

THE FRUSTRATION OF PENTHEUS:
NARRATIVE MOMENTUM IN OVID'S
METAMORPHOSES, 3.511–731

The frustration of the teleological momentum of epic poetry is one of many features which contribute to the generic conundrum that is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Instead of a poem-long narrative thrust, the reader is presented with innumerable episodes and an ever-receding *telos*; a plethora of narrators and disruptive embedded tales replace the more traditional uni- or bivocal narration of an epic storyline; directly quoted speech (on the occasions on which it *isn't* storytelling) is often one-sided, monologic and frequently contributes little to the 'action' of a tale. Such features combine to frustrate the momentum of the poem:¹ Ovid's epic is all talk, and little action.

The Pentheus episode at *Met.* 3.511–731 contains all of these features.² The episode can be summarized as follows: ignoring a warning from Tiresias that he must acknowledge the divinity of the new god Bacchus (3.511–26), Pentheus rebukes his citizens for their Bacchic worship and has his guards arrest a young follower of the god, Acoetes (3.527–81); Acoetes narrates the story of Bacchus' metamorphosis of the Tyrrhenian sailors, a punishment which was motivated by *their* refusal to acknowledge his divinity (3.582–691); Pentheus ignores both Acoetes' *exemplum* and the prisoner's miraculous escape, and storms off to Mount Cithaeron to witness the Bacchic rites, where he is torn apart by his mother, aunt and other women, who mistake him for an animal (3.692–731). The reader is presented with a large amount of direct speech in this episode, little of which has any immediately perceivable *effect*: Pentheus delivers an extended monologue which is entirely disregarded by its (internal) audience, while the other character in the drama temporarily becomes a narrator, resulting in a lengthy and fairly unrelated narrative significantly delaying the grisly denouement of the 'main' story. On the surface, therefore, the deferred downfall of Ovid's Pentheus could not appear more different from the inexorable march to destruction depicted in Euripides' *Bacchae*.³ The 'stranger', probably an

¹ J.B. Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (North Carolina, 1988) 35, suggests that the expectation of linear movement is 'assaulted in the poem', by means of inset narratives; 'the essential narrative technique militates against a sense of movement'. Similarly, M. von Albrecht, *Roman Epic: An Interpretative Introduction* (Leiden, 1999), 148, sees extended monologue as a 'means of retardation' of the narrative. E.J. Bernbeck, *Beobachtungen zur Darstellungsart in Ovids Metamorphosen* (Munich, 1967), 7–11, meanwhile, supporting his argument for a lack of epic continuity in the poem, demonstrates that speeches often appear to be detached from their dramatic context. On the one-sidedness of dialogue, see further n. 54.

² Significant recent discussions of this episode include P. James, 'Pentheus anguigena. Sins of the "father"', *BICS* 38 (1991), 81–92; A. Feldherr, 'Metamorphosis and sacrifice in Ovid's Theban narrative', *MD* 38 (1997), 25–55; and A.M. Keith, 'Sources and genres in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 1–5', in B.W. Boyd (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Ovid* (Leiden, 2002), 235–69, at 262–8.

³ While it is true that the use of messenger scenes in the *Bacchae* provides some retardation of the plot in Euripides' version of the story, Ovid's use of a messenger-type speech (that of

influence from Pacuvius' version of the play,⁴ does not reveal the god's presence, but tells a long story about his powers.⁵ Ovid has expanded the episode and conflated two myths, but apparently at the cost of slowing the 'action' down, of weakening the 'tragedy'.⁶

The insertion of an embedded tale at a crucial moment in Pentheus' descent into madness frustrates the expected narrative of Pentheus' *sparagmos*. The reader of *Metamorphoses* 3 has already witnessed the downfall of two young Theban men, the unfortunate descendents of Cadmus, Actaeon (3.144–252) and Narcissus (3.339–510). Pentheus completes Book 3's trio of distressing fates, but the reader is kept waiting for his famous punishment; Acoetes' rambling tale intervenes. On the surface, narrative momentum is frustrated by the excessive use of dialogue – or rather, the use of mostly separate acts of monologue which do not communicate with each other. This paper will suggest that the narrative momentum of this episode is manifested in rather unexpected ways. Instead of sustaining momentum within narrative passages (by narrating/describing the actions of the characters) the interrupting and interrupted dialogue *performs* the actions of the characters. It has already been noted that the amount of direct speech which makes up this episode is reminiscent of drama:⁷ in fact, in its use of mimetic direct speech to represent and drive forward the events of the story, it is far more dramatic in technique even than at first appears from the quasi-theatrical encounter between Pentheus and Acoetes.⁸

Acoetes) reporting an *entirely* different narrative to the one in which it is contained, represents a much more significant suspension of the action.

⁴ Servius Auctus *ad Aen.* 4.469 attests to the presence of a character called Acoetes in Pacuvius' play. B. Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge, 1966), 139, 371–2; F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso Metamorphosen: Buch I–III* (Heidelberg, 1969) on 3.582–691; and H.M. Currie 'Ovid and the Roman stage', *ANRW* II.31.4 (1981), 2717–18 outline the evidence which suggests Pacuvius to be Ovid's source for this character, and for the conflation of the two myths; though G. Manuwald, *Pacuvius Summus Tragicus Poeta. Zum dramatischen Profil seiner Tragödien* (Leipzig, 2003), 46–7, reminds us of the paucity of evidence for Pacuvius' *Pentheus*.

⁵ Although some assert that Acoetes is meant to be understood as the god in disguise (L.P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* [Cambridge, 1955], 226; Otis [n. 4] 139; F. Ahl, *Metaformations. Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and other Classical Poets* [New York, 1985], 239; Solodow [n. 1], 26; Keith [n. 2], 265), this is never made explicit in the text. James (n. 2), 90 and Feldherr (n. 2), 34 notice this uncertainty, upon which Feldherr productively elaborates: 'the audience of this narrative ... faces the same challenge as the characters within it' (29). I shall return to the 'cohesion' of audiences in this episode (see below, § 2). For now, it is sufficient to note that, while in Euripides' play Dionysus controls the information to which Pentheus is privy, whilst keeping the watching audience informed, in Ovid's version this information is being controlled by the poet: neither the characters nor the external audience are provided with any certainty as to Acoetes' identity and the ultimate meaning of the events.

⁶ I. Gildenhard and A. Zissos, "'Somatic economies': tragic bodies and poetic design in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*", in P. Hardie, A. Barchiesi and S. Hinds (edd.), *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on Ovid's Metamorphoses and its Reception* (Cambridge, 1999), 162–81 have productively analysed Ovid's reimagining of tragic material and suggest (163) that his apparent non-conformity to the (Aristotelian) emotional register of tragedy has been responsible for a relative lack of scholarly interest in the *Metamorphoses*' engagement with the tragic genre (compared with interest in their epic, elegiac or Callimachean features for example).

⁷ Wilkinson (n. 5), 226; Otis (n. 4), 372.

⁸ Gildenhard and Zissos (n. 6), 171 note that epic narrative 'which is encountered in reading or recitation' cannot attain the theatricality of drama. They suggest that Ovid explores the performative and visual aspects of tragedy through the persistent evocation of spectacle in the Theban narrative; see also Feldherr (n. 2) on the spectacles of Actaeon and Pentheus in particu-

Direct speech is a particularly mimetic form of narrative;⁹ the implied direct correspondence of the words ‘spoken’ in the story world with the words quoted in a text provides direct discourse with a particularly powerful imitative status. Furthermore, narrated direct discourse can be assumed to take up the same amount of temporal ‘space’ within the narrative as it does in the world of the story. But what is ‘happening’ while a speech act is being narrated? In a sense, any action in the narrative, with the exception of the ‘speaking’, is suspended. Thus, there is synthesis of style, time and event between the narrative plane and that of the story world. Only the ‘voice’ differs: a character temporarily takes over the primary discourse from the narrator.

Pentheus is one of the more strident ‘voices’ in the poem, and his speech at *Met.* 3.528–81, is wholly unsuccessful. It receives one of the worst responses in the entire poem.¹⁰ Richard Tarrant has perceptively noted the overwhelming tendency of the speeches in Ovid’s poem to fail.¹¹ How should the external audience read a ‘pointless’ speech, a speech which strikingly fails to achieve its purpose? Failed rhetoric must be read just as closely as that which succeeds or, perhaps, even more so, in the case of a speech which fails as spectacularly as Pentheus’ does. The response to Pentheus’ speech is uniformly negative:

hunc auus, hunc Athamas, hunc cetera turba suorum
corripiunt dictis frustra que inhibere laborant. (3.564–5¹²)

I will return to this point again, but will allow it, for the moment, to raise its obvious question: if a speech misses its targeted internal audience, and fails in its function within the narrated story, might we suspect that the speech in fact fulfils some other function? I will argue that Pentheus’ speech provides something which the primary narrative does not. As I shall demonstrate in § 1, the speech functions not only as an exhortation to the internal audience but, to the external audience, it also serves as a representation of the developments in the speaker’s emotion, a foreshadowing of the denouement of the episode and, as such, as a significant contribution to the narrative momentum of the passage. This complex functioning of the speech, as we shall see in §§ 2–3, prompts further reflection upon narratological and generic implications of the presentation of this episode.

For the external audience, the speech ‘dramatizes’ Pentheus’ descent into anger and madness. Ovid represents the king’s loss of control by means of his speech: its increasingly fragmented rhetorical structure, as we shall see, prefigures the

lar. I suggest that the use of ‘performative’ direct speech in the Pentheus episode constitutes a similar exploration with the dramatic method.

⁹ A. Laird, *Powers of Expression, Expressions of Power: Speech Presentation and Latin Literature* (Oxford, 1999), 89–90 provides a useful overview of this issue, which was, of course, observed by as early a critic as Aristotle (*Poet.* 1448a3, 1460a–b).

¹⁰ On which see further below, pp. 192–3, 195–6.

¹¹ R.J. Tarrant, ‘Ovid and the failure of rhetoric’, in D. Innes, H. Hine and C. Pelling (edd.), *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Oxford, 1995), 63–74. Tarrant’s suggestion is that Ovid presents the ‘procedures of formal argument’ not to represent their use and effect within the poetry, but to locate rhetorical argument at an ironic distance from the emotions represented in or by the poetry (64). In terms of this paper, in other words, this means that, whether it succeeds in persuading its internal audience or not, a speech in the *Metamorphoses* may have the additional aim of persuading the external audience to respond to its speaker, content or context in a particular way.

¹² All quotations are taken from R.J. Tarrant, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses* (Oxford, 2004).

king's *sparagmos* – the narration of which, of course, is delayed by an embedded narrative. The rhetorically trained external audience is perfectly placed to read Pentheus' speech in the foreknowledge of his fate, sealed as it is as soon as he opens his mouth.

1. FRAGMENTED RHETORIC

Pentheus' speech is one of many attempts at persuasion in the *Metamorphoses*. Characters are frequently depicted persuading others to take a particular course of action,¹³ or are depicted urging *themselves* to alter their plans or their feelings in monologues.¹⁴ Of course, embedded narratives too, like that of Acoetes in this episode (along with many others), can have a persuasive aim. As has already been suggested, this talkativeness is partly responsible for the retardation of narrative momentum – for instance, before witnessing Phaethon's dramatic flight (2.150–328, a narrative which is itself interrupted by a speech from Tellus, 2.279–300), we must read Sol's lengthy description of it (2.50–102), ostensibly intended to terrify his son from undertaking his ambitious task. Much has been written about the influence of Ovid's rhetorical training on this aspect of the *Metamorphoses*. The testimony of the elder Seneca suggests Ovid's preference for *suasoriae*, persuasive monologues, over argumentative exercises, *controuersiae*, during his training, along with his interest in character-based exercises (*Contr.* 2.2.12¹⁵), and readers/scholars have found this to 'explain' the prevalence of direct persuasive speech and 'ventriloquism'¹⁶ in Ovid's poetry. More generally, the fact that the poet is known to have attended the schools of declamation at all, has explained away the noticeable presence of rhetorical techniques throughout his corpus.¹⁷ However one judges the increased influence of rhetoric and/or the rhetorical education upon Latin literature in this and later periods¹⁸ (for it has not always been to everybody's taste), one

¹³ Particularly lengthy examples include Niobe to the Lydians (6.170–202), Byblis to Caunus (in the form of a letter, 9.530–64), Ajax (13.5–122) and Ulysses (13.128–381) to the Greek armies, and Polyphemus to Galatea (13.789–869).

¹⁴ Narcissus (3.442–73), Juno (4.422–31), Boreas (6.687–701), Medea (7.11–71), Scylla (8.44–80), Althaea (8.481–511); Hercules (9.176–204), Byblis (9.474–516, 585–629), Iphis (9.726–63), Myrrha (10.320–55).

¹⁵ *declamabat autem Naso raro controuersias et non nisi ethicas; libentius dicebat suasorias: molesta illi erat omnis argumentatio.*

¹⁶ The *Heroides* are an excellent and innovative example of this technique, despite the fact that, as H. Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet Between Two Worlds* (California, 1945), 36 noted, they had been dismissed as '*suasoriae* in verse'.

¹⁷ The general influence of the rhetorical education on Ovidian poetry has been studied by S.F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation* (Liverpool, 1949), 149–56; F. Arnaldi, 'La 'retorica' nella poesia di Ovidio' in N.I. Herescu (ed.), *Ovidiana* (Paris, 1958), 23–31; and T.F. Higham, 'Ovid and rhetoric', *ibid.* 32–48. More recently, J.T. Davis, *Fictus Adulter: Poet as Actor in the Amores* (Amsterdam, 1989) and M.L. Stapleton, *Harmful Eloquence: Ovid's Amores from Antiquity to Shakespeare* (Michigan, 1996) have focussed specifically on the influence of role-playing in rhetorical education on the *personae* in the *Amores*.

¹⁸ Ovid's rhetorical style, and that of the 'Silver Age' whose coming he was once seen to herald, has been seen as heavily influenced by the practice of declamation and the reduced opportunities for 'real' oratory; H.M. Currie, *Silver Latin Epic* (Bristol, 1985), xi–xiii and J. Farrell, 'Towards a rhetoric of (Roman?) epic', in W.J. Dominik (ed.), *Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in Society and Literature* (London, 1997), 135–38 provide a review of these issues, while G.A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern*

relatively safe conclusion must be that, if rhetorical figures and techniques were making more frequent (or, perhaps, more perceivable/noticeable) appearances in poetic texts, their intended audiences must have been (theoretically, at least) able to discern, interpret and appreciate their use.¹⁹ The external audience of Ovid's poem, here, can assess Pentheus' speech not only as a fragment of a wider narrative, but also as a *suasoria*, an exercise in persuasion by a particular character, in a particular situation. The poet, in turn, has an arsenal of rhetorical techniques with which to characterize his speaker and, by extension, his internal audience.

Pentheus' aim as an orator is to persuade his subjects to reject Bacchus. This is fictionalized 'civic' oratory (a king is addressing his people),²⁰ and an unusually public speech for the *Metamorphoses*: it takes place before a large audience of Bacchic revellers:

Liber adest festisque fremunt ululatus agri;
turba ruit, mixtaeque uiris matresque nurusque
uulgusque proceresque ignota ad sacra feruntur. (3.528–30)

The large numbers in the crowd are indicated by the accumulation of nouns and conjunctive *-que* (polysyndeton).²¹ Few other speeches in the poem are made in front of such a large internal audience. As well as being a *suasoria*, therefore, the speech bears a resemblance to epideictic oratory, the type of oratory which

Times (London, 1980), 108–19 discusses the *letteraturizzazione* of rhetoric which has occurred repeatedly in several periods (of which Hellenistic Greece and Imperial Rome are just two).

¹⁹ Scholars have long recognized the Roman predilection for rhetoric: on the Roman rhetorical education system: see H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London, 1956), 284–91; D.L. Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York, 1957); G.A. Kennedy, *Quintilian* (New York, 1969), 39–53; S.F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (London, 1977), 65–111; A. Corbeill, 'Education in the Roman republic: creating traditions', in Y.L. Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden, 2001), 266–76. On oratory as a fundamental aspect of the social system and outlook, see E. Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture: From Cicero to Apuleius* (Baltimore, 1996), 2–14 and T. Habinek, *Ancient Rhetoric and Oratory* (Oxford, 2005). On the 'rhetorical tastes' of the Roman audience, see O.S. Due, *Changing Forms: Studies in the Metamorphoses of Ovid* (Copenhagen, 1974), 81–2; N.P. Gross, 'Rhetorical wit and amatory persuasion in Ovid', *CJ* 74 (1979), 305; Davis (n. 17), 11–12; A. Dihle, *Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire: From Augustus to Justinian*, tr. M. Malzahn (London, 1994), 65; R.J. Tarrant, 'Aspects of Virgil's reception in antiquity', in C. Martindale (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge, 1997), 63; and S.M. Wheeler, *A Discourse of Wonders: Audience and Performance in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Philadelphia, 1999), 68–9, 100. More specifically, scholars have discussed the taste for *listening* to both oratory and poetry: see W.Y. Sellars, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age: Horace and the Elegiac Poets* (Oxford, 1892), 213; Wilkinson (n. 5), 11–16; and G.W. Williams, *The Nature of Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1970), 157–58. (H.E. Butler, *Post-Augustan Poetry: From Seneca to Juvenal* [Oxford, 1909], 18–19 and C.W. Mendell, *Latin Poetry: The Age of Rhetoric and Satire* [New Haven, 1967], 12–14 cite the first-century A.D. development of the practice of *recitatio* as partly responsible for the increased influence of rhetoric in poetry.) But this audience characteristic (and, indeed, practical consideration) has only fairly recently been accepted as an influence on the creative concerns of a poet: see, on Ovid, e.g. Ahl (n. 5), 35–44, 54–63; Davis (n. 17), 28–31; L. Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 2000), 54; and Wheeler (this note), *passim*.

²⁰ Similar situations occur elsewhere only between Jupiter and the gods (1.163–245, 9.418–39), Niobe and the Lydians (6.165–203) and Cipus and the Romans (15.590–608).

²¹ This is emphasized by the unusual lengthening of the *-que* of *uulgusque* which, Bömer (n. 4), 85–6 notes, is an occasional feature of lines which contain the repeated suffix (see *Met.* 1.193, 4.10, 5.484).

was accessible to the widest range of people (note the narrator's concentration on the female members of the audience *mixtae ... matresque nurusque* and the lower and upper classes *uulgusque proceresque*). However, epideictic oratory was concerned with 'entertainment' (in a loose sense), rather than with a practical purpose, so, strictly, Pentheus' persuasive political aim does not entirely conform to this categorization. Nevertheless, parts of his speech do conform to the precepts set out for the composition of epideictic, and their consideration will prove to be useful. Techniques of praise and blame (Arist. *Rh.* 1366a9–1368a41; Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.59.177–8, *De or.* 2.340–49; Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.20–1, 3.7.1–28) are particularly pertinent. Quintilian also informs us that praise and blame could be used for practical (judicial and political) purposes (*Inst.* 3.7.4–6) and not only in epideictic 'display' speeches. We will see Pentheus praise his people and blame his perceived enemy (the false new god) in an attempt to turn his subjects away from Bacchus. An analysis of Pentheus' speech reveals the gradual erosion, as his anger increases, of his powers of persuasion.

Initially, his speech is well structured. Pentheus' *exordium* opens with two rhetorical questions. It is a sudden opening, following straight on from the description of the crowd at 3.528–30. Pentheus' speech is directly quoted without his being introduced into the narrative (I shall return to this observation in § 2):

'quis furor, anguigenae, proles Mauortia, uestras
attonuit mentes?' Pentheus ait ... (3.531–2)

The opening question has been recognized as an allusion to Ascanius' address to the ship-burning women at *Aeneid* 5.670: '*quis furor iste nouus?*'. Anderson argues that the similarity of language highlights the difference in motivation of the two speakers – Pentheus' wrong-headedness and impiety is contrasted with Ascanius' piety and propriety.²² In addition, however, this language will later help to reveal Pentheus' lack of awareness, for it is recalled during Acoetes' narrative *exemplum*. When he narrates the tale of his sole acknowledgement of Bacchus and subsequent delivery from dolphin-hood, Acoetes depicts one of the disbelieving (and later punished) sailors asking him why he believes in Bacchus' presence: '*quis te furor ... | persequitur?*' (*Met.* 3.641–2). Pentheus cannot recognize the implications of hearing his own questions ventriloquized by a *contemptor diuum* who goes on to be severely punished, stripped of his humanity.

The second question, which expands on his first, is impressively structured:

aerane tantum
aere repulsa ualent et adunco tibia cornu
et magicae fraudes, ut quos non bellicus ensis,
non tuba terruerit, non strictis agmina telis,
femineae uoces et mota insania uino
obsценique greges et inania tympana uincant? (3.532–7)

Pentheus portrays the subjects, Bacchic paraphernalia, enclosing and surrounding the object, the Thebans, pressing in on both sides. The structure reflects the

²² W.S. Anderson, 'Form changed: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*' in A.J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic* (London, 1993), 108–24, at 116. Pentheus' opening is also reminiscent of Laocoon's at *Aen.* 2.42: '*o miseri, quae tanta insania, ciues?*'.

claustrophobic situation, from Pentheus' point of view at least. Similarly, he begins and ends his list with the actual musical paraphernalia of Bacchic worship (*aera ... tibia ... tympana*), while he places the more abstract Bacchic associations (*fraudes ... femineae uoces ... insania ... obscenique greges*) between these. He thus 'buries' his less tangible concerns within the brackets of these 'real' items. For these concerns (magic, insanity, obscenity, femininity) are the standard accusations levelled at Dionysiac/Bacchic rites by those who often represent more traditional authoritative religion.²³ Euripides' Pentheus had revealed the same fears of insanity and sexuality (*Bacch.* 221–5, 487).²⁴ By bracketing what could be seen as his prejudices and suspicions about these unfamiliar rites between visible and tangible Bacchic accoutrements, Pentheus places his strongest arguments first and last, burying his weaker points in the middle. This method of structuring is recommended by none other than Cicero at *De oratore* 2.314: *in oratione firmissimum quodque sit primum ... si quae erunt mediocria – nam uitiosus nusquam esse oportet locum – in mediam turbam atque in gregem coniciantur.*

Pentheus expresses disbelief at the potency of music and mayhem, and he sets up an opposition between this strength and that of military might. He defines the Thebans by their military strength (*quos non bellicus ensis | non tuba terruerit, non strictis agmina telis*, 3.534–5²⁵), thereby bringing out their current weakness.²⁶ Defining someone by their actions was a way of praising or vituperating someone in a speech (Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.10–18), and Pentheus defines the Thebans as a formerly fearless, warlike people. He goes on to divide his audience with two further questions, addressing the first to the elder and the second to the younger men of his audience (with anaphora of *uosne ... uosne ...*, 3.538, 540). James (n. 2), 91 suggests that his division of the *turba* indicates his desire to reimpose social strata upon the 'chaotic confluence ... Bacchus has produced'. He does not directly address any women. Despite the mixed nature of his crowd, demonstrated by the narrator's description at 3.528–30 (see above, pp. 184–5) and Pentheus' concerns over the threat of femininity (*femineae uoces ... uincant?*), he directs his persuasion at the male members of his audience rather than at the women.

²³ Livy, when reporting the authorities' restrictions on Bacchic rites in 186 B.C., reveals the suspicions and accusations commonly levelled at mystery cults, including accusations of promiscuity and violence: *nec unum genus noxae, stupra promiscua ingenuorum feminarumque errant, sed falsi testes, falsa signa testamentaque et indicia ex eadem officina exhibant: uenena indidem intestinae caedes ... multa dolo, pleraque per uim audebantur. occulebat uim quod prae ululatus tympanorumque et cymbalarum strepitu nulla uox quiritantium inter stupra et caedes exaudiri potest* (39.8.7–8). See further M.W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London, 2001), 126; J. Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, tr. J. Lloyd (Edinburgh, 2003), 146 (originally published as *La Religion des Romains*, [Paris, 1998]).

²⁴ The sexual fixations of Euripides' Pentheus have been psychoanalysed by W. Sale, 'The psychoanalysis of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides', *YClS* 22 (1972), 63–82 and C.P. Segal, 'Pentheus and Hippolytus on the couch and on the grid: psychoanalytic and structuralist readings of Greek tragedy', *CW* 72.1 (1978), 129–48.

²⁵ Bömer (n. 4) 578, notes the pleasing structure of this phrase, since it follows an ascending (meta)chronological order: 'Waffen-Signal-Kampf'.

²⁶ Virgil's Aeneas employs a similar rhetorical structure when he laments the Trojans' susceptibility to Sinon's lies at *Aen.* 2.195–198:

talibus insidiis periurique arte Sinonis
credita res, captique dolis lacrimisque coactis
quos neque Tydides nec Larisaeus Achilles
non anni domuere decem, non mille carinae.

Lafaye²⁷ has shown how Ovid's Pentheus differs in this regard from the Euripidean version, who, having spotted where the problem lies, rebukes the Theban women (e.g. *Bacch.* 215–32, 260–63); Anderson (n. 22), 120, meanwhile, has dismissed this as 'chauvinistic rhetoric'. Pentheus' disregard of the female members of his audience parallels his argument, however, which urges the men to reject femininity in favour of masculinity. He dismisses women at his peril, of course; it is at their hands that he will meet his death (3.708–31).

In his addresses to the older and younger members of the audience, Pentheus tailors his characterization of each according to their age:

uosne, senes, mirer, qui longa per aequora uecti
 hac Tyron, hac profugos posuistis sede Penates,
 nunc sinitis sine Marte capi? uosne, acrior aetas,
 o iuuenes, propiorque meae, quos arma tenere,
 non thyrsos, galeaque tegi, non fronde decebat? (3.538–42)

His questions are still disbelieving: he cannot believe his eyes (*mirer?*).²⁸ Like Euripides' Pentheus, the sight of the elders causes him confusion; Euripides' king is saddened by the sight of Tiresias and, particularly Cadmus (*ἀναίνομαι, πάτερ, | τὸ γῆρας εἰσορῶν νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον*, Eur. *Bacch.* 251–2) joining the Dionysiac rites. While Euripides' Pentheus is harsh and disrespectful to both Tiresias (*Bacch.* 255–62) and Cadmus (*Bacch.* 343–64), Ovid's king is more subtle. He praises the elders according to their past actions and their endurance (what they *have* done), while he implicitly rebukes the younger men for their current actions (he contrasts what they *are* doing with what they *ought* to be doing). Epic associations are continued by further use of vocabulary from the *Aeneid* (*per aequora uecti, penates, profugos*), sustaining the primary narrator's link between his Theban foundation legend, and that of the *Aeneid*.²⁹ Like the opening 'epic' question, this language reveals Pentheus' epic aspirations.³⁰ The young men, he argues, should still be warlike. He opposes nouns to convey the contrast between their current and their ideal behaviour: *arma ... thyrsus, galea ... frons*. These (real) items act equally well as metonyms, representing Mars/Bacchus, war/poetry, masculinity/femininity, epic/tragedy, and so on. This rhetoric of opposition and inversion is appropriate to Bacchus, who was a god who inverted the norm and represented dualities.³¹ Thus,

²⁷ G. Lafaye, *Les Métamorphoses d'Ovide et leurs modèles grecs* (Hildesheim, 1971), 157.

²⁸ The irony of Pentheus' status as voyeur in his myth has been brought out by Ovid in Tiresias' prophecy 3.517–25; e.g. 517–8: '*quam felix esses, si tu quoque luminis huius | orbis ait fieres, ne Bacchica sacra uideres ...*'. See Feldherr (n. 2) on Pentheus' transformation in this episode from spectator to spectacle.

²⁹ On which see P.R. Hardie's influential article, 'Ovid's Theban history: the first "anti-*Aeneid*"?' *CQ* 40 (1990), 224–35.

³⁰ Anderson (n. 22), 116–17, disapproves of this *Aeneid*-reminiscent rhetoric, since it is illogical (the Thebans had no religious or ideological quest) and parodic. In addition, he reveals his preference for Virgil's style over Ovid's thus (ibid. 117); 'Virgil would never have ... fallen into the silly triple alliteration [at 3.539] that goes with Pentheus' popping anger' (where, no doubt, his own alliteration is as intentional as Ovid's). I am not certain Pentheus is yet at his angriest at this point in the speech – we shall see Pentheus' rhetoric become far less restrained than this.

³¹ M. Detienne, *Dionysos at Large*, tr. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 24–6 (originally published as *Dionysos à ciel ouvert* [Paris, 1986]); E. Csapo, 'Riding the phallus for Dionysos: iconology, ritual, and gender-role deconstruction', *Phoenix* 51.3 (1997), 253–95, at 253–6. Euripides, too, depicted the victory of the thyrsus over traditional weapons, *Bacch.* 758–64.

the initial questions of Pentheus' speech are well structured, lay out his argument and the opposed themes which will run throughout his speech, and characterize (parts of) his audience.

Pentheus now dispenses with disbelief, and makes emotional appeals, urging the Thebans to remember themselves:

este, precor, memores, qua sitis stirpe creati,
illiusque animos, qui multos perdidit unus,
sumite serpentis. pro fontibus ille lacuque
interiit; at uos pro fama uincite uestra.
ille dedit leto fortes, uos pellite molles
et patrium retinete decus. (3.543–8)

precor is very frequently used parenthetically in this way, and is often combined with an imperative:³² the appeal adds to the urgency of the request. He appeals to the Thebans' sense of self, by recalling their ancestry – another technique recommended in epideictic oratory (Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.10–11). However, there is irony in Pentheus' use of the serpent as an ideal model for the Thebans. Firstly, the snake was associated with Bacchus (amongst other gods),³³ so it seems rhetorically foolish to use Bacchic or ritualistic iconography to persuade his audience to reject Bacchus. Secondly, the serpent, always an ambiguous icon in ancient religion,³⁴ has proved to be particularly ill-omened for the Thebans: Barkan argues that Cadmus' misreading of his encounter with the serpent lies at the root of the crises of identity and misrecognition which characterize the Theban cycle stories within Books 3 and 4.³⁵ Hardie (n. 29), 225; James (n. 2), 87–9; and Feldherr (n. 2), 50 go further, suggesting that, rather than encouraging his audience to do so, Pentheus *himself* emulates the serpent in this episode. The contrast between what Pentheus wishes to persuade his people of, and what his words actually represent, further highlights Pentheus' lack of awareness: he sees the snake as a good role model, and an emblem of self-sacrifice.

However, his style is still holding together at this point. He continues to praise the Thebans, by means of their (admittedly questionable) ancestor. His words are highly sibilant (*qua sitis stirpe ... sumite serpentis*), and evoke the serpent phonetically as well as directly. He balances his clauses, alternating between the deeds of the serpent and his addresses to the Thebans (*ille ... uos ... ille ... uos*). Bömer (n. 4), 580 also notes an accumulation of antitheses: *fons/lacus* 545, *interiit/uincite* 546, *dedit/pellite*, *fortes/molles* 547, *ille/uos* 545–6 and 547. The oppositions serve to continue the theme of inversion and 'topsy-turviness' caused by Bacchus, while adding to the impressiveness of Pentheus' speech.³⁶ At this vital and central point, Pentheus' argument is clear (just as the serpent acted, so the Thebans should now act) and his tone is forceful and direct. From *este* (543) to *retinete* (548) there are five imperatives. These are the only commands Pentheus gives to the Thebans in

³² 18 times in total: *Met.* 1.504; 2.361, 597; 3.543; 4.770; 5.281; 8.601; 9.503, 775; 10.321, 411; 11.133; 12.121; 13.598, 880; 14.762; 15.777, 861.

³³ See E. Mitropolou, *Deities and Heroes in the Form of Snakes* (Athens, 1977).

³⁴ Mitropolou (n. 33), 15, 41–3.

³⁵ L. Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven, 1986), 42–56.

³⁶ The *Auctor Ad Herennium* writes of antithesis at *Auct. ad Her.* 4.15.21: *hoc genere si distinguemus orationem, et graues et ornati poterimus esse.*

his speech (with one exception; see below, p. 191). After this point, he addresses his audience less frequently, as he retreats into his imagination.

Pentheus' next figure is an elaborate wish. It is boldly expressed and noble, but the tone of the speech has altered noticeably from the forcefulness and directness of the preceding section (3.543–8):

si fata uetabant
stare diu Thebas, utinam tormenta uirique
moenia diruerent, ferrumque ignisque sonarent;
essemus miseri sine crimine sorsque querenda,
non celandi foret lacrimaeque pudore carerent. (3.548–52)

The forcefulness of imperatives is exchanged for the potentiality of subjunctives. Pentheus uses synecdoche³⁷ to represent the war to which he would prefer Thebes to fall (*tormenta uirique ... ferrumque ignisque*) pleasingly balancing two pairs of predicates. Of course, Pentheus unknowingly predicts the destruction of Thebes, and alludes to the transience of cities, of which Pythagoras cites Thebes as an example (15.429).³⁸ A nicely varied pair of verses explain why he wishes for such a fate (3.551–2): Pentheus' fixation on the 'shameful' aspects of Bacchic worship resurfaces here, and it is from this point onwards that his anger begins to get the better of him.

In the second half of his speech, Pentheus' rhetoric becomes less well structured. He describes an alternative end for Thebes to the glorious military one he has just described:

at nunc a puero Thebae capientur inermi,
quem neque bella iuuant nec tela nec usus equorum,
sed madidus murra crinis mollesque coronae
purpuraque et pictis intextum uestibus aurum. (3.553–6)

Pentheus is no longer praising Thebes, but has begun to vituperate Bacchus. He refers to Bacchus' youth, not as one of his divine attributes (see *Met.* 4.18 *tu puer aeternus*), but sneeringly using *puero ... inermi* to emphasize a lack of power: in order for Pentheus to find youth respectable, it has to be associated with warfare (*iuuenes* 3.541). He represents Bacchus as an oddity, who delights in none of the traditional ideals of a (Roman) youth spent in preparation for military service. Instead, Bacchus embodies effeminacy and luxury. Feldherr (n. 2), 45 points out that this representation 'recalls not only a well-worn rhetorical *topos* but also its most recent literary manifestations'. Pentheus' suspicions of a perfumed man in dyed clothing resemble those of Virgil's Iarbas (*et nunc ille Paris ... | Maenonia mentum mitra crinemque madentem | subnexus*, *Aen.* 4.215–17) and Turnus ([*sc. da*] *foedare in puluere crinis | uibratos calido ferro murraque madentis*, *Aen.* 12.99–100), both of whom describe Aeneas in dandyish terms.³⁹ There is an irony

³⁷ On which see Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.18, who states that synecdoche (and, similarly, metaphor) should only be used if it is more effective than being literal: *si in alienum uenit, plus ualere [sc. debet] eo quod expellit.*

³⁸ On the implications of Pythagoras' *exemplum*, see Hardie (n. 29), 225.

³⁹ Anderson (n. 22), 116 suggests that a connection should also be made with Numanus Remulus (*Aen.* 9.590–620), and that his foolishness should be transferred to Pentheus. While this is true, it is worth remembering that Pentheus is not casting these aspersions at Ascanius

behind Pentheus' disapproval of effeminate dress, however: Euripides' *Bacchae* makes much of the scene in which Pentheus disguises himself as a female bacchant in order to infiltrate the women's rituals (*Bacch.* 917–76).⁴⁰ Ovid's Pentheus takes on no such disguise, but runs to Mount Cithaeron openly, as himself (3.701–7). Far from being disguised as a female, here, Pentheus is likened to a warhorse in a simile with clear epic associations:⁴¹

ut fremit acer equus, cum bellicus aere canoro
 signa dedit tubicen pugnaeque adsumit amorem,
 Penthea sic ictus longis ululatibus aether
 mouit, et audito clamore recanduit ira. (3.704–7)

Clearly, Ovid's Pentheus is not in the cross-dressing world of drama, but the (Roman) epic world, with its suspicions of effeminate men. Or at least, that is where he aspires to place himself with his rhetoric.

The tone of the lines in which he describes Bacchus' appearance is sneering and angry, with repeated 'c', 'm' and 'p' sounds (here I would concur with Anderson's reading of the alliterative 'p' – see above, n. 30). The speech now becomes increasingly disjointed:

quem quidem ego actutum (modo uos absistite) cogam
 adsumptumque patrem commentaque sacra fateri. (3.557–8)

Several features disrupt the flow of the first line: Pentheus uses the prosaic *quidem* and the archaic *actutum*, which almost elide away the (speaking) subject, *ego* (Pentheus); *ego* itself forms part of an accumulation of pronouns (*quem ...ego ... uos*);⁴² and, finally, Pentheus interrupts himself with a parenthesis. E.J. Kenney has suggested that *actutum* is a Pacuvian influence, and may be a *color tragicus*.⁴³ If so, this continues the conflation of epic and tragedy within the speech. Try as Pentheus might to present his language in epic terms (the opening rhetorical question, his use of martial vocabulary, and language thematically associated, in the reader's mind at least, with the *Aeneid*), he cannot separate epic language from tragic vocabulary (*thyrsos*, *frons*, *actutum*). He is an epic warhorse excited not by the trumpet, but by ululations (3.704–7, above). Though Pentheus adheres to an 'epic' viewpoint, he is rooted in Thebes, the most 'tragic' of (staged) cities,⁴⁴ whose foundation legend (in the *Metamorphoses*) fails to match up to that (in the *Aeneid*) of Rome.⁴⁵

and Aeneas, but at a god whose religion was associated with ritual transvestism. See further on this below in § 2.

⁴⁰ On which see R. Seaford, *Euripides' Bacchae* (Warminster, 1996), 222–8; C. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*. Expanded ed. (New Jersey, 1997), 170.

⁴¹ Heroes are compared to horses, eager for battle, at Homer, *Il.* 15.263–8 (Hector), Ap. Rhod. 3.1259–61 (Jason) and Verg. *Aen.* 11.492–7 (Turnus); see further Keith (n. 2), 266–7.

⁴² Bömer (n. 4), 583, 'Pronominale Verschwendung'.

⁴³ E.J. Kenney, 'The style of the *Metamorphoses*', in J.W. Binns (ed.), *Ovid* (London, 1973), 116–53, at 120.

⁴⁴ F. Zeitlin, 'Thebes: theater of self and society in Athenian drama', in J.J. Winkler and F. Zeitlin (edd.), *Nothing to do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama and its Social Context* (Princeton, 1990), 130–67.

⁴⁵ Hardie (n. 29) has demonstrated the pervasive connections between Ovid's Theban and Virgil's Roman foundation legends in Books 3–4 of the *Metamorphoses*. On Books 3–4 as a 'tragic' cycle, see Gildenhard and Zissos (n. 6), 170–6.

The final address to his audience is contained within the parenthesis. Unlike the earlier imperatives (*este ... sumite ... pellite ... retinete*), *absistite* is not requesting that they change their behaviour, but commanding them to get out of his way. His speech is becoming more hubristic and almost entirely concerned with himself. His status as a *contemptor diuum* is revealed by the outrageous claims he makes regarding Bacchus' divinity (*adsumptum patrem ... commenta sacra; uanum | numen* 3.558–60), and his own ability to reveal its falsehood (*cogam ... fateri*). He associates himself with Acrisius, citing him as a positive *exemplum* (3.559–60): the primary narrator later tells us that Acrisius came to regret his outspokenness – *tam uiolasse deum ... | paenitet* 4.613–14; Acrisius is a doomed individual. Pentheus is again characterized as someone who cannot recognize warnings, either explicit, like that of Tiresias,⁴⁶ or implicit, like the narrative *exemplum* of Acoetes or the story-world *exempla* of Acrisius and the serpent.⁴⁷ Pentheus is no longer concerned with benefiting Thebes, but is (unintentionally) damaging himself. The shift in his priorities is made clear at 3.561: *Pentheia terrebit cum totis aduena Thebis?* His final rhetorical question puts himself first. His sentence structure reveals his self-centredness (or self-priority). There has been a change to Pentheus' rhetorical skill since the beginning of his speech, when he was able to structure his arguments in the best possible manner, and when his arguments were designed to persuade; they did not, as here, unwittingly reveal his hubris.

Finally, he commands his servants to drag the god to him in chains. The primary narrator here contributes to the disintegration of Pentheus' speech by interjecting with a parenthesis:

'ite citi' (famulis hoc imperat) 'ite ducemque
atrahite huc uinctum! iussis mora segniss abesto!' (3.562–3)

It is rare for the primary narrator to interrupt the direct speech of a character: it happens elsewhere only nine times in the poem.⁴⁸ Most often, as here, the interruption provides 'stage directions'; that is, the parenthesis explains the *actions* of the character. Here, the interjection makes the change of addressee clear; the other instances describe the gestures of the speaker (1.591 *et nemorum monstrauerat umbras*; 8.575 *digitoque ostendit*; 11.693 *et quaerit, uestigia si qua supersint*; 11.753 *ostendens spatiosum in guttura mergum*; 13.132–3 *manuque simul ueluti lacrimantia tersit | lumina*).⁴⁹ The interjection of the primary narrator explains Pentheus' final words, but also contributes to the disjointed nature of the final lines

⁴⁶ A.D. Nikolopoulos, *Ovidius Polytropos: Metanarrative in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Zurich, 2004), 226 suggests that the incident with Tiresias forewarns us that Pentheus will be a 'resistant narratee'; Feldherr (n. 2), 31–2, 46 suggests that Pentheus' punishment is a direct result of his failures of recognition and interpretation.

⁴⁷ On Pentheus' misinterpretation of the serpent, see Feldherr (n. 2), 49–51.

⁴⁸ *Met.* 1.591, 2.282–3, 3.447–8, 7.659–60, 8.575, 11.693, 753, 12.87–8, 13.132–3.

⁴⁹ The remaining interjections by the narrator into direct speech are mainly to explain the words of the character (2.282–3 *uis equidem fauces haec ipsa in uerba resoluo* – | *presserat ora uapor* – '*tostos en aspice crines ...*'; 7.659–60 '*cum primum, qui te feliciter, attulit Euris*' – | *Eurus enim attulerat* – '*fuert mutatus in Austros*'; 12.87–90 '*quid a nobis uulnus miraris abesse?*' – | *mirabatur enim* – '*non haec ... auxilio mihi sunt.*') or, uniquely, to comment on the words of the character (3.447–8 '*non tamen inuenio*' – *tantus tenet error amantem* – | '*quoque magis doleam ...*').

of Pentheus' speech. By inserting parentheses, Pentheus (at 3.557) and the primary narrator are both responsible for breaks in Pentheus' train of thought.

The close of the speech, in sharp contrast to its opening, is therefore presented to the reader as badly structured, disjointed and unclear. Pentheus' rhetoric has become increasingly unruly throughout his speech, as his anger increases. His emotion precludes successful style. Although it fails on a persuasive level, therefore, Pentheus' style is dramatically plausible, in that it portrays, or *enacts* his anger: Demetrius, *De elocutione* 27, suggests that emotion finds its own style: *θυμὸς γὰρ τέχνης οὐ δείται*; [Longinus] also suggests that emotion is best represented by 'disorder': *Subl.* 20.2 *ἐν στάσει γὰρ τὸ ἡρεμῶν, ἐν ἀταξίᾳ δὲ τὸ πάθος, ἐπεὶ φορὰ ψυχῆς καὶ συγκίνησις ἔστιν ...*⁵⁰. Order and disorder are both exemplified in Pentheus' speech. Its earlier parts are an ideal example of (epideictic) persuasive oratory, featuring flattery of his audience, praise and vituperation of the various subjects, and impressive rhetorical figures. The final section is directed far more at himself, and his pride, impiety and lack of awareness are all revealed. The trigger for the disintegration of his rhetoric would appear to be his description of Bacchus at 3.553–6. The idea of the androgynous god's victory over Thebes causes Pentheus to lose control of his speech.⁵¹ Pentheus' changing state of mind has been conveyed by the changes in his language. Furthermore, disintegrating and disjointed language acts as the ideal vehicle to dramatize the downfall of Pentheus, since his linguistic disintegration foreshadows his famous physical *sparagmos*.

But are his resultant rhetorical excesses the only reasons for the failure of Pentheus' speech within the story? The internal audience is unimpressed, and tries to prevent Pentheus from saying more. The listeners concentrate on Pentheus' impiety in their response, ignoring his persuasive attempt to make them realize how much worship of Bacchus has changed them:

hunc auus, **hunc** Athamas, **hunc** cetera turba suorum
corripiunt dictis frustra inhibere laborant. (3.564–5)

Very few speeches in the poem elicit so strong a reaction. Some (narrative) speeches receive criticism from one audience member: Pirithous at 8.612–15, and Tlepolemus at 12.536–41 respond harshly to speeches by Achelous and Nestor, respectively. The only other speech which receives censure from a large part of its audience is the comment of Acmon at 14.486–93. Diomedes, narrating Acmon's impious words and ensuing punishment, says at 14.496–7 *dicta placent paucis, numeri maioris amici | Acmona corripimus*. Interestingly, Acmon's metamorphosis, according to Diomedes, triggers a similar response to that received by Pentheus' speech:

hunc Lycus, **hunc** Idas et cum Rhexenore Nycteus,
hunc miratur Abas ... (14.504–5)

⁵⁰ [Longinus]' comment is linked to his praise of Demosthenes' variation of his figures in a section from the speech *Against Meidias*; variation, or disorder, conveys emotion better than monotony (see further, C.W. Wooten, 'Abruptness in Demetrius, Longinus, and Demosthenes', *AJPh* 112.4 [1991], 493–505, at 501–3).

⁵¹ Interestingly, it is merely the *idea* of the god which causes Pentheus to lose control: in Euripides' play, the god himself explicitly assumes control of Pentheus' mind and senses (*Bacch.* 848–61, 913–48). Ovid instead represents a man losing control of himself with little sign of divine or supernatural intervention: see below pp. 195–6.

Acmon is repeatedly (*hunc ... hunc*) the object of amazement, while Pentheus is repeatedly (*hunc ... hunc*) the object of criticism, and internal and primary narrator use the same anaphora to convey this.⁵² The reader learns that there is not one audience member who has been persuaded by Pentheus, despite his emotional and rhetorical performance.⁵³ This is an unusual detail for the primary narrator to have included.⁵⁴ The interaction between protagonist and a ‘chorus’ of ordinary people or advisers is a further technique familiar from tragedy. Pentheus has alienated his internal audience: this is unsurprising, considering his extreme views. However, it is possible that his views are not quite so alienating to the speech’s alternative audience, the external audience: this, I suggest, is another reason for the speech’s failure – Pentheus’ arguments are directed at Rome, not at Thebes.

2. AUDIENCE ALLEGIANCE

It has already been observed that, on several occasions, Pentheus uses vocabulary and arguments which evoke the *Aeneid*, the greatest, and most recent, Roman nationalistic epic. In flattering the Thebans, Pentheus addresses the elders in terms appropriate to Virgil’s exiled Trojans (see above, p. 187). According to Anderson,⁵⁵ such vocabulary is strikingly inappropriate to the indigenous Thebans. His focus is on masculinity: generally, his encouragement to the Theban youth to take up arms rather than ‘arts’ is a manifestation of the ideals of *Romanitas*;⁵⁶ more specifically, his criticism of Bacchus’ effeminacy recalls the criticisms of Aeneas from the manly characters of Virgil’s poem (see above, p. 189). Pentheus’ argument could be seen to ‘make sense’ to the Roman reader of the *Aeneid*. The speech appears to be directed more closely towards the external audience than towards its internal one.

⁵² J. Wills, *Repetition in Latin Poetry: Figures of Allusion* (Oxford, 1996), 6–7, 18–26, suggests in his detailed study that there are three possible types of effect to repetition: repetition can either be iconic – by imitating the event being described – indexical – by pointing to an effect already present in the single use of a word and emphasizing it – or allusive – by marking an allusive passage for the reader’s consideration or recognition. I suggest that Ovid’s use of anaphora at 3.564–5 is alluding to that at 14.504–5.

⁵³ Pentheus is now in the position of Dionysus in Eur. *Bacch.* 787–8: *πέθῃ μὲν οὐδέν, τῶν ἐμῶν λόγων κλύων, Πενθεῦ.*

⁵⁴ Around half of the speech acts (direct and indirect speech) in the *Metamorphoses* meet with no explicit response; just under 16% elicit a directly spoken response, and 35% elicit some other form of response (e.g. indirect speech, a gesture, an inner response) explicitly detailed in the narrative. Of course, these figures tell very little of the story: there are some extremely ambiguous response moments. For instance, in the Apollo and Daphne episode alone, does Daphne’s metamorphosis into a tree constitute her father’s response to her prayer at 1.546–7, when it is not made clear that he is responsible? Daphne’s laurel-tree branches move at 1.566–7 as if in response to Phoebus’ dedication (*factis modo laurea ramis, | adnuit utque caput uisa est agitasse cacumen*), but can this be counted as such? Nevertheless, the percentages do tell us that, because around half of the responses to speech acts in the poem either do not exist or are dispensed with in the narrative, it is likely to be significant when a speech meets with a very explicit response such as that to Pentheus’. See also Nikolopoulos (n. 46), 249–50, who has collated the reactions of intradiegetic narratees to the stories told to them: 23 out of 37 have no reaction or response indicated in the narrative.

⁵⁵ Anderson (n. 22), 116.

⁵⁶ Like the famous instruction of Virgil’s Anchises to future Romans at *Aen.* 6.847–53, that warfare and government should be the Roman ‘arts’ (*haec tibi erunt artes*, 6.852), though other cultures may excel at artistic and scientific endeavours.

The opening of Pentheus' speech highlights this apparent duality of audiences even further. I have already examined how the opening rhetorical question recalls the questions of Ascanius and Laocoon to various 'frenzied' audiences in the *Aeneid* (see above, p. 185). Further unusual vocabulary ties the opening question to Virgil's poem: Pentheus' learned name for the Thebans at 3.530, *proles Mauortia*,⁵⁷ not only begins the martial characterization which is continued throughout the speech, but also strongly recalls the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.276 *Romulus ... Mauortia condet | moenia*, 6.777–8 *Mauortius ... | Romulus*, 9.685 *Mauortius Haemon*): Pentheus' address may seem more appropriate to an audience made up of Romans rather than Thebans. And, indeed, the ownership, and therefore the intended audience of this question, is, for a brief moment, strangely unclear:

'quis furor, anguigenae, proles Mauortia, uestras
attonuit mentes?' Pentheus ait ... (3.531–2)

In the absence of punctuation, the ownership of these opening words is unclear until the reader reaches *Pentheus ait*. It is very rare (indeed, almost unique⁵⁸) for a shift into direct speech in the poem to remain unmarked until the second line, or to occur before the speaking character has been introduced – Pentheus' presence in the crowd is not made explicit until after he has started speaking. This rhetorical question could therefore initially seem to be posed by the primary narrator, since it apparently continues the narrative without a break. The content of the lines does not even conclusively mark the question as belonging within the story world – the primary narrator is fond both of apostrophizing his characters with second-person verbs⁵⁹ and of asking rhetorical questions (of the audience/reader) in the midst of his narrative.⁶⁰ Until we reach *Pentheus ait*, we cannot be sure that this is not a question on the part of the narrator at the opening of an episode.⁶¹ As such, it momentarily resembles other famous epic-opening questions (*Il.* 1.8 *τίς τ' ἄρ σφωε θεῶν ἔριδι ξυνέηκε μάχεσθαι*; *Aen.* 1.11 *tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*).⁶² The external audience is led to expect an epic narrative when they are in fact about to hear a monologue. When the question is revealed as being posed by Pentheus, however, it is he who becomes responsible for the epic tone; as we have seen, he is unable to sustain it, overwhelmed as he is by his tragic heritage.

⁵⁷ The reference is to a legend attested by Euripides (*Phoen.* 657) that the serpent was the offspring of Mars. In addition, Mars and Venus were the parents of Harmonia, wife of Cadmus: Hardie (n. 29), 229 notes this further link to the ancestral ideology of the Roman reader.

⁵⁸ The only example similar to Pentheus' opening is Medea's address to the daughters of Pelias at 7.331–4: *intrarant iussae cum Colchide limina natae | ambierantque torum: 'quid nunc dubitatis inertes? | stringite' ait 'gladios ueteremque haurite cruorem, | ut repleam uacuas iuuenali sanguine uenas ...'* The delay of *ait* temporarily leaves the question 'unowned': the matter is only resolved after the grim command *stringite*.

⁵⁹ At *Met.* 2.435, 533–5; 3.432–6; 4.661; 5.111–13; 6.421; 7.144–8, 229; 9.229–38, 447–50, 581, 651, 790–2; 10.44, 99–100, 120–5; 11.50–1, 237–45; 12.67–8, 608–11; 14.794–5, 806; 15.622–5, 758–9.

⁶⁰ At *Met.* 1.397, 400; 2.356–7, 436–7; 3.6–7; 4.653–4, 704; 6.421; 9.658; 10.61; 12.162–3; 14.637–41; 15.613.

⁶¹ See A. Feldherr and P. James, 'Making the most of Marsyas', *Arctura* 37 (2004), 75–103, at 79 on a similar effect in the Marsyas episode, one which adds to the 'disarticulation' which is its principal theme.

⁶² Lucan too will ask a disbelieving rhetorical question of his readers at the opening of his epic (*B Civ.* 1.8); see below, n. 64.

Ovid temporarily combines the two audiences of the speech.⁶³ For the briefest of moments, the reader appears to be addressed by the primary narrator, to be bundled in with the Thebans (*anguigenae*) and named as *proles Mauortia*, to have their *furor* questioned.⁶⁴ The confusion is short-lived, of course – we soon learn that Pentheus is the speaker – but I suggest that even this is sufficient to conflate the two audiences, that of the story world, and that of the listening/reading world. Since the speech opens with the different addressees in such parallelism, any later divergence, I suggest, becomes all the more pointed. I have already noted the unusually elaborate and violent response of the Theban people to Pentheus' speech: its extraordinary nature allows the external audience to compare their response (an opportunity frequently denied them in the *Metamorphoses* – see above, n. 54), which leads us to ask; what purpose might such comparison serve in the narrative?

The uniformly negative response from the internal audience may jar with that produced by a Roman audience. Pentheus is urging *Romanitas* upon his Thebans. They are able to reject it, but what of the Roman reader of the *Metamorphoses*? It is likely to cause considerable discomfort to hear what amount to arguments in support of the Roman way of life in the mouth of an impious *contemptor diuum*, and a man who is visibly breaking down, and whom we know will soon *be* broken down. The Roman audience may have more sympathy with Pentheus, though they may not wish it,⁶⁵ than do the entirely antipathetic Theban audience.

Indeed, I believe that Ovid's Pentheus is intended to be a more sympathetic character than he appears in his earlier dramatic manifestations.⁶⁶ His eloquence is admirable (and admirably Roman) at first, but it disintegrates as his anger increases. His lack of self-awareness is tempered by the fact that he is aware of the impending destruction of Thebes, and the (very real) dangers of Bacchus. His loss of control during his speech foreshadows his physical disintegration. Pentheus' control appears to slip away from him not as a result of direct divine intervention (see above, n. 51) but because of his excessive emotion, his anger. Ovid does not allow the psyche of his Pentheus to be explicitly controlled by strong and present supernatural forces: the reader witnesses a (Romanized) Pentheus succumbing to his own anger.⁶⁷ Pentheus' error is uncomfortably human. Meanwhile, the physical

⁶³ Wheeler (n. 19) posits the external audience of the *Metamorphoses* as the narratorial audience, which is implied at moments in the narrative which call for a response outside the story world, in the listening or receiving world; see in particular ch. 4 (94–116). Meanwhile, his Introduction (1–7) provides a useful review of audience-response approaches to the *Metamorphoses*.

⁶⁴ As, later, Lucan's audience will be directly questioned in a narratorial apostrophe at *B Civ.* 1.8; *quis furor, o ciues, quae tanta licentia ferri?* See above, p. 194.

⁶⁵ Feldherr (n. 2), 45–55, discusses the implications of this encouragement of the reader's sympathy with Pentheus at the very moment of his symbolic sacrifice. This is the moment when Pentheus ceases to be a bad interpreter/reader: here, his perspective finally 'coalesces with that of the reader' (32). I will suggest, however, that this happens earlier, if only temporarily – see below, p. 197.

⁶⁶ On Pentheus' tyrannical characteristics in *Bacchae*, see E.R. Dodds, *Euripides' Bacchae* (Oxford, 1960), xliii; Seaford (n. 40), 47.

⁶⁷ For Roman anxieties about anger and its effects on reason and human behaviour, and on the necessity of controlling anger, see W.V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 80–128. No intervention on the part of Dionysus/Bacchus provides an excuse for the behaviour of Ovid's Pentheus. He is a human being who has failed to exercise self-control.

disintegration of Pentheus is, as Elaine Fantham notes,⁶⁸ depicted by means of a relatively gentle simile:

non citius frondes autumni frigore tactas
iamque male haerentes alta rapit arbore uentus,
quam sunt membra uiri manibus derepta nefandis. (3.729–31)

The violence of Pentheus' death is elided in these lines, which are almost the closing lines of Book 3. A dreadful event is narrated in a calm and relatively pleasing way.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it is a considerably weakened Pentheus who undergoes this violence: *cunctae coeunt fremituque sequuntur | iam trepidum, iam uerba minus uiolenta loquentem, | iam se damnantem, iam se peccasse fatentem* (3.716–18).⁷⁰ Thus, the terrible Theban events of Book 3 are brought to a close: at the end of the episode, Pentheus is revealingly vulnerable.

The Thebans' exaggerated response does not, however, merely serve as a measure against which the reader can assess his or her own sympathies: the violent reaction of the crowd also drives the plot of the episode forward. Pentheus' anger has increased *during* his speech (as evidenced and performed by his increasingly uncontrolled rhetorical structure), but it also increases *after* the speech. Pentheus' interaction with his advisers further increases his anger:

acrior admonitu est inritaturque retenta
et crescit rabies, remoraminaque ipsa nocebant. (3.566–7)⁷¹

This idea is developed by a highly unusual simile, to which I will return in § 3. The response to Pentheus' speech, the fact that it has failed to convince, is thus highlighted as a contributory factor to his anger. The very performance of the speech has had a negative effect upon its speaker. An otherwise unsuccessful and ineffective speech therefore has an effect upon the *momentum* of the narrative: it drives the plot forward.

And yet, the plot is driven forward only to be immediately frustrated again. The arrival of Acoetes brings with it no agonistic engagement between denier and (worshipper of) Bacchus: instead, a lengthy narrative of 110 lines, containing details of Acoetes' birth and upbringing (3.582–96 – as requested by Pentheus, admittedly, at 3.580–1⁷²), and of the events on board the Tyrrhenian ship, both mundane (3.597–657) and fantastic (3.658–88). The embedded story is detailed (notice Acoetes' pedantic concentration on the names of the sailors at 3.605, 615, 617–19, 624–5, 647, and 671) and contains somewhat comical moments (such as the sailors' questioning of each other's change – *in quae miracula ... | uerteris?*, 3.673–4): such a tone detracts from the plot of the narrative frame, suspended as it is at a crucial moment in the inexorable drive towards Pentheus' downfall.

⁶⁸ E. Fantham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford, 2004), 43.

⁶⁹ The simile echoes that used by Homer's Apollo when considering the lives of mortals at *Il.* 21.464–6: '... οὐ φύλλοισιν ἐοικότες ἄλλοτε μὲν τε | ζαφλεγέες τελέθουσιν, ἀρούρης καρπὸν ἔδουτες, | ἄλλοτε δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἀκήριοι ...'.

⁷⁰ Like his earlier *exemplum*, Acrisius, Pentheus also repents of his offence (see p. 191).

⁷¹ The alliterative 'r' sounds of these lines create something approaching a growl when enunciated.

⁷² In a perverted twist on conventional host–guest questions, as B. Nagle, 'Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. A narratological catalogue', *SyllClass* 1 (1989), 97–125, notes at 103.

Narrative momentum is frustrated; the external audience, if they are desirous of witnessing the infamous end of Pentheus' tale, are frustrated too.

This time, it is Pentheus' turn to be an ignorant audience. The king, who had intended Acoetes to serve as an example to others of the dangers of worshipping exotic and unauthorized divinities ('*o periture tuaque aliis documenta dature | morte ...*', 3.579–80), fails to recognize Acoetes' narrative *exemplum* of the dangers of *failing* to worship such divinities. Pentheus responds as follows:

'praeuimus longis' Pentheus 'ambagibus aures'
inquit, 'ut ira mora uires absumere posset ...' (3.692–3)

Pentheus does not register what he has just heard, he only notices how long it has taken. His intention in listening was to decrease (or suspend) his anger but, in fact, he is so frustrated by the stranger's long-windedness that he orders him to be immediately killed. Pentheus is such a bad audience that Acoetes' narrative has no effect whatsoever upon him.⁷³ It does not decrease his anger, as he wished, but restarts it, and he orders the execution which was promised with *periture* (3.579) before Acoetes' narrative took place: the action in the frame narrative has been paused. At the close of Acoetes' tale, the narrative momentum is restarted, along with Pentheus' anger. And yet, once again, the reader may find that his or her response has been engineered to fit more closely with Pentheus than he or she might wish. Acoetes' tale is designed to frustrate the momentum of the (dramatic) narrative that the external audience was enjoying; at its close, the reader learns that it has also frustrated its *internal* audience. Indeed, the plural *praeuimus* (though undoubtedly a royal 'we' on the part of Pentheus, and a metrical one of the part of the poet), could be seen to combine internal and external audiences once again.⁷⁴ We, Pentheus and the reader, have all devoted our time to Acoetes' (Ovid's) meanderings,⁷⁵ suspending our immediate interest in the events of the storyworld; Pentheus expresses the reader's frustration.

Just as the external audience was encouraged uncomfortably to contrast their (patriotic, Roman) response to Pentheus' speech with that of the pious Thebans (see above, pp. 193–5), here it is encouraged to align its response with that of the impious Pentheus. We know this character to be a useless audience, to lack foresight and to be utterly misguided; yet Ovid encourages us to emulate his frustration in relation to the events of the story, in our frustration in relation to the momentum of the narrative.

3. A SYMBOL OF FRUSTRATION

Frustration is therefore a repeated motif in the development of this episode: the internal audience frustrate Pentheus, increasing his anger and driving forward the

⁷³ Wheeler (n. 19), 182.

⁷⁴ See Wheeler (n. 19), 103–5, on the use of first-person plural verbs to associate the narrator and the audience: here, a character could be seen to be implicitly associated with the audience, by means of the 'parallel' response.

⁷⁵ James (n. 2), 86 notes that there may be 'sinister undertones' to Acoetes' use of *longae ambages*: Acoetes is suspected of manipulating his audience, telling a long story to delay the moment of his death. If the methods of Acoetes and Ovid are being implicitly compared here (Acoetes is delaying his own death, Ovid is delaying the narration of Pentheus' death), then such manipulation takes on a metapoetic significance.

plot; Acoetes' narrative frustrates both the external audience (desiring the *telos* of the well-known story) and the internal audience – Pentheus' impatience is further increased while the tale is being told. Such frustrations of the narrative momentum are, ironically, responsible for the development of the story. Rather than holding back the narrative movement, they in fact *cause* it and, in the case of Pentheus' speech, *perform* it (his mental *sparagmos*). The extensive sections of direct speech in this episode, both persuasive and narrative monologue, drive Pentheus into his frenzy, in the way that the king's various verbal encounters in Euripides' drama do. Just as the epic aspirations of Pentheus' speech were repeatedly contaminated by tragic associations, so too Ovid's epic narrative is deliberately reminiscent of drama. Though the *content* of the speeches may be undramatic (the benefits of *Romanitas*,⁷⁶ the long story of metamorphosis) the mimetic use of direct speech to affect the characters *is* dramatic: generic contamination in this episode takes place at the level of *medium*, as well as of theme.

Finally, the episode itself contains a self-conscious reflection of its (and, perhaps, the poem's) narrative techniques. A unique simile at 3.568–71 elaborates on Pentheus' growing anger in response to the Thebans' reaction to his speech:

acrior admonitu est inritaturque retenta
 et crescit rabies, remoraminaque ipsa nocebant.
 sic ego torrentem, qua nil obstabat eunti,
 lenius et modico strepitu decurrere uidi;
 at quacumque trabes obstructaque saxa tenebant,
 spumeus et feruens et ab obice saeuior ibat. (3.566–71)

The primary narrator is no longer interrupting the direct speech of a character in an authorial way (see above, pp. 191–2) but is interrupting his own narrative with his first-person *persona*. This intrusion of the primary narrator into the subject matter of a simile is unique in the *Metamorphoses*, and commentators have struggled with this passage. Bömer (n. 4), 584 and Hill⁷⁷ both suggest that the personalization of this simile gives it an elegiac colouring. Yet the vocabulary (*strepitus*, *trabes*, *spumeus*, *feruens*) is markedly epic,⁷⁸ leading Hardie (n. 29), 225 and James (n. 2), 87 to reject a generic interpretation. They suggest that the simile conveys the elemental nature of Pentheus' rage (Hardie), or that the primary narrator's intrusion is perhaps intended to create an impression of historical accuracy (James). It is interesting to note, in addition to these readings, that the torrent is an image which is at home in ancient stylistic criticism.⁷⁹ It may represent both Pentheus' anger and his bombast.

⁷⁶ By labelling this undramatic, I more accurately mean 'un-Euripidean': it is, of course, possible that Ovid is drawing on the Roman tragic models, as well as the *Aeneid*, for the 'Roman' style of his Pentheus' persuasive approach.

⁷⁷ D.E. Hill, *Ovid Metamorphoses 1–4* (Warminster, 1985), 231.

⁷⁸ Uncontrollable rivers provide the subject matter for similes in epic at *Il.* 4.452–6, 5.87–9, 11.492–7, 16.389–93; *Aen.* 2.305–7, 496–9, 10.603–4, 11.297–9, 12.523–5; *Met.* 3.79, 13.801. See E.G. Wilkins, 'A classification of the similes of Homer', *CW* 13 (1920), 147–50, 154–9; 'A classification of the similes in Vergil's *Aeneid* and *Georgics*', *CW* 14 (1920), 170–4; and 'A classification of the similes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *CW* 25 (1932), 73–8, 81–6. Keith (n. 2), 266–7 notes, in addition, the undeniably 'epic' character of the other extended similes in this episode (3.704–7, discussed above p. 190, 3.729–31), which she sees as part of Ovid's inscription, in this episode, of 'a literary contest between epic and tragedy' (266).

⁷⁹ I am grateful to Philip Hardie for this suggestion. Horace, for instance, uses the mountain stream to represent the bombastic style of Pindar at *Odes* 4.2.1–24; M.C.J. Putnam, *Artifices*

To compound the generic confusion even further, the personalized tone of *sic ego ... uidi* is reminiscent of a didactic persona. Thomas⁸⁰ finds that Virgil's claims to autopsy are intended to impart *fides*. The narrator of the *Metamorphoses* inserts himself into this simile, marking it out with a guarantee of his *fides*. He associates himself personally with Pentheus' story, commenting upon it as a detached observer. The external audience is thereby persuaded of Pentheus' importance for their own observations.

The generic mixture found within this simile reflects the oddities of the episode (and the poem as a whole). The Pentheus episode veers between epic and tragic themes, between narrative and dramatic techniques: this simile, too, is a stylistic conundrum. The oddly personalized tone marks the simile out for closer consideration. The reader must wonder what this image is demonstrating which requires so unique a signal.

Within the simile, we are offered a further insight into Pentheus' state of mind. The narrator offers us a double image: Pentheus *is* like a river which is meeting with numerous obstructions; however, it is also acknowledged that a river which does not meet with obstructions is markedly quieter and more 'reasonable'. The implication is that Pentheus' behaviour need not have been so extreme, had his speech met with a more favourable response. Certainly, Pentheus himself has revealed his impatience (*iussis mora segnis abesto!* 3.563), and his desire to remove those obstructing him (*modo uos absistite*, 3.557); the narrator, too, draws attention to this by combining sinister descriptions of his growing anger (3.568–9) and his impatience (*quamquam poenae uix tempora differt*, 3.578) with self-coined, attention-grabbing vocabulary (*remoramina*, 3.569).⁸¹ Pentheus, we are told, cannot bear these repeated delays. The frustrating obstacles upon which Pentheus is coming are, according to the simile, the very reason for his anger, and his frenzied downfall. And yet, we have already seen that, to a certain extent, Pentheus' frustrations are shared by the external audience: the primary narrator has gone to some lengths to ally the external audience's sympathies with the *contemptor diuum*. These sympathies relate, in particular, to the (productive) frustrations of the narrative momentum of the episode.

of Eternity: Horace's Fourth Book of Odes (Ithaca, 1986), 52–6 finds Horace to be exemplifying the ambitious, boundary-breaking style of the lyric poet, with the simile's epic resonances helping to bring this out (52). Of course, water imagery is a pervasive and multi-faceted metaphor in ancient poetics (following, in particular, Callim. *Aet. fr.* 2, and *Hymn* 2, 105–12): G.O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry* (Oxford, 1988), 76–84 and A. Kahane, 'Callimachus, Apollonius, and the poetics of mud', *TAPhA* 124 (1994), 121–33, provide a summary of Callimachus' water metaphors in relation to Hellenistic literary criticism, while W. Wimmel, *Kallimachos in Rom* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 222–33, traces the use of water imagery among Roman poetic statements. In addition, S. Hinds, 'Generalising about Ovid', in A.J. Boyle (ed.), *The Imperial Muse: Ramus Essays on Roman Literature of the Empire: To Juvenal Through Ovid* (Berwick, Vic., 1988), 4–31, at 19, finds Ovid playing with the idea of a 'swollen' river in order to engineer a self-reflexive comment on bombastic style elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*: at *Met.* 8.550, Achelous the river god, is described as *tumens*, while in the process of *expansively* re-enacting the *Hekale* for/with Theseus, thus, in Hinds' words, 'de-Callimachising Callimachus'.

⁸⁰ R.F. Thomas, *Virgil: Georgics I–II* (Cambridge, 1988), 122; see also Lucretius 4.577, 6.1044, and Ov. *Ars am.* 1.721, 3.67, 3.378, 3.487, *Rem. am.* 101, for claims to autopsy cited as proofs.

⁸¹ Tarrant's (n. 12) *remoramina* has been less popular with modern editors than *moderamina* (itself an Ovidian coinage; see A.A.J. Henderson, *Ovid. Metamorphoses III* (Bristol, 1979), ad loc.). One reviewer of Tarrant's OCT has observed that '*remoramina* is the result of the harmonization of the narrative with the eye-witness description of the torrent when it meets with obstructions' (M. Possanza, *BMCR*, 2005-06-07).

If we accept that the experiences of internal and external audiences are, to some extent, being synthesized in this episode, then the extraordinary simile can be explained as having metapoetic significance. The implication of the simile – that a lack of obstructions makes for smoother running – can be extrapolated to pertain to each of the subjects to which it can potentially apply: a river which meets with no rocks, a speaker who meets with no criticism, and, perhaps, an audience/reader who meets with no frustrating impediments to the momentum of the story they are witnessing/reading. Ovid's poem would be a smoother (*lenius*) one, were it not for the frequent meandering obstructions which the reader has to negotiate.

CONCLUSIONS

The Pentheus episode is full of oddities. The techniques which, on the surface, contribute to the frustration of the narrative (a pointless speech, an embedded narrative), are in fact revealed to be the very things which drive the protagonist, and therefore the momentum of the plot, forward. Such techniques – the use of mimetic direct speech to *perform* a character's breakdown, the inclusion of a narrative 'messenger' speech (an oddly unrelated one, in this case), the guiding responses of a chorus of lesser characters – are familiar from drama. The combination of epic and dramatic techniques reflects the thematic concerns of the episode, and of the protagonist. The protagonist is aligned with the external audience, who are encouraged, by various means (a sympathetic simile, his 'Roman' outlook, the temporary conflation of his response and theirs) to sympathize with his frustration. Since Pentheus' frustration is caused by his impatience at various delays and obstructions, his experience and that of the reader are further synthesized – the same narrative delays the denouement of Pentheus' tale for both its protagonist and its external audience. Furthermore, the unique and startling simile (already marked as a generic oddity by the primary narrator's personalized intrusion), which describes the frustration of the protagonist, may also therefore serve as a symbol of the external audience, encountering some of the same obstructions. The torrent represents Pentheus' emotion, certainly, but perhaps also the experience of reading Pentheus' story. Ovid's simile ironically comments on the provocation which his poem provides to the audience member seeking a smoother ride. An episode which converts a famously 'momentous' dramatic tale into an (un-?)epic narrative which stops and starts and delays its denouement, can therefore be seen to reflect self-consciously upon its games with momentum, and their effect both upon the generic status of the narrative, and upon the external audience of such a narrative.⁸²

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