribution to the field of styling within Classical and reception studies. I have argued that through the application of Critical Fashion Practice, queer theory, and color theory the costume morphs from a once-stagnant accessory to an embodiment of social commentary. Applying these theories to ramifications of contemporary costumes expands reception studies so that our understanding of ancient, historical, and modern productions includes the audience's lived experiences and marks the clothes with the sociology of the culture that conceives them.

The costume is essential to articulating power dynamics, misfortune, and identity, thus, the costume is a fundamental foundation of the *Bacchae's* reception. I chose the *Bacchae* due to the immense possibilities of gender expression that are already articulated through textually-based costume reference. I also chose the *Bacchae* because of the endless supply of inspiration I have taken from my four years working with its text and the academic scholarship surrounding it. Because the commentary is boundless pertaining to the interpretation of gender and identity expression seen in the text, I have always been drawn to working with the text in ways that not only are out of the box but circumvent the box completely.

My contribution to costume styling within adaptations of the *Bacchae* relies on my personal identity affiliations and is framed through a 21st-century lens that stresses the importance of fashion. An intentional reframing of the costume's intent allows for intellectual audience participation in the creation of the character's identities and recognizes the profundity of applying a Critical Fashion Practice lens to unconventional disciplines. Further, I believe that any creative practice executed by an individual must acknowledge their work's reflection of their lived experiences, therefore, recognizing my own influence's implications is essential to the

conclusion of this project. As a queer individual, using costumes to understand the othering of characters such as Pentheus, was a clear direction this project would head. Queerness, as I discussed in the section on Critical Fashion Practice, has historically utilized fashion for self-expression and to find community. Therefore, while the othering that was forced onto the characters through the perception of the audience was reinforced through their costumes, the clothes were also a mirror for queer individuals such as myself to see themselves reflected on stage.

While this project does touch on multiple different interpretations of the text, this project does not address other adaptations outside of the 20th century to compare my personal interpretation's contribution and the contemporary fashion that has heavily influenced my work. This lack was due in part to accessibility, the sources I used needed to be web-accessible, and also in part due to an interest in how past imposed structures influence decision-making in the 21st century. If the time and resources allowed, this project would have been an inclusive list of all *Bacchae* adaptations that were web accessible, however, this project remains limited to a senior thesis and thus, remains constrained for the time being.

Looking forward, I hope that this project is a continuous study of the implications of the costume, not just for the *Bacchae* or Classical text, but as a part of the expanding world of fashion and a change towards considering styling as a transformative art practice. Forever evolving, fashion opens the door for personal expression, social change, and a new language for communicating. This project is just the beginning in articulating fashion's impact within the classical world, and by drawing from the past as inspiration, will continue into the future of fashion styling.



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