In the first century B.C. Vergil crafted the *Aeneid*, a national epic which followed the journeys and struggles of Aeneas, the mythical ancestor of the Roman people. Vergil told his story in twelve books – the first half recounted Aeneas’s wandering after he escaped from the destruction of Troy, and the latter half the conflict he faced once he arrived in Italy. Aeneas’s quest was to find a new home for himself and the other Trojan survivors, and fate directed him to Italy, a land already inhabited by the native Italians. Although the Trojans and Italians were destined to become one people, the animosity of one goddess, Juno, sowed conflict between them instead. An oracle had declared that the king of the Italians should give his daughter, Lavinia, in marriage to Aeneas. Juno responded by sending the Fury Allecto to Queen Amata; the Fury inspired the queen to oppose this marriage and steal Lavinia away. The maddened Amata then stirred up her fellow Italians against the Trojans, and this – along with several other troubles caused by Allecto – triggered war between the two peoples.

While it is epic in its form and scope, Vergil’s *Aeneid* owes a debt not only to the earlier epic poets,
Homer and Ennius, but also to Greek tragedy. Allusions appear throughout the epic to various ancient plays; all of *Aeneid* Book IV in particular, for instance, has long been read as drama.\(^1\) Therefore, it is not out of place that after Allecto’s release in Book VII, Vergil pauses to focus on Queen Amata and the Latin women in a passage reminiscent of a well-known work by Euripides: the *Bacchae*.

The *Bacchae* by Euripides dates from the fifth century B.C. and recounts how Dionysus came to Thebes, angry that the city and King Pentheus were refusing to acknowledge him as a deity. Many of the major characters in the play are actually related: Dionysus’s mother was the mortal Semele, accidentally killed when she asked to see her lover Zeus in his full glory. Her sisters were Agave, Ino, and Autonoë; Agave is the mother of Pentheus. Semele’s sisters, however, believed that she lied about Zeus, and so Dionysus’s mortal family and home refused to worship him. The young god responded by driving the sisters and other Theban women mad, and he tricked Pentheus into going out alone to spy on the women. This had dire consequences: the crazed women did not recognize

their king and, upon catching him, tore him to pieces. Pentheus’s own aunts and mother took part in the bloody act. Dionysus did not lift their madness until after his revenge was completed.

Thus in the *Aeneid*, Vergil alludes to the *Bacchae* in lines 7.385-405 in order to foreshadow the conflict to come, both by allowing his reader to recall the horrifying end of the tragedy itself and by reminding him of earlier comparisons in Book IV of the *Aeneid* to maddened bacchantes. Where he diverges from the *Bacchae*, Vergil suggests instead that the Trojan and Italian conflict will be even more destructive than the tragedy’s conclusion and the *Aeneid*’s first half.

“I, Dionysus the child of Zeus, have come to the land of the Thebans,” (ἥκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα / Διόνυσος, 1-2) Dionysus declares at the start of Euripides’s *Bacchae*, asserting his immortal identity. He summarizes his wanderings and then explains the reason for his ire: the defamation of his mother by her sisters. The god tells the audience how he has begun to punish them:

Therefore I have goaded [Agave, Ino, and Autonoë] from their houses in madness, and they dwell in the mountain frenzied in mind:
and I compelled them to wear the attire of my secret rites.

τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ὑστηρσ᾽ ἐγὼ
μανίαις, ὤρος δ᾽ οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν:
σκευὴν τ᾽ ἔχειν ηὐάγκας᾽ ὀργίων ἐμῶν (32-34).

Almost four hundred years later, Vergil brings in a deity to drive one of his own royal figures to Bacchanal madness. Queen Amata is the focus of lines 7.385-405: in the first line she rushes into the woods “with the divine will of Bacchus simulated” (simulato numine Bacchi, 7.385); in the last line Vergil frames the entire passage and reiterates that “Allecto drives the queen from all sides with the goads of Bacchus” (reginam Allecto stimulis agit undique Bacchi, 7.405). So the Fury Allecto targets Amata as she sows the seeds of war between Italians and Trojans. The madness she inflicts on the queen, earlier described as “frenzied” (lymphata, 7.377), eventually becomes the raving of a bacchante. Vergil does not leave Amata in “forests” (silvas, 7.385) but a few lines later specifically mentions her in “leafy mountains” (frondosis montibus, 7.387), just as Agave and her sisters inhabit “thick-shaded mountains” (δασκίοις / ὄρεσι, 218-19). There Amata hails Bacchus
with the “traditionally Dionysiac”\textsuperscript{2} cry “Euhoe” in line 7.389, which has its Greek parallel in Bacchae 141 with “εὐοῖ.”

More significantly, Vergil does not leave Amata alone in her Bacchanal frenzy. In the Bacchae, Dionysus strikes a further blow against Thebes when he targets the women of the city:

And all the female seed of Thebes,
how many are women, I have driven mad from the houses:
and they, mixed together with the children of Cadmus,
sit under green trees on roofless rocks.

καὶ πᾶν τὸ θῆλυ σπέρμα Καδμείων,
ὅσαι γυναῖκες ἦσαν, ἐξέμηνα δωμάτων:
ὁμοῦ δὲ Κάδμου παισὶν ἀναμεμειγμέναι
χλωραῖς ὑπ᾽ ἐλάταις ἀνορόφοις ἤνται πέτραις (35-38).

In the Aeneid, Vergil does not mention Allecto herself driving the Latin women, but rather writes that “rumor flies” (fama volat, 7.392). If fama is read as the personified Fama who appears in line 4.173 and following, a divinity is

\textsuperscript{2} Nicholas Horsfall, Virgil, Aeneid 7: A Commentary (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 269.
at least partly responsible for the departure of the Latin women just as Dionysus is responsible for that of the Theban women. The fact that “a burning drives the mothers” (*matres... / ...ardor agit*, 7.392-93) is significant. Even if a particular god is not named as responsible for the Latin women’s departure, and even if what exactly drives them is left simply as a vague “burning,” nevertheless the women themselves are the objects in this line. They are being driven. Only after they are “inflamed with fury” (*furiisque accensas*, 7.392) do they become the subjects who “desert” (*deseruere*, 7.394) their homes, “give” (*dant*, 7.394) their hair and necks to the wind, “fill” (*complent*, 7.395) the air with their cries, and “carry” (*gerunt*, 7.396) Bacchanal staffs called thyrsoi. The inclusion of these women is also important in another way. By incorporating them, Vergil unquestionably alludes to Euripides’s notable tragedy which does the same with the Theban woman. He could have simply focused on Amata and compared her to a bacchante to emphasize the extent of her insanity, but he instead also writes of the Latin women and crafts a direct parallel to the *Bacchae*.

Further similarities appear between the *Aeneid* passage and the *Bacchae*. The women in the epic carry “thyrsoi” (*thrysos*, 7.390); a mention is later made of “ivy-
covered spears” (*pampineas*... *hastas*, 7.396). These words directly echo the description the thyrsus first receives when it appears in the tragedy: “missile of ivy” (*κίσσινον βέλος*, 25). The phrasing “ivy-covered spears” to describe the thyrsoi not only suggests the shift from the pastoral to the martial apparent throughout Book VII, but also calls to mind how the women wielded their thyrsoi in Euripides’s tragedy. There, as the messenger relates,

Those women sending forth the thyrsoi from their hands wounded the men turned in flight.

κεῖναι δὲ θύρσους ἐξανιεῖσαι χερῶν ἐτραυμάτιζον κἀπενώτιζον φυγῆ γυναῖκες ἄνδρας (762-64).

Later, the messenger returns with dire news after the bacchantes have killed Pentheus, “fixing the miserable head at the top of the thyrsus” (*κρᾶτα δ᾽ ἄθλιον, / ... / πήξασ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἄκρον θύρσον*, 1139-41). So the mention of “ivy-covered spears” in the *Aeneid* threatens that the thyrsoi might be wielded in the epic as they were in the tragedy.

The *Bacchae* concerns itself with a single family, the house of Cadmus. He is the father of Agave, Ino, and Autonoë and the grandfather of Pentheus, all of whom suffer in one way or another by the play’s conclusion. Dionysus, technically the nephew of the three sisters and
the cousin of Pentheus, goads these four characters to madness so as to bring them to ruin. Similarly, conflict in the *Aeneid* concerns the destruction caused by an intended marriage, a union of families. This devastation extends beyond Aeneas’s and Latinus’s immediate families. It takes the form of a war between the Italians and the Trojans. These people, however, are destined to become one in the Roman race, giving the conflict between the two overtones of a civil war. The senseless war between Italians and Trojans thus becomes comparable to the mad strife within Cadmus’s family, and it is fitting that Allecto, who is able “to arm like-minded brothers in battle and to overturn houses with hate” (*unanimos armare in proelia frateres / atque odiis versare domos*, 7.335-36), is the one to cause it.

Interestingly, in Amata’s appeal to the Latin women, “If kindness remains in your dutiful spirits for unhappy Amata, if a care gnaws for maternal rights” (*Si qua piis animis manet infelicit / Amatae gratia, si iuris materni cura remordet*, 7.401-2), there is the suggestion of Amata being a mother wronged. Here she might be linked with Semele, the mother of Dionysus who was ill-treated by what her sisters claimed about her death. In this case it seems that Amata tries to cast herself as Semele, the woman whose unjust treatment will be avenged by a god:
the queen herself, after all, is the one speaking in lines 401-2. This is foreboding for the Trojans. In striving to align herself with Semele, Amata is calling for vengeance because Aeneas’s impending marriage has wronged her. Divine vengeance would be aimed at Aeneas and the Trojans. Of course, as Books VIII through XII reveal, this hardly comes to pass: Amata is unsuccessful in gaining the sympathy of the gods. Fate is against both her and Juno, the one deity who would happily have shattered Aeneas’s marriage. Meanwhile, Allecto is not particular about where she wreaks havoc. Ultimately, Amata fits the role not of the innocent Semele, but instead of the possessed noble sisters.

What might Vergil intend by reminding his readers of this Greek tragedy? As mentioned before, if he wanted to simply stress the extent of Amata’s own madness, he could have inflicted her alone with a Bacchanal frenzy. Earlier in the poem, for example, he uses the verb “rave like a bacchante” (*bacchatur*, 4.301; 4.666; 6.78) for the actions of Dido, Rumor, and the Sibyl respectively; he is not alluding to the *Bacchae* every time he compares someone to a bacchante. But by imitating the setup of Euripides’s tragedy in this passage of Book VII, Vergil crafts an ominous start for the conflict between the Italians
and Trojans. Just as the *Bacchae* opens with this setup, so the start of the second half of the *Aeneid* includes it as well. Book VII is, after all, a new beginning, complete with an invocation to the muse starting at line 37 and Vergil’s own declaration that “a greater arrangement of things is produced by me; I move a greater work” (*maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo, maius opus moveo*, 7.44-45). The first half of the epic and Aeneas’s lengthy journey are over: Book VII begins the second half which focuses on events in Italy. So alluding to the *Bacchae*’s beginning in this fresh start bodes ill, since it is a tragedy striking for the unintentional familial strife that ensues. Driven by Dionysus, the Theban women and Pentheus’s mother and aunts ultimately tear Pentheus apart – Agave, Ino, and Autonoë are so crazed they do not even realize what they are doing. By making the unintentional strife between Italians and Trojans comparable to this familial strife, Vergil foreshadows the violence that is to come in the second half of the *Aeneid*.

The reference to Euripides’s tragedy is ominous not only because of the *Bacchae*’s own horrifying ending, but also because it recalls earlier mentions of maddened bacchantes in the *Aeneid*: namely, those in Book IV. Hints of Pentheus’s story do appear interwoven in Dido’s fall: she “raves like a bacchante” (*bacchatur*, 4.301) through the
city like a “follower of Bacchus” (Thyias, 4.302) shouting to Bacchus and Cithaeron, the mountain where Pentheus was killed (Bacchae 1142). She is even compared to the doomed Pentheus himself when he sees “both twin suns and doubled Thebes laid out” (et solem geminum et duplicis se ostendere Thebas, 4.470). This vision is exactly what Pentheus hallucinates in the Bacchae: “truly I think I see two suns and doubled Thebes, the city of the seven gates” (καὶ μὴν ὁρᾶν μοί δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ, / δισσὰς δὲ Θῆβας καὶ πόλισμ᾽ ἐπτάστομον, 918-19). The connection between lines 7.385-405 and Book IV is strengthened with the comment “rumor flies,” which recalls Rumor’s introduction in the earlier book. The two books are especially linked when the Latin queen refers to herself as “unhappy Amata” (infelicis Amatae, 7.401), taking for herself Dido’s famous epithet.

As a result, the allusion to this Euripidean tragedy in Book VII becomes portentous in a second way: it brings to mind Book IV and the fall of a noble character. It further serves as an escalation of events in the first half of the Aeneid. Dido, compared at first to a dangerous bacchante, ultimately resolves to die and is compared instead to Pentheus, the doomed king.\(^3\) In acting alone, she

\(^3\) Lee Fratantuono, *Madness Unchained: A Reading of Virgil’s Aeneid*
better fits the role of Pentheus, who for a time was even disguised as a bacchant (Bacchae 917). Amata, in contrast, appears in the role of the three daughters of Cadmus, and she is supported by the Latin women. Where before Dido was the only mortal raving like a bacchante, the passage in Book VII more closely echoes the Bacchae when the Latin women follow Amata into the forest, and it has the potential to reach the same horrific conclusion that the tragedy did.

Yet in many ways, Vergil does depart from Euripides’s work. Bacchus himself never appears, neither in this passage nor throughout the rest of the poem. Amata is described “with the divine will of Bacchus simulated” (simulato numine Bacchi, 7.385). She cries out to him, “Euhoe Bacchus!” (Euhoe Bacche, 7.389), and Allecto drives her “with the goads of Bacchus” (stimulis... Bacchi, 7.405), even though Bacchus is absent. Elsewhere, his name refers to wine (1.215, 3.354, 5.77, 7.725, 11.737) or is connected with his bacchantes (4.302, 7.580). At the end of Book I, in line 734, Dido asks that he and Juno smile upon the feast. In an epic where numerous other gods appear, ranging from Olympians to minor deities, it is striking that Bacchus does not, even when bacchantes

(Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 118.
appear and call on him. Juno does not enlist his aid, though earlier she had bargained with Aeolus and unleashed Allecto; instead, Allecto is the one to drive the queen’s madness.

Likewise, the word simulatus (meaning “simulated” or “imitated”) in line 385 is significant. Vergil explicitly writes that the “divine will of Bacchus” (numen Bacchi, 7.385) is being simulated, copied, or represented: it is not actually present. This would suggest that “Amata’s madness is not authentically Bacchic.”

Other evidence in the passage supports this idea. The queen first cries out to Bacchus and promises Lavinia to him alone (7.389-91). Several lines later Vergil describes how Amata “herself burning in the middle raises up a flaming pine branch and sings the weddings songs of her daughter and Turnus” (ipsa inter medias flagrantem fervida pinum / sustinet ac natae Turnique canit hymenaeos, 7.397-98), Bacchus apparently forgotten. When Amata appeals to the Italian women, she makes no mention of the god except indirectly when she invites them to join her in the “Bacchic rites” (orgia, 7.403). What the queen is doing is not about Bacchus: it is about Lavinia’s marriage. Interestingly, what Pentheus wrongfully accuses Dionysus’s worshippers of in the

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4 Horsfall (2007) 266.
Bacchae might actually have some truth in the Aeneid; the Theban king claims that they are acting only on the “pretext [they are] bacchantes worshipping” (πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δῆ μαυνάδας θυοσκόους, 224). If simulato is read to mean that Amata is not actually experiencing Bacchanal madness, then she is guilty of what Pentheus claimed in Euripides’s tragedy.

In the Bacchae, Dionysus wreaks terrible destruction, but destruction is not his only art. He is capable of terrible things, but he is also the god of wine, known to be the one who banishes grief and brings joy. Allecto, however, is one of the Furies and described as one “to whose heart there are sad wars and insidious anger and harmful judgments” (cui tristia bella / iraeque insidiaequ et crimina noxia cordi, 7.325-6). Her name comes from the Greek “ἄλληκτος” and means “unceasing anger.” When Juno releases Allecto, she specifically mentions her ability to cause interfamilial strife (7.335-37). Thus, Amata is not driven by Bacchus, or even by another regular god: rather, she is poisoned by the Fury Allecto with her “one thousand arts for causing harm” (mille nocendi artes, 7.337), a figure particularly suited for igniting the war that fills the latter books of the Aeneid.

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5 Liddell & Scott's Greek-English Lexicon, 7th ed., s.v. “ἄλληκτος.”
As a result, Allecto’s involvement promises to result in consequences beyond those seen in the *Bacchae*. Where Euripides had Dionysus concentrate his wrath for the most part on the individuals who had provoked him, Vergil instead has Juno give Allecto free reign to inflame war between the Trojans and Italians. What was a family conflict in the *Bacchae* becomes a war reminiscent of civil war in the *Aeneid*. With this understanding, the line “with the divine will of Bacchus simulated” (*simulato numine Bacchi* 7.385) and the line immediately after it, “approaching a greater crime and beginning a greater fury” (*maius adorta nefas maioremque orsa furorem*, 7.386), make sense. Amata’s wicked deed is greater and foreshadows worse things because of the different gods involved and their different goals. Dionysus seeks something that he can certainly achieve in a matter of time: penalty for maligning Semele’s name and acknowledgement for himself as a god. Allecto, however, only causes destruction; Juno, who released her, is prevented by fate from achieving her desire and instead settles for prolonging warfare. There is no end immediately in sight, and Allecto and Juno do not even limit their wrath to the Trojans alone.
Vergil sets lines 385-405 in Book VII off from other passages in the book, framing it with similar comments about how Amata runs into the woods and how Allecto drives her there. These lines are quite distinct from what comes before – the whirling top simile – and what follows – Allecto’s trip to Turnus. The Latin of these 21 lines contains a concentrated reference to the *Bacchae*, paralleling the events that open the tragedy. With this passage, Vergil looks both forwards and backwards: he makes use of a tragedy written almost four hundred years in his own past and alludes to events that happened in the mythic past, even earlier than the mythic past his own poem is set in. He also looks backward through connections this passage has with Book IV, reminding his reader of events that already happened in the epic. Ultimately, however, Book VII’s lines 385-405 look forward to the events which occur in the latter books of the *Aeneid*. They set up a beginning that promises enormous conflict. Where Vergil makes changes in how he shapes this *Bacchae* reference, the differences emphasize that the passage looks ahead to events even more calamitous than either of the past tragedies it recalls. Such “greater fury” (*maiorem... furorem*, 7.386) suits the last six books of the
Aeneid: Vergil himself called the second half the “greater arrangement of things” (*maior rerum... ordo*, 7.44).
Bibliography


