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Vergil and the Death of Pentheus in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3

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Abstract: In a pivotal article in 1990, P. Hardie illustrated that the Theban narrative of Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4 was the first anti-*Aeneid*. He did not include discussion of the death of Pentheus at the end of Book 3. In this article I show that the depiction of the Theban king's death is bound up with key Vergilian intertexts which have a profound impact both on reading the pathos of the scene, but more importantly, on Ovid's reconstruction of the end of the *Aeneid* and the death of Turnus. A seemingly clichéd simile comparing Pentheus' *sparagmos* with the falling of leaves from a tree evokes the famous passage from the underworld in *Aeneid* 6 in which the souls of those who died prematurely are described. More importantly, in relation to Ovid's narrative of the Theban *ktisis*, careful allusions to the final lines of the *Aeneid* in Pentheus' death-scene act as a critical commentary on the *Aeneid* and the actions of Aeneas.

Keywords: Turnus, similes, Vergilian intertextuality

An article now foundational in studies of Books 3 and 4 described the Theban narrative in Ovid *Metamorphoses* as the first anti-*Aeneid*.¹ Cadmus' ktistic endeavours result in his self-imposed exile from the city he had tried to build, and as in the *Aeneid*, Juno plays a key role in thwarting the settler.² Cadmus, like Aeneas in *Aeneid* 3, departs from a city he had come to found as an exile, but leaves with that vision in ruins (*Met.* 4.603), the snake-slayer turned snake.³ In Hardie's article, and elsewhere,⁴ repeated allusions to the *Aeneid* in Ovid's Theban narra-

1 Hardie (1990) 224–35.

2 Hardie (1990) 231–5 on the interventions of Juno beginning at *Met.* 3.256 and 4.420.

3 Hardie (1990) 228.

4 For bibliography see e.g. Janan (2009), Feldherr (2010) and von Glinski (2012). Bömer (1969) is still the most detailed in its *Quellenforschung*.

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tive have been noted,⁵ yet the narrative of Pentheus' death at the end of *Metamorphoses* 3 has been largely unexplored in that connection.⁶ Within that framework there are a number of unnoticed Vergilian intertexts which replay the end of the *Aeneid* itself and especially the death of Turnus.

This article focuses on Vergilian references within the narrative of Pentheus' death. The first part of my discussion will begin with a seemingly clichéd simile of leaves in autumn which concludes Pentheus' death sequence and Book 3 as a whole. The simile's Homeric but especially Vergilian intertextuality has a vital impact on the construction of the pathos of the scene and on the characterisation of Pentheus and his attackers. I will argue that the simile, because of its intertextuality, underscores the tragic, pathetic image of a young man dying before the eyes of his parents, and the failure of the Theban *ktisis*. I will then turn to two other young men who died before their time: Ovid alludes to both Actaeon and Orpheus and their respective deaths, figures that lend vital characterisation to Pentheus in his last moments. Building on these Vergilian references, I will concentrate on the Ovidian interactions with the end of *Aeneid* 12: I will demonstrate that key allusions to Turnus' death at Aeneas' hands occur in the account of Pentheus' *sparagmos*, that these allusions emphasise more than any other passage in his narrative of the founding of Thebes that Ovid has inbuilt an anti-*Aeneid* reading into his account of the city's doomed origins, in particular a commentary on the ktistic metaphor of Turnus' fate. This article, therefore, seeks to complement Hardie (1990) by inclusion of the Pentheus narrative, but aims, too, to emphasise that of all the scenes in Book 3, the final one is the most vital for gaining an insight into Ovid's reading of Vergil.

I *Ante ora parentum*

After a series of tragic deaths or transformations, including those of two other young men (Actaeon, 3.249, and Narcissus 3.509–10), *Metamorphoses* 3 returns to the underlying theme of the foundation of Thebes in the person of Pentheus. The description of his gruesome death, so familiar from Euripides' *Bacchae*, is postponed by an inset narrative in which the captured Acoetes relates to the Theban king the story of Bacchus and the sailors who were transformed into dolphins (582–691). Then there very briefly ensues the fateful end of Pentheus (692–733).

⁵ On Vergilian influence generally in the *Metamorphoses*, see Döpp (1968) esp. 104–40.

⁶ Hardie's article begins with a discussion of Pentheus but discussion does not extend to the narrative of his death (3.701–33).

Ovid concludes the account of the *sparagmos* with what at first seems an incongruous image (*Met.* 3.723–33):

*non habet infelix quae matri bracchia tendat,
trunca sed ostendens dereptis uulnera membris
'adspice, mater!' ait. uisis ululauit Agaue* 725
*collaque iactauit mouitque per aera crinem
auulsumque caput digitis complexa cruentis
clamat: 'io comites, opus hoc uictoria nostra est!'
non citius frondes autumnum frigore tactas
iamque male haerentes alta rapit arbore uentus,* 730
*quam sunt membra uiri manibus derepta nefandis.
talibus exemplis monitae noua sacra frequentant
turaque dant sanctasque colunt Ismenides aras.*

The unhappy man did not have arms to stretch out to his mother, but showing instead his truncated wounds where his arms had been ripped off, said “Look, mother!” Agaue uttered a scream when she saw them and tossed her neck back and flicked her hair through the air and, after she had ripped off his head and had embraced it with her bloodied fingers, shouted: “Look, my friends, this act is our victory!” No more swiftly does the wind seize the leaves from a high tree, leaves already ready to fall touched as they are by the autumn frost, than were the limbs of that man ripped off by abominable hands. Warned by such precedents the Ismenides began to frequent the new rites and give incense and worship at the holy altars.⁷

This simile has never been received kindly, due to its apparent dissonance with the narrative it compares. Bömer, for example, writes: “Der Schluß des Buches fällt im dichterischen Tenor gegenüber der bisherigen Komposition stark ab. Es scheint, daß der Abschluß routinemäßig dargestellt wird und vielfach dem bisherigen Pathos der Darstellung nicht entspricht.”⁸ Explicitly, the primary *Vergleichspunkt* of the Ovidian simile is the swiftness of the leaves with the swiftness of the dismemberment of Pentheus, whose decapitation is summarily described, tucked away in a near-parenthetic, participial construction *auulsum ...*

⁷ All translation is my own; the text of Ovid is Tarrant (2004), of Vergil Mynors (1969) and of the *Iliad* West (1998/2000) but with altered orthography.

⁸ Bömer (1969) 624. With Bömer, cf. Hill (1985) 233 (“This absurdly inappropriate simile in the grand epic manner”) and Anderson (1997) 409 (“It is then, with some dismay that we hear the poet using this ordinary and pretty picture to clarify the dismemberment of the king”). McNamara (2010) 189 strikes a slightly different note: “The violence of Pentheus’ death is elided in these lines ... a dreadful event is narrated in a calm and pleasing way.” Barchiesi (2009) ad loc. has gone some way to stabilise interpretation of this simile by emphasising the strong (pungent, as he calls it) contrast as the intended effect of the simile. The recent study of similes in the *Metamorphoses* by von Glinski (2012) does not discuss this simile.

caput (727). The first hint we get of the simile is most likely *bracchia* in line 723 (and *trunca*, 724), which develops, as a sort of pun, into the simile of the tree.⁹ Whereas the leaves of the tree in the simile are all set to fall naturally (730: *iamque male haerentes*), touched by autumn frost, and encouraged by the wind, impious hands rip off the limbs of Pentheus (731: *manibus derepta nefandis*). The difference is underlined by the echoing *rapit* and *derepta* of simile and narrative (730, 731).

Why end, then, the description of Pentheus' gruesome and tragic destruction with a simile of leaves? Ovid has chosen to insert, at the climax of the book, a simile commonly associated, in its literary heritage, with the inevitability of death and the continual regeneration of life. The reasons for the apparent lack of fit between narrative and image, an unnatural, sudden death compared with a natural, inevitable and wholly recognisable picture,¹⁰ become clearer through analysis of the literary inheritance of this simile and its context. First, however, I wish to highlight a hitherto unnoticed connection with the bT *scholion* to *Iliad* 6.149, a line from the famous simile in *Iliad* 6 in which Glaucus compares the generations of men to the generation of leaves (6.145–9, the Homeric passage which spawns a series of imitations, from Mimnermus onwards, right up to this reworking in Ovid).¹¹ This simile was interpreted by the Homeric *scholia* with their usual exertions to find tight correspondences between simile and main narrative.¹² The *scholion* on line 149 (ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἢ μὲν φύει ἢ δ' ἀπολήγει)

⁹ It is surely possible to see in Agaue's fixing of her son's head upon the top of a thyrsus (Eur. *Bacch.* 1141) a further reason for Ovid's inclusion of this tree simile. On the symbolism of the thyrsus for Pentheus' physical transformation into a follower of Dionysus, see Kalke (1985) 409–26, esp. 410. In Ovid, the simile of falling leaves in the cold of autumn is found at *Met.* 1.117; *Ars am.* 2.315; 3.161; 3.703; *Fast.* 6.149; *Tr.* 3.8.29 (so Bömer 1969, 624, on 3.729).

¹⁰ The poet Ted Hughes perhaps identifies this disparity in his adaptation of these lines, where he sets up a very strong contrasting juxtaposition between the light breeze at dawn which blows through the tree's leaves and the *sparagmos* itself: "So swiftly / The hands of those women / Separated the King's bones and stripped them."

¹¹ *Iliad* 6.147–9: "As the generation of leaves is, so is the generation of men. The wind blows the leaves to the ground, and the flourishing wood grows others in their place, when the time of spring comes on. So is the generation of men which both increases and dies away." (οἷη περ φύλλων γενεὴ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν. / φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δὲ θ' ὕλη / τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγιγνεται ὥρη). Cf. Mimnermus fr. 2, Bacchylides 5.63–7 and Simonides 4.34.28 (Stobaeus). Cf. also Pindar fr. 346 Sn.-M. Further discussion is found in Sider (2001), and for further references see esp. Barchiesi (2009) 239. For an extensive (recent) bibliography on the Iliadic passage, and for further discussion, see Grethlein (2006a) and Grethlein (2006b) 85–96. For the meaning of 6.149, see esp. Grethlein (2006a) 5–6.

¹² On this tendency in the Homeric scholia, see, *inter alios*, Nünlist (2009) 288–90 and the still foundational discussion of Heath (1989) 102–23, and esp. 104–7.

identifies the leaves in Glaucus' image as the human joints which separate at death (δύναται μὲν καὶ ἄρθρα εἶναι, ἄμεινον δὲ συνδέσµους ἐκδέχεσθαι αὐτούς). The literal identification of the key detail of the Iliadic simile as befitting the biological composition of man is appropriated here by Ovid. The poet, however, increases the level of literal identification of the leaves: there is no more suitable simile to describe the *sparagmos* of Pentheus because, if we are to be guided by the scholiastic interpretation, the leaves of the tree symbolise limbs. This exegesis by the *scholion* takes on an all new significance as Pentheus' limbs are torn from him, scattered through the air, like autumn leaves: the scholiastic interpretation is vouched for by Ovid.¹³ But the Iliadic intertext brings contrast, too. The emphasis in the Iliadic simile is successive generations. There is, however, nothing natural or regenerative about the death of Pentheus, and the simile implies what the death of Pentheus is *not like*.¹⁴ His sudden demise, inevitable through literary tradition, and inevitable given the tragic premise of his actions,¹⁵ is the death of someone who does not enjoy a full life, who does not continue the generations of the house of Thebes.

The primary intertextual point of reference for the Ovidian simile is, naturally, Vergil: the key intertext embedded within the passage is from *Aeneid* 6.305–12.

huc omnis turba ad ripas effusa ruebat, 305
matres atque uiri defunctaque corpora uita
magnanimum heroum, pueri innuptaeque puellae,
impositique rogis iuuenes ante ora parentum:
quam multa in siluis autumni frigore primo
lapsa cadunt folia, aut ad terram gurgite ab alto 310
quam multae glomerantur aues, ubi frigidus annus
trans pontum fugat et terris immittit apricis.

¹³ A useful exercise, to my knowledge still wanting in Ovidian scholarship, would be a study of Ovid's use of scholiastic Homeric criticism. Contrast the burgeoning study of the *Aeneid* and Homeric scholarship – see, principally, Schmit-Neuerburg (1999) and the well-known study by Schlunk (1974). On ancient (Roman) rhetoric and the *Metamorphoses*, see McNamara (2010) esp. 176–7, with references.

¹⁴ It is not entirely clear how to understand the cycle suggested by the Iliadic simile. See, principally, Kirk (1985) ad loc., who argues that there is no suggestion of rebirth, but that the emphasis is on the transience of life. For further discussion and some contrary views, see Grethlein (2006b) 86–7. A pejorative sense is seen in very similar phraseology used by Apollo at *Il.* 21.464–6, viewed as exegesis of the *Il.* 6 simile by scholion T. on 6.146 (see discussion of Maftei 1976, 21).

¹⁵ As Tiresias makes clear at 3.522–3: *mille lacer spargere locis et sanguine siluas / foedabis matremque tuam matrisque sorores*. Cf. Hardie (2002) 166.

A huge crowd was rushing here, dispersed to the banks, mothers and men and bodies of glorious heroes deprived of life, boys and unmarried girls, and young men placed on pyres before their parents' faces: as many as are the leaves that fall in the woods with the first frost of autumn, or as many as the birds that flock to land from deep ocean, when the cold season puts them to flight across the sea and dispatches them to the sun-baked lands.

This excerpt comes from the famous underworld scene in *Aeneid* 6, where Charon ferries the dead across the Stygian swamp. The unburied stretch forth their hands in eagerness to get across the Styx. There are two intertexts in particular which are present in Ovid's simile. Most obviously, first, there is the quotation of the autumn frost: the combination *autumni frigore*, appearing in the identical metrical *sedes* in both passages (*Met.* 3.729 and *Aen.* 6.309), does not occur elsewhere.¹⁶ The quotation demands further investigation into the Vergilian simile.

The Vergilian simile follows on closely from the description of the boys and unmarried girls, and the young men who had died before their parents,¹⁷ who flock to the shore. The primary correspondence is the multitude of shades who rush to the banks, emphasised by *quam multa* and *quam multae* at 6.309 and 311.¹⁸ In the *Aeneid*, however, the leaves fall naturally in the first frost of autumn, but in Ovid the wind seizes the leaves which only just cling on (*male haerentes*, 3.730),¹⁹ emphasising just how futile Pentheus' pleas for mercy were bound to be (3.730–1).²⁰ It is the immediate context of the Vergilian simile, however, that is especially relevant for our reading of Pentheus. What Ovid is drawing the reader's attention to is the pathetic scene which Aeneas surveys in the underworld, especially the impetus for the Vergilian simile, namely the youths placed on the funeral pyre before the faces of their parents (*ante ora parentum*, 3.308). In the

16 The intertext is discussed by Barchiesi (2009) ad loc.; cf. too Horsfall (2013) 261 (who has a full list of references to Vergilian scholarship on the simile).

17 *Aen.* 6.306–9 is a quotation of *Georg.* 4.471–80, of the souls who flock to hear the song of Orpheus. For further discussion, see O'Sullivan (2009) 452–3, Horsfall (2013) 260–1 and my discussion below. The lines are themselves an Odyssean intertext (*Od.* 11.38–41).

18 For discussion of this set of similes (309–12), see esp. Norden (1957) 222–5, in addition to Thaniel (1971) 237–45, Anderson (1997) ad loc., and Barchiesi (2009) ad loc. Lyne (1989) 167 is right, I think, to see in *quam multa* (6.309) an allusion, above all, to Bacchylides 5.64–5.

19 D. O'Rourke has made the excellent suggestion to me that the *male* inserted within the Ovidian simile (730) is an implicit critique of the ill-fit in the Vergilian simile between those who have died *young* and the leaves which fall naturally in *autumn*.

20 The emphasis on wind in the Ovidian simile leads the reader back directly to the simile in *Il.* 6.147 and Bacchylides 5.65. Barchiesi (2009) 239 suggests, rightly, that Ovid is positing, with this word "wind", a specific site of memory to the original Homeric archetype. The Vergilian simile is therefore the lens, or window, through which the reader of Ovid looks back to the prototype for both the Vergilian and Ovidian leaves similes, to the original simile in *Iliad* 6. On so-called window allusions, see the seminal article of Thomas (1986).

Aeneid, an untimely death especially *ante ora parentum* is a recurrent theme, tied to that very formula.²¹ In Vergil, nothing is more pathetic: one of the most famous examples of an immature death is that of Polites before the eyes of Priam, at *Aeneid* 2.531–2, where, in Aeneas' narration, the young warrior pours out his life before the eyes of his parents, after he has been cut down by Pyrrhus. The motif of parents watching their offspring dying or dead before their eyes is found first in Homer, above all the case of Hector caught outside the walls of Troy before the eyes of his father Priam in *Iliad* 22.²²

In Ovid, it is even starker: not only does a parent witness the death of her son, but is the cause of it. Agaue and her sisters are the agents of Pentheus' death in front of their own *ora*, but in front of *ora* which do not truly recognise the fact.²³ They cannot see their son to see his death, let alone prevent it. The souls flocking to the banks in *Aeneid* 6 stretch forth their hands in their desire for the far side (6.314), but Pentheus does not have arms with which to stretch out to his mother in supplication (3.723–4). Each onrush of the two crowds is clearly set up in opposition too: one, in Vergil, seeks safe passage across the Styx, but the other rushes to send someone to the Styx. The phraseology and metrical patterns closely match each other in each text: *ruit omnis in unum / turba furens* (*Met.* 3.715–6) with *huc omnis turba ad ripas effusa ruebat* (*Aen.* 6.305);²⁴ and the emphasis on *mothers* (*matres*, 6.306) in Vergil,²⁵ the first of the incorporeal crowd to be described, is neatly mirrored in the identity of Agaue as the chief perpetrator of her son's death. The drawing together of the two pictures, by means of the simile of the leaves, brings contrasting perspectives. We survey again as readers the scene that Aeneas surveyed in Book 6, but now read through the lens of Pentheus' cruel fate: the deathly, pathetic picture of the underworld in the *Aeneid* is re-written as

21 See above all the excellent article of O'Sullivan (2009).

22 On the motif of the grieving father in the *Iliad*, see Griffin (1980) 108 and O'Sullivan (2009) 451.

23 Turnus' boast, *Aeneid* 10.443, during the death of Pallas is relevant here: *cuperem ipse parens spectator adesset*. Turnus' father was powerless to prevent his son from meeting his death at Aeneas' hands, just as Priam had to witness Hector's death at *Iliad* 22, despite his warnings. Pentheus' mother is truly present as a parental spectator at the death of her son.

24 Cf. *Aeneid* 7.573: *ruit omnis in urbem*, which closely matches in metrical position and wording *Met.* 3.715. There in *Aeneid* 7 the Latin shepherds rush to the city to report the death of Almo to Latinus and demand vengeance; as a result the Latin women become incensed with rage at young Almo's death. In Ovid, the situation is reversed: the Theban women become incensed with rage and kill the young Pentheus. Note the identical metrical position of *coeunt* at *Aen.* 7.582 (of the Latin women who assemble and demand war, *undique collecti coeunt Martemque fatigant*) and *Met.* 3.716, *turba furens; cunctae coeunt fremituque sequuntur*. Once again Ovid uses the *Aeneid* to point to the unnaturalness and cruelty of the Maenads' actions.

25 *Aen.* 6.306–7: *matres atque uiri defunctaque corpora uita / magnanimum heroum*.

existing in the cruel world above. The throng in the *Aeneid* share a uniform fate, a collection of humanity who succumbed to death's inevitability. A god's power, of Bacchus in Ovid, can create an opposite type of *turba* which rushes to cause destruction, bringing family members to attack their own and enact the type of scene that far outdoes the horror and pathos narrated in *Aeneid* 6.

The frustrated, limbless state of Pentheus matches, of course, the inability of Actaeon to move the newly formed anatomy which he received (*Met.* 3.238–41). Actaeon had by accident (3.175: *non certis passibus errans*) stumbled across the naked goddess Diana, but despite his lack of intention in that encounter is torn apart by his own dogs after he is turned into a stag as punishment. Their transformed master cannot issue them commands, to prevent his death, because he has no human voice (3.229–31). Pentheus does have a voice, but is ignored. Pentheus, too, becomes in actuality what Actaeon was only in similarity: there is a graduation from *supplex similisque roganti* (3.240), a suppliant like an actual person pleading his cause, to *precantis* (3.721), a victim crying out, in reality, for mercy.²⁶ These polarities bring the unnaturalness of Pentheus' death to the fore, and add pathos to the warnings of Pentheus that the *exemplum* of Actaeon should be heeded. Pentheus points to a site of memory, of the cruelty done to Actaeon, as a means of eliciting pity. Even the gods had debated whether Diana had gone too far in Actaeon's punishment (3.253–5). The fact that the Maenads' hands are called, by the primary narrator, impious (3.731) strengthens this point: they are doing something they should not be doing, and though under the god's power, they, and the god, have gone too far.²⁷

Agave can only see the *things* before her (*uisis*, 3.725), deprived of the face and personality which should stop her.²⁸ It is not an accident, either, that Pentheus speaks of the *shades* of Actaeon (*umbrae*, 3.720). This appeal to be moved by an earlier example is given in the third person ('*Autonoes moueant animos*', 3.720),²⁹ with Actaeon's *umbrae* as subject. Actaeon is now in Hades, as one of the souls alluded to in the simile. Pentheus is about to join him, in the

²⁶ On the lack of arms, cf. *Met.* 3.679 (so Bömer 1969, 623 on 3.723): a sailor, on being turned into a dolphin, attempts to grasp the ship's rope for safety, but has no *bracchia* to do so.

²⁷ On the avenging gods in the *Metamorphoses*, see the now classic study of Otis (1970) 128–65, esp. 133 on the innocence of Actaeon and cruelty of Diana as emphasised by the narrator, and 141–2 on the cruelty done to Pentheus (141: "He is deliberately setting the two episodes in parallel. He wants to show that the justice of Bacchus has now given place to his cruelty.").

²⁸ See von Glinski (2012) 19 n. 39 for other failed recognitions before this scene. Bömer (1969) 623 on 3.725 sees in *uisis* a causal ablative from the neuter plural form ("der Anblick"), but I think emphasis is placed on things seen, plural. As Bömer shows, *uisis* cannot be an ablative absolute.

²⁹ The emphasis on Autonoe reactivates the patronymic in the description of Actaeon as the *Autonoeius heros* at 3.198. For the etymological significance of her name, see Barchiesi (2009) 159,

category of those who have died before the eyes of their parents – even if, through intratext, his mother and her sisters assume the place of Actaeon’s savage dogs.³⁰ Pentheus is asking his mother to remember her text of *Metamorphoses* 3, as the readers do: be human(e) and do not behave like those dogs.³¹ The women’s inability to understand family history, or *Metamorphoses* 3, creates an imbalance between the actors of the drama and the readers of the narrative.³²

There are two other instances of mothers associated with Bacchant fury or *sparagmos* in the second half of the *Aeneid* that also lurk behind the representation of Agaue, *exempla* of positive behaviour because of wrongs done to their young men, which stand in opposition to the actions done to Pentheus by his mother.³³ In *Aeneid* 7, Amata and the other Latin women take to the mountains, because Latinus fails to stand up to Aeneas and honour Turnus (7.389–92). The fury Allecto has inflamed to the point of rage Amata’s sense of maternal piety towards her daughter and the prospective husband Turnus: she pretends to be under the power of Bacchus (7.385) and hides her daughter in the leafy mountains (7.387). This is Bacchic *furor*, feigned, against the new arrival Aeneas on behalf of the young native Turnus: in Ovid the mothers truly are under the power of the newly arrived Bacchus and rage on his behalf *against* the native king Pentheus. Even more significantly, in *Aeneid* 9, when news reaches the mother of Euryalus of her son’s death, her grief is expressed in very similar Bacchant terms to those used by Ovid to describe Agaue and the other Theban women. At 9.477–8 she flies to the walls, wailing aloud (477: *euolat infelix et femineo ululatu* – cf. *Met.* 3.725: *uisis ululauit Agaue*) and with hair in disarray (478 – cf. *Met.* 3.726). She speaks of her son’s death in the terms of *sparagmos*:³⁴ she wonders where his limbs and

on 3.198–203: it is perhaps no accident here that Pentheus appeals to the *animi* of his aunt, who is *autos noos*.

30 But cf. von Glinski (2012) 19: “Agave herself in tearing him apart is acting in a non-human way in her Dionysiac frenzy, while Actaeon’s dogs act out of animal instinct alone.”

31 Cf. von Glinski (2012) 14: “Where the body is metamorphosed, the challenge is to show its human reactions; where the body is recognisably human, the simile maps animal behavior onto human cruelty.” In this case, the very human dimension to the simile points to the animal behaviour of Pentheus’ attackers. In the case of Actaeon’s attackers, the mock-epic catalogue of their names does the reverse and gives a human dimension to the dogs (von Glinski 2012, 15). On other parallels with Actaeon before Book 3, see von Glinski (2012) 16 n. 32.

32 As Hardie (2002) 169 eloquently puts it, “the product of every metamorphosis is an absent presence.” On the audience of Pentheus and the audience of Ovid viewing Pentheus, see, further, Feldherr (2010) 182–3. On Pentheus as appealing to an especially Roman audience with Roman ideals, see McNamara (2010) 186–8.

33 I follow some of the discussion in Oliensis (2009) 70–1, who, though she does not discuss the death of Pentheus in Ovid, has very relevant discussion of the two passages in the *Aeneid* (in Books 7 and 9 respectively) which I discuss here.

ripped arms are (490–1: *quae nunc artus auulsaque membra / et funus lacerum tellus habet?*) in language recalled in Ovid in the description of Pentheus' *sparagmos* (*Met.* 3.724: *ostendens dereptis uulnera membris*; 727: *auulsumque caput*; and 731: *membra uiri manibus derepta nefandis*). Euryalus' mother is stricken with grief described in the terms associated with a Maenad (*ululatu*, 9.477) because of a death which she herself describes as a *sparagmos*. She complains, too, that she did not have the opportunity to perform proper funeral rites on her son (9.486–7). This mother complains that there is not enough body left for her to carry out such rituals; it is Agaue and the other Theban mothers, under Bacchus' power, who *cause* the ripping of limbs from Pentheus with impious hands. These mothers in the *Aeneid* provide a potential template of behaviour for the Theban women, which, in the end, is entirely absent in Ovid.

So the Vergilian underworld scene activated through Ovid's simile, along with the evocation of Actaeon's fate and the two parallel Bacchant scenes in *Aeneid* 7 and 9, brings a sense of pathos which some have argued is missing in the description of Pentheus' death. It has been asserted, for example, that "Ovid avoids the tragic pathos embodied in Euripides' *Bacchae* ... Ovid's Pentheus is simply arrogant".³⁵ As well as the Vergilian intertext, the pathetic picture of Pentheus extending his armless limbs, his entreaty to his aunt to remember Actaeon, and his confessions of wrong doing, play against this judgement. Ovid, too, with the leaves simile, points to the death of Orpheus, which is an obvious *exemplum* for the *sparagmos* of Pentheus itself. Part of the *Aeneid* passage (at 6.306–8) is a quotation of *Georgics* 4.475–6, of the types of shades in the underworld. The story in the *Georgics* is told there by Proteus of how Orpheus in his music-playing summoned the *umbrae* (4.472) from Hades. The allusion to the *Aeneid* by Ovid brings with it the *Aeneid*'s quotation of the *Georgics*, and generates too a comparison of Pentheus with Orpheus. But whereas Orpheus had this magical power over the underworld's inhabitants, to summon them from the underworld's depths, Pentheus fails to summon the shades of Actaeon, at least as a warning to his killers. When Orpheus famously looks back and is deprived of his Eurydice, he is eventually torn to pieces and decapitated by the slighted Thracian

34 So Oliensis (2009) 71.

35 Janan (2004) 131. Bömer (1969) 620, on 3.707, sees *ira* as the theme of the Pentheus drama, taking its reference at 3.577 as key. See too McNamara (2010) 175–8. Barchiesi (2009) 237, on 3.706–7, discusses the tragic parallels for generic representation of a tyrant, esp. in the *Bacchae*. Cf. Otis (1970) 142 on the *furor* of Bacchus as confirmed by Juno at 4.142. Anderson (1997) 389 is determined to see in the initial description of Pentheus as *contemptor superum* (3.514, which echoes the description of Mezentius at *Aeneid* 7.648 and 8.7) a unifacted picture of Mezentian arrogance in Pentheus, without any development as the narrative proceeds.

women (4.520) in their Bacchic rage.³⁶ Orpheus' decapitation is described as *caput reuulsum* (*Georgics* 4.523), echoed by *auulsumque caput* at *Met.* 3.727.³⁷ We get the *exemplum* of Orpheus in addition to the explicitly stated case of Actaeon.³⁸ Ovid himself eventually completes the series in his own description of Orpheus' downfall at the beginning of *Metamorphoses* 11.³⁹ But even the sparagmodic parallel with Orpheus brings up a contrast: Orpheus, as the founder of Orphic mysteries, has an eternal rest promised to him, consolation after death. Pentheus has no such promise.⁴⁰

II Turnus rewritten

There is another young man who stretches out his hands in supplication: Turnus, at the end of the *Aeneid*, tells Aeneas that all of the Ausonians can see that he has been beaten, and that he stretches out his palms to him (*Aen.* 12.936: *uicisti et uictum tendere palmas*).⁴¹ The parallels, verbal and thematic, between Pentheus and Turnus in their deaths, are very conspicuous, and, as a result, the ending of the *Aeneid*, both in its characterisation of victim and victor and in its implications

36 See Servius ad loc. for discussion of their identity.

37 In connection with this passage, it is worth pointing out the verbal parallel between the decapitation of Pentheus and that of Priam in *Aeneid* 2 (*auulsumque caput*: *Met.* 3.727 and *Aen.* 2.558): both were kings, in their own eyes, futilely defending their kingdoms against the incursions of foreign insurgents. Priam dies after witnessing his son's death, whereas, conversely, Agaue is herself responsible for her son's death. Cf. too Lucan 1.685–6, and the discussion of Barchiesi (2009) 238.

38 The Vergilian intertexts, especially that of *Aeneid* 6, have also been seen as contributing an Orphic-religious dimension to this scene, but not one that necessarily applies to Pentheus (Barchiesi 2009, 239–40). Norden (and Lloyd-Jones, among other advocates) wish to see in the *Aeneid* passage an allusion to the lost epic the *Katabasis of Heracles*, which, they argue, was also the model for Bacchylides 5.64 (and for P.Oxy. 2622 attributed to Pindar). See Norden (1957) ad loc. and Lloyd-Jones (1967) 207. Norden (1957) 224 also adduces Sophocles *OT* 175 ff. alluded to by the second half of the Vergilian simile (6.311–12), as well as *Il.* 3.4–5 of course. For discussion against influence of the *Katabasis* on Vergil, see Thaniel (1971) (and 244 n. 33 for bibliography) and the scepticism of Austin (1977) 130–1.

39 On this passage, and the relationship between the deaths of Actaeon, Pentheus and Orpheus, see von Glinski (2012) 14; 21–6 (esp. good on Orpheus). Among the numerous parallels between Pentheus and Orpheus in Ovid, the death episodes of both Pentheus and Orpheus begin with a description of them as a *contemptor* (*Met.* 3.514; 11.7).

40 Cf. McNamara (2010) 189: "At the end of the episode, Pentheus is revealingly vulnerable."

41 Note the echo in Turnus' words of the description of Eurydice stretching out her hands at *Georgics* 4.498 as she bids farewell to Orpheus: *invalidasque tibi tendens ... palmas* (an image which may be present too, in the intertextual background, in the description of Pentheus in Ovid).

for the *Aeneid* as a whole, is brought forward for an re-examination at the end of *Metamorphoses* 3.

The final obstacle in the way of full acceptance of Bacchus, the new arrival from the East, in Thebes is Pentheus. Aeneas' ultimate acceptance among the Latins, and the future triumph of Rome, culminates too, in the death of a young man, Turnus. Ovid has very carefully constructed Pentheus' final moments against the pattern set for Turnus at the end of *Aeneid* 12. Pentheus pleads familial *exempla*, namely Actaeon, and Turnus reminds Aeneas of Anchises in an attempt to receive at least proper burial (*Aeneid* 12.934). The description of Turnus' final moments, the dissolution of his limbs (12.951: *ast illi soluuntur frigore membra*) is echoed in Ovid where Pentheus' dismemberment is compared to leaves touched by frost (*frigore*, 3.729, with *membra*, 731). Pentheus pleads his guilt, wounded (3.718–9: *iam se peccasse fatentem. / saucius ille*). Turnus, too, admits his loss (12.931 and 936), and is compared at the beginning of *Aeneid* 12 to a wounded lion (*saucius ille*, 5), clearly recalled by Ovid here.⁴² Both are maimed, unable to escape (at 12.927, Turnus collapses to the ground), and both stretch out their right hand in supplication. Note the echo of the description of Turnus' gesticulation in Pentheus' posture: *dextramque precantis*, in Ovid (3.721) re-enacts *dextramque precantem* of Turnus at *Aeneid* 12.930.⁴³ The key moment before death, in each case, is described in precisely the same terms. The fates of Turnus and Pentheus, therefore, become interlocked in our reading of the end of *Metamorphoses* 3.

So far I have tried to demonstrate the compelling presence of key passages from the *Aeneid* behind the construction of the final scene of *Metamorphoses* 3. Not only does the simile of the leaves act as a window on to the underworld scene of *Aeneid* 6, but a number of key phrases disclose correlations between the final moments of Pentheus and Turnus. But already before the description of Pentheus' death, Ovid raises two further Vergilian intertexts relating to Pentheus. First, in *Aeneid* 12, Turnus goes out to face the foreigner Aeneas, who is described in terms which portray him as an easterner, a foreigner who is not welcome (*Aeneid* 12.99–100):

*semiuri Phrygis et foedare in puluere crinis
uibratos calido ferro murraque madentis.* 100

⁴² 12.5–6: *saucius ille ... leo*. *Saucius ille* as a combination in this metrical *sedes* is found only in these passages in Vergil and Ovid.

⁴³ The pairing of *precantem* (/ -is) with *dextram(que)* occurs only in these two places. Silius Italicus *Punica* 2.413 has *dextraque precantem*, but this time of Dido as she was abandoned by Aeneas on the shores of Carthage.

“[Allow me to lay low the body ...] of the Trojan half-man and to spoil his hair in the dust, hair that has been curled with a hot iron and drenched with myrrh.”

This Vergilian description is picked up earlier in Pentheus’ own very similar description of Bacchus at *Met.* 3.553–5,⁴⁴ particularly in the image of hair soaked with myrrh.

*at nunc a puero Thebae capientur inermi,
quem neque bella iuuant nec tela nec usus equorum,
sed madidus murra crinis mollesque coronae.*⁴⁵ 555

“But now Thebes will be captured by an unarmed boy, to whom neither wars nor weapons nor horsemanship are pleasing, but hair drenched in myrrh and soft crowns.”

Pentheus is keen to present an exaggerated picture of an eastern invader who is alien to Theban martial ways (emphasized too by Pentheus at 3.556 in his description of Bacchus dressed in purple and luxuriously adorned clothing).⁴⁶ The femininity is implied not only in the appearance of Bacchus but also in his disinterest in the virile things of war which so interest Pentheus. Ovid has the Theban king unwittingly echo Turnus’ characterisation of Aeneas, but in so doing does not only forecast a similar fatal end for Pentheus. The parallelism works in two ways: Ovid comments on the Turnus episode through the person of Pentheus, and implies that Turnus’ attempts to repel the foreigner Aeneas were as doomed as Pentheus’ militaristic exertions against a god. The plot about Turnus in *Aeneid* 12 is, therefore, read as all the more tragic by means of this intertextual recasting in the words of Pentheus, archetypally doomed to destruction in the face of the inexorable Bacchus. For Turnus, death at the hands of Aeneas who had the gods, fate and Roman history on his side, was as inevitable as Pentheus’ failure. In addition, for Pentheus to cast Bacchus in this way is to add an epic texture to the already written (Euripidean), tragic nature of his final moments. He has, as it were, doubled the certainty of doom awaiting him.

It is Aeneas who recalls, on seeing the baldric (12.945–6), another young man who had been mercilessly cut down, and avenges that death as a surrogate

44 In the close similarity between Ovid’s Pentheus and Vergil’s Turnus, MacGóráin (2013) 139 sees Ovid signalling “his awareness of the Penthean ancestry of Virgil’s Turnus, both indeed as leaders of the resistance against strangers”.

45 Cf. Tarrant (2012) 116, who, on *Aen.* 12.100 (cf. *Ov. Met.* 5.53), counts Aeneas as a *Paris alter*.

46 Cf. Atreus’ depiction of Thyestes at Seneca *Thyestes* 909, which may well be influenced by this line.

father,⁴⁷ by ending Turnus' life. Ovid has so constituted the final moments of Pentheus' death to pass comment on the end of the *Aeneid*. It takes women frenzied by Bacchus, Maenads who cannot see reality, or dogs who cannot identify their master Actaeon in the guise of a stag, to kill a young man, begging for mercy. Aeneas, fully cognizant of the supplications of Turnus and his case for mercy, and with the death of one young man – Pallas – brought to mind, still causes the death of the helpless young man in front of him. Through the prism of the Pentheus narrative, Ovid's readers apply to Aeneas' actions what the Maenads do only under the power of Bacchus, and read him as sacrificing (*immolat*, 12.949) a young native to establish his own, inexorable power. Thus, by replaying Aeneas' killing of Turnus through key allusions embedded into the narrative at the end of *Metamorphoses* 3, Ovid reconstructs Aeneas' actions as exemplary of the type of merciless, unpitying actions of the gods. Ovid, through intertext, implies the real price of resistance, but implies, too, that Aeneas' decision was the *inhumane* one.

III *Ktisis* and perspective

The image of the leaves in Ovid functions on two levels of reading and, therefore, of register. A contrast in tone is undoubtedly established between the violent familial murder of Pentheus and the natural human generation suggested by the Iliadic intertext. But the strong verbal echoing of the Vergilian simile, with its pathetic context of young men who died *ante ora parentum*, variegates the scene of a repentant Pentheus before the fury of Bacchus, and shifts attention in particular to the pitiful nature of the death of a *young man*. Without any *anagnorisis* on the part of Agaue or her sisters, Book 3 ends instead with the pointed note that such *exempla* served to warn the Thebans: that is, the dismemberment of one who opposed Bacchus, and the wrath of the gods against unsuspecting Actaeon (who is brought to the fore in Pentheus' pleas), led the daughters of Ismene religiously to attend to the rites of Bacchus (3.732–3).

Bacchus is an incomer, a settler, just as Cadmus arrived to set up a new city on a foreign land. Cadmus is described at the beginning of Book 3 as an exile, escaping the wrath of a parent, in terms taken from the proem of the *Aeneid* which were used to describe Aeneas, his fate and his mission.⁴⁸ Cadmus had to slay the

⁴⁷ Cf. Owen Lee (1979) 6–12.

⁴⁸ Specifically 3.7: *profugus patriamque iramque parentis*, echoing *Aeneid* 1.2 and 4, surprisingly not discussed by Hardie (1990). On the ktistic parallels, see Hardie (1990) 226–30.

snake to establish his city (3.55–94); Bacchus must slay the snake-born (3.543–5) Pentheus to establish his own religious *ktisis*. Hardie has already shown how carefully Ovid parallels the anger of Pentheus, the son of the snake-born Echion (“viperman”), with the beginning of Book 3 and the original combat between Cadmus and the snake.⁴⁹ Once again, a snake must be slain by a new arrival, but this time that new arrival is Bacchus. By the end of Book 3, Pentheus has assumed the role, through intertext, of a Turnus fighting against a foreign incursion, whereas Bacchus is set up in the figure first, of Cadmus and his triumph over the snake, and second, of Aeneas in his eventually successful *ktisis* through the death of Turnus. At the beginning of Book 3, with his explicit verbal echoes from the proem of the *Aeneid*, Ovid alerted the reader to Cadmus’ status as an Aeneas figure, an exile but one bound to set up a new city by fate, and likely to be successful given his early auspicious success. By the end of Book 3, this foreshadowing through intertext has proven misleading, as Ovid now constructs the young Theban ruler Pentheus in the mould of Turnus, bound to lose. The fortunes of the Theban household have gone from favourable, cast in the template of Aeneas’ mission, to doomed, on the wrong side of literary history, and thus a symbol of the inevitability of the failed Theban *ktisis*.⁵⁰ The slip in intertextual roles, from Cadmus’ Aeneas to Pentheus’ Turnus, destabilises the roles described in the *Aeneid*, in that family succession, and a seemingly fated foundation, are no guarantees of perpetuity. Bacchus appropriates the role of Aeneas, and supplants the place given, by rights, and by intertext, to Cadmus, the original exile and settler who slew the original snake. Settlements become resettled, success turns into tragic failure, and Aeneas-figures can be replaced by other ones, especially if they come in the shape of a god. Pentheus by rights should be continuing the heritage given to him by an original Aeneas, Cadmus, but that line is removed from him, as the Vergilian intertextuality demonstrates: he is given the role of the victim, not the victor, and in the blending of the tragic and epic codes, it is Bacchus who has the double triumph. But it is to Pentheus as a *lamentable* victim that the intertexts firmly lead Ovid’s readers.

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⁴⁹ See Hardie (1990) 225, and 225 n. 9. Hardie (1990) 230 also shows how the imagery of snakes and snake-slaying recalls the Hercules and Cacus story of *Aeneid* 8, but this time the death of a monster results in a failed *ktisis*.

⁵⁰ Ovid’s allusive play on the parallel fates of Thebes and Rome is taken up by Lucan, as Hardie (1990) 230 shows: “By the time of Lucan the analogy between the fratricides and civil wars of Thebes and Rome is well established.”

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