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M. Vetta, *Il simposio: la monodia e il giambo*, in AA.VV., *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica*, I. *La produzione e la circolazione del testo*. Tomo I: *La polis*, Roma 1992, 177-218.

Vlastos 1981

G. Vlastos, *The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato*, in *Platonic Studies*, Princeton 1981², 3-42.

Andrew Feldherr

*Metamorphosis and Sacrifice
in Ovid's Theban Narrative**

«A long and entertaining book cannot and must not be overloaded with serious import¹». This caution, which actually introduces a very serious exploration of the themes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, reflects an impulse still detectible in criticism of the poem. The desire to keep the *Metamorphoses* safe from serious import is so irresistible partly because it derives from the poet's own invitation. We are constantly reminded through the elaborate self-referentiality of the narration that the tales in the poem are quintessentially fictions; they are *fide maius*, entertainments designed, like the tale of Syrinx in book one, to lull too watchful giants to sleep. Yet what happens to Argus when he succumbs to temptation should serve as a powerful warning to all readers to keep their eyes open. Argus is charmed by the story of a nymph who avoids the attack of the god Pan by begging her sisters to transform her into reeds. But in this case the fiction ends in the production of a real artifact, the very reed pipe with which Mercury puts Argus to sleep. The moment when the translation of Syrinx from a figure in a story to a real syrinx occurs is just the instant when Argus stops being merely the audience for the tale of Syrinx and when the narrative of which he himself is the subject reaches its climax in his own bloody death. While Ovid takes over from Mercury to tell us of the metamorphosis of Syrinx from girl to pipe, the god decapitates Argus. And since the story that Mercury tells Argus is almost identical to the story that the Ovidian narrator has just told about Daphne and Apollo, the correlation between narrated violence and real violence also has implications for our own reception of Ovid's text. The story of Syrinx makes clear that Ovidian narrative cannot be relegated to the realm of fiction because the

* I am grateful to Deborah Steiner and J. E. G. Zetzel for generously agreeing to read earlier drafts of this paper and to the editors of this journal for further suggestions.

1. H. Fränkel, *Ovid, a Poet between Two Worlds*, Berkeley 1945, p. 73.

boundary that separates fiction from reality is always dissolving².

Throughout the poem, Ovid insists that the act of hearing, reading, or observing an artistic representation is the moment when that boundary is crossed, when we apprehend the represented image as a part of our real experience³. Especially in the narratives of the first book, it could be argued that this shift from fiction to reality is crucial to the poem's central process of metamorphosis. Like that of Syrinx, Daphne's metamorphosis too comes when she is transformed from a figure in a story to an object present in the immediate experience of Ovid's audience, the laurel sprig that adorns triumphal processions. This double process by which the reader is absorbed into the poem's fictional narrative and that fiction in turn is redefined as an active and dynamic part of contemporary «reality» will be the subject of this paper. The first section analyzes how Ovid's manipulation of perspective in the Theban narratives of book three functions to equate the experience of the victim of metamorphosis to that of the reader himself; the second section argues that these same narratives make it possible to relate the resulting model for the reception of Ovidian fiction to other contemporary forms of representation and spectacle, especially to the experience of the participant at a sacrificial ritual, and that this connection in turn provides a new framework for examining the political status of Ovid's text⁴.

2. For a complementary interpretation of the episode see D. Konstan, *The Death of Argus, or What Stories Do: Audience Response in Ancient Fiction and Theory*, «*Helios*» 18, 1991, pp. 15-30. Konstan sees the discrepancy between Argus' reaction to the Syrinx story and that of Ovid's own audience as illustrating the opposition between two ancient strategies for reading fictional narratives, one of which focuses on the technical skills of the narrator while the other emphasizes the mimetic capacities of the narrative itself and its resulting ability to involve the reader emotionally in the fiction.

3. Ovid's interest in the theme of artistic representation has been much discussed. See especially E.W. Leach, *Ekphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, «*Ramus*», 3, 1974, pp. 102-42, who argues that Ovid's portrayal of the ephemerality and fragility of artistic creations within the poem offers a foil to his conception of the *Metamorphoses* itself, and J. Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Chapel Hill 1988, pp. 203-14.

4. For a different interpretation of the same motif, which also stresses the parallels between the Cadmus and Actaeon episodes, but with an emphasis on the

The decision to focus on book three is based on the prominence of a particular motif that unites most of its major episodes. Like Argus, three of the central characters in this book, Cadmus, Actaeon, and Pentheus, find themselves suddenly thrust from the role of audience or spectator into that of participant. Or indeed victim. For again, as in the Argus episode, the transition from spectator to spectacle coincides with the moment when each story reaches its violent climax. The pattern is first articulated at the instant when Cadmus has killed the monstrous serpent who has devoured his companions. While Cadmus inspects the monster's size, he hears a mysterious voice ask him why he is staring at the serpent, «since [he] too will be gazed upon as a serpent» (*quid, Agenore nate, peremptum / serpentem spectas? et tu spectabere serpens.*, 3, 97-8). The perfect symmetry of line 98 emphasizes that Cadmus will indeed become a mirror image of what he has seen, and further correlates the shift from an active to a passive role in the act of gazing with the process of metamorphosis itself. Becoming a serpent goes together with ceasing to be the gazer and becoming the object of another's gaze⁵.

Cadmus' own transformation will be both long deferred and comparatively benign, but the text suggests that he is actually on the verge of undergoing a more violent and immediate metamorphosis as a result of his sheer terror at the mysterious voice until Pallas Athena descends to reassure him and keep the narrative moving. He loses his color; his hair stands on end, and he grows cold⁶. But for his grandsons, Actaeon and Pentheus, the process of becoming a spectacle has precisely the immediate and destructive consequences that Cadmus fears. Not only is Actaeon transformed from the unwitting

psychological states of the victims rather than the social consequences of the relationship between victims and spectators, see L. Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism*, New Haven 1986, pp. 42-46. The most recent, and detailed, treatment of the Theban narrative is P. Hardie, *Ovid's Theban History: The First 'Anti-Aeneid'?*, «*Class. Quart.*» 40, 1990, pp. 224-35. Hardie demonstrates the extent to which Ovid's account of the origins of Thebes not only recalls the legends of Rome's foundations but, through a dense and complex network of allusions, asks to be read against the *Aeneid* itself.

5. Interesting and problematic in this case since the serpent is the quintessential gazer, *drakon*.

6. *ille diu pavidus pariter cum mente colorem perdiderat, gelidoque comae terrore rigeabant.* (3, 99-100)

ting spectator of Diana's bath to the stag whose death is so vividly described for the reader, but at the very instant he is being torn apart by his dogs, his comrades wish that he could be present to watch the scene: «they complain that he is absent and that, slow, he does not perceive the spectacle of this fortuitous prey. He would indeed wish to be absent, but he is present, and he would rather watch than feel the cruel deeds of his dogs»⁷. Pentheus at the book's close goes out to watch the Bacchae, and the moment when he is himself seen is the same at which he becomes their victim:

monte fere medio est cingentibus ultima silvis,
 purus ab arboribus, spectabilis undique campus.
 hic oculis illum cernentem sacra profanis
 prima videt, prima est insano concita cursu,
 prima suum misso violavit Penthea thyrsos
 mater... (3, 708-713)

«Near the middle of the mountain there is a plain free from trees, with forest fringing its borders, clearly visible from all sides. Here, as Pentheus beheld the sacred rites with his profane eyes, the first to see him, the first to set out on her mad course; the first to violate her Pentheus by hurling the thyrsus was his own mother.»

Not only does the description of the physical setting of Pentheus' death contain verbal reminiscences of the *loci amoeni* in the Cadmus and Actaeon episodes⁸, but the frequency of terms for visual processes draws attention precisely to the shift from being watcher to the object of another's gaze⁹.

In each of these stories, the sudden role reversal we have

7. *et abesse queruntur, / nec capere oblatae segnem spectacula praedae. / vellet abesse quidem; sed adest. velletque videre, / non etiam sentire canum fera facta suorum.* (3, 245-48)

8. On the unifying role of landscape description in book three, and particularly for the link it provides between the Cadmus, Actaeon, and Pentheus episodes, see C. P. Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, «Hermes» Einzelschrift 23, Wiesbaden 1969, pp. 42-49.

9. So too in Euripides' treatment of the same scene, Pentheus the watcher is placed at the top of a tall tree where he himself will be most conspicuous, Eur. *Bac.* 1075. For the thematic centrality of this reversal in roles to the *Bacchae* as a whole, see in particular J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Masked Dionysus*, in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (trans. J. Lloyd), New York 1990,

been describing can be partly explained by the logic of symbolic retribution. Actaeon is not only an inadvertent Peeping Tom, but a prodigious hunter whose depredations are initially described as having polluted the idyllic landscape where his tale takes place, in much the same way that Cadmus' killing of the serpent occurs in a previously unspoiled setting¹⁰. Hence his end as quarry. Pentheus who persecutes the Bacchantes, and fails to recognize Dionysus, should himself be persecuted and killed because of a failure of recognition. And indeed his death is accompanied by a moment of self-recognition when he confesses his errors. By contrast, the central narrative of the book illustrates a complementary inversion. Narcissus rejects the advances of the nymph Echo, and subsequently dies of longing for a similarly unattainable object. Here the quarry is made an unsuccessful pursuer as a punishment for not being caught.

But the reversal in visual roles that accompanies the punishments of Actaeon and Pentheus also links their deaths to a larger discourse within book three about the perils of visual communication, especially about problems of recognition in which a visual image, in place of being a deception, is suddenly to be apprehended as real. The very first line of the book describes such a moment of revelation, when Jupiter, having «shed the image of a false bull» *posita fallacis imagine tauri* (3, 1), reveals himself to Europa. The same god will similarly discard another false image in his encounter with Bacchus' mother Semele, but with more disastrous results. By contrast, the sailors who carry Bacchus over the sea, with the exception of Acoetes, fail to penetrate the god's metamorphic disguises. And since Acoetes himself, who tells this tale as a warning to Pentheus, may very well be the same god in another disguise, the audience of this narrative (or audiences, since Ovid gives his reader no more certainty about the speaker's identity than the clues that Acoetes himself gives Pentheus) faces the same challenge as the characters within it.

pp. 381-412 (esp. p. 393); and C. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, Princeton 1982, esp. pp. 205, 225 ff., and 247-254.

10. *Mons erat infectus variarum caede ferarum*, 3, 143. Cf. *Silva vetus stabat nulla violata securi*, 3, 28. For the importance of the contrast between unspoiled natural settings and the development of urban Thebes throughout this section of the poem see Hardie, «Class. Quart.», pp. 224 ff.

Finally the poem's longest meditation on the relationship between image and reality featuring perhaps Ovid's worst reader of images, Narcissus, occupies the book's central position.

It is at the instant when Actaeon and Pentheus are killed that failures in recognition assume their most disastrous form. As each of Cadmus' grandsons undergoes the transition from spectator to spectacle, the audiences looking on fail to recognize them beneath the images they have assumed. In Actaeon's case of course, it is his own inability to communicate or explain who he is that is responsible for this failure. «He wanted to cry, 'I am Actaeon, recognize your master,' but the words were lacking to his intention»¹¹. The situation of Pentheus is somewhat more complicated since he has not been transformed into anything, at least for the audience of Ovid's poem. Commentators have indeed been puzzled that Ovid devoted such a prominent position to a tale that seems to lack a metamorphosis, but this is not entirely true. Agave and the other Bacchantes kill Pentheus because they have been deluded into seeing him as a wild boar¹². And unlike Ovid's model, Euripides' *Bacchae*, this narrative ends without any recognition scene. Agave, never learns the true identity of the animal she has killed.

In the case of the death of Actaeon, the phenomenon of metamorphosis both serves as a barrier to recognition, and, more importantly, poses the problem of recognition as a disjunction between the perspectives of the spectator and the object of their gaze, the two spectacular roles emphasized in the warning received by Cadmus. To any spectator Actaeon is a stag, it is only he who recognizes himself as a man. As the narrative approaches its climax, the isolation of Actaeon from this external perspective becomes more and more acute; the spectators delight in the sight of Actaeon's death and regret that he himself cannot be present as a watcher. Pentheus' story makes the connection between metamorphosis and the incompatibility between external appearance and internal

11. *clamare libebat*: / «Actaeon ego sum, dominum cognoscite vestrum!» / *verba animo desunt*. (3, 229-31).

12. Also noted by B. Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, Cambridge 1970, p. 140.

identity even clearer, since there the metamorphosis occurs only in the eye of the beholder.

What is more, within the Pentheus episode the process of recognition involved in penetrating the false images of the «metamorphosed» victim goes together with a corresponding failure to interpret a narrative. Pentheus' punishment, as I will discuss later, results from his inability both to recognize the god Bacchus lurking under the guise of the sailor Acoetes and to interpret and apply to his own situation the story that «Acoetes» tells him about the punishment of his fellow sailors. At the moment of Pentheus' death, there is another example of a failure to «recognize» a narrative, only this time the narrative is one that forms a part of Ovid's own text: When Pentheus' mother does not recognize her son, he appeals to his aunt Autonoe, and to communicate his situation reminds her of the fate of her own son Actaeon. «But she», as Ovid says, «did not know who Actaeon was»¹³.

If we assume that this piece of self-referentiality invites us to consider the death of Pentheus as in some way relating to the process of interpretation that Ovid demands of his own readers, what can it teach us about the way the poet conceives of the reception of his text? Perhaps the simplest solution would be to take Pentheus, like Argus earlier, as a wittily constructed negative exemplum to alert his readers to the hermeneutic complexities of the poem. Pay attention or you too could be decapitated or torn apart by Maenads. But can Pentheus be understood as anything other than a foil to Ovid's own audience? Does the danger of violent absorption into the spectacle, or perhaps the text, one seemed to observe from the outside exist only for bad readers? The model of recognition operative in the deaths of Actaeon and Pentheus suggests that, rather than serving simply as a warning, what befalls Pentheus at the hands of the Maenads can be understood as a model for the reader's own experience of Ovid's narrative. First, the violence Pentheus suffers actually coincides with his entry into the class of good readers. Just at the moment of his death, Pentheus comes to recognize both the folly of his own actions and the divinity of Dionysus; he ac-

13. «*fer opem, matertera*», dixit / «*Autonoe! moveant animos Actaeonis umbrae!*» / *illa quis Actaeon, nescit...* (3, 719-21).

knowledges his fault and confesses that he has sinned against the god¹⁴. Pentheus' recognition in turn is part of a process by which his own perspective coalesces with that of the reader, whose understanding of the situation he comes to share. Indeed Pentheus, like his grandfather Cadmus, as a watcher, or spectator, already occupies a position comparable to that of the reader in relation to the text. The reader who perceives this similarity, and comes to identify with the figure of Pentheus, or Cadmus, or indeed Actaeon, thus undergoes a simultaneous process of recognition through which he too finds himself thrust from the role of observer to that of participant. Finally, as it does for the victims themselves, this recognition also marks the reader's exclusion from the alternative perspective of the crowd within the narrative, who are distinguished precisely by their failure to recognize the victim. In the case of Pentheus, the discrepancy between the point of view of Ovid's reader and that of the Bacchantes is particularly signalled when Autonoe fails to recognize the name of Actaeon since any reader of Ovid's narrative will know only too well who Actaeon was and the applicability of that narrative to the present situation.

As we have seen, even for the characters within the narrative the scene of Pentheus' dismemberment can be understood as a playing out in real life of actions that had previously been experienced only through narratives about others. Pentheus comes to recognize the vengeance of the god, enacted in a form similar to that which had been described for him in the story Acoetes tells about the Tyrrhenian pirates, while Autonoe is unable to recognize the story of Actaeon much less comprehend its relevance. The process of interpretation that is demanded of Pentheus and Autonoe therefore corresponds exactly to the process of recognition that Ovid's own audience goes through if they themselves come to identify the fictional victims in these narratives as surrogates for themselves. That this capacity to make the leap between narrative and re-

14. *cunctae coeunt trepidumque sequuntur / iam trepidum, iam verba minus violenta loquentem, / iam se damnantem, iam se peccasse fatentem.* (3, 716-18). The repeated present participles, together with the anaphoric *iam*, emphasize not only the idea of retribution (*now* he speaks less violently), but also the simultaneity of pursuit and recognition.

ality is crucial to the kind of interpretation Ovid demands of his own audience emerges also from a close reading of the earlier narrative which the disguised god tells the king.

While motifs of vision and recognition, the ability to penetrate illusion and, as Euripides' Dionysus puts it, to «see what one ought to see¹⁵» are practically universal in ancient accounts of religious initiations and feature prominently in the *Bacchae*, what distinguishes Ovid's treatment of the episode is the connection he makes between this clarity of vision and the ability to interpret a fictional narrative. Thus when his Pentheus is confronted by the «Lydian» stranger whom his soldiers have captured, in place of the stichomythic interrogation in which the king repeatedly asks the stranger about the appearance of the god who is in fact standing right in front of him, Ovid has the captive tell Pentheus an elaborate tale, based on the Homeric Hymn to Dionysus, about his own first encounter with the god. The stranger claims to be a fisherman who has learned the skills of navigation. When the ship on which he is helmsman puts in at Chios, the sailors find a mysterious somnolent youth, whom they wish to kidnap and hold for ransom but whom he recognizes as a god. As they make off with their captive, the ship suddenly halts; tendrils of ivy and bunches of grapes encase the oars and sails. The god appears surrounded by the «*inania simulacra*» of lynxes and the «fierce bodies of painted panthers», and all the men, except the narrator himself, are transformed into dolphins.

With its vivid pictorialism and double emphasis on metamorphosis, the tale is characteristically Ovidian; indeed critics have suggested that his desire to include it was the poet's primary motivation for presenting the legend of Pentheus at all¹⁶. The exotic and fantastical elements of the narrative are thrown into greater relief by contrast with Pentheus' earlier splenetic rejection of the foreign and the unbelievable. Yet the strategy of the poet and the god is not quite a simple insistence that the

15. Eur. *Bac.* 924. For the *Bacchae* as a Dionysiac epiphany, see esp. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy*.

16. Cf., e.g., F. Bömer, P. *Ovidius Naso. Metamorphosen Buch I-III: Kommentar*, Heidelberg 1969, pp. 589: «Das Hauptgewicht lag für ihn [sc. Ovid] in der Acoetes-Geschichte, weil sie die Metamorphose enthielt»; also Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, p. 26.

miraculous story is literally true. On the contrary, the tale told to Pentheus emphasizes precisely the false and deceiving quality of the images Bacchus presents¹⁷. The god's appearance in the form of a helpless boy lures the sailors into considering him their victim. And since the presence of the Euripidean model, both alluded to and Romanized by the description of the stranger as a Tyrrhenus¹⁸, strongly suggests that Acoetes, as the stranger styles himself, is in fact none other than Bacchus, this narrative itself provides yet another example of the god's manipulations of disguise and falsehood¹⁹. However it is precisely this ability to conceal his identity through disguise that more than anything else reveals the god's essential nature. Thus for «Acoetes» the *forma* that deceives the sailors provides a sign of their victim's divinity. «I behold his dress, his appearance, and his gate; nothing I saw could be considered mortal (3, 609 f.)»²⁰. So too the epiphany of the god aboard the ship is heralded by apparitions that are

17. Cf. the discussion of the particular association between Bacchus and the phenomenon of metamorphosis, and the thematic role the figure of the god comes to occupy within Ovid's poem, by Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, pp. 37-41.

18. Also an allusion to the Homeric Hymn, where the pirates who abduct the god are *Tyrsenoi* (*Hom. Hymn.* 7, 8). The figure of Acoetes himself is not referred to anywhere in extant earlier Greek literature, but first appears in the *Pentheus* of Pacuvius (synopsis in *Serv. Auct. ad Aen.* 4, 469). For background and a discussion of the «oft ventilierte Frage» of whether Acoetes is to be regarded as a figure in his own right or simply as an *alias* for Dionysus, see F. Bömer, *Kommentar*, pp. 588 ff. Hardie, «Class. Quart.», p. 231 n. 41, suggests that Ovid's Acoetes may have been influenced by Vergil's Sinon.

19. The elaborate biography that the prisoner concocts for himself perhaps also draws attention to the deception that he is practicing on Pentheus. Acoetes says that his original trade was fishing and that he learned it from his father: *pauper et ipse fuit linoque solebat et hamis / decipere et calamo salientes ducere pisces. / ars illi sua census erat; cum traderet artem...* (3, 586ff.) The language in which this craft is described, while not necessarily remarkable in accounts of fishing (see F. Bömer, *Kommentar*, p. 591 ad loc., for parallels), both draws attention to the themes of deception and «artifice» and simultaneously contains veiled allusions to Dionysus' actual father Jupiter, whose capacity to «decipere» and «ducere» was revealed, inter alia, by his encounter with Europa. (Bömer, *ibid.*, takes *decipere* simply as equivalent to *capere*.)

20. And Acoetes' recognition of Bacchus itself bears similarities to the kind of recognition demanded of other interpreters of fictions in this book since it is after all a self-recognition. Assuming that Acoetes is Bacchus, the figure whom he claims to have recognized within the story is none other than himself.

explicitly identified as false: *inania simulacra* of lynxes and «fierce bodies of painted panthers».

The use of disguise to reveal exemplified by Dionysus' appearance in Acoetes' tale closely parallels the relationship between truth and falsehood in the narrative itself. Despite the fact that this story is a fiction, the god does actually exist and will punish Pentheus for his violence much as he is said to punish the sailors. The formulation that Acoetes uses to introduce his account of the miracle he witnessed aboard the ship draws attention directly to this paradox: «I swear by the god himself (and no god is more present, *praesentior*) that what I am recounting is as much true as it surpasses credibility (*tam vera... quam veri maiora fide*, 3, 658-60)». The narrator's attempt to swear by the god of course further enhances the fiction that he is not Dionysus himself, and thus constitutes another deception. But the claim that no god is *praesentior* is an absolutely true statement. So in the case of the metamorphosis of the sailors, the unbelievability of the story, indeed perhaps its essential falseness, is in direct proportion to its truth value. The tale is in fact a false one, but the event it describes, the violent loss of identity as a result of violence offered to the god, is something that Pentheus will not only intellectually accept, but will physically experience as reality. While the narrator acknowledges that the panthers and lynxes around the god are mere apparitions, no such disclaimer qualifies the account of the metamorphosis of the sailors; indeed the particularity and vividness of the description contributes to the impression that this miracle is to be regarded as a physical fact. Correspondingly the effect of the transformation on the bodies of the sailors in this false narrative closely anticipates the actual dismemberment of the unmetamorphosed body of Pentheus. One of the sailors attempts to stretch his arms toward the ropes of the ship to save himself only to discover that his arms have turned to fins. In the same way Pentheus will discover that he has «no arms with which to supplicate his mother»²¹. The situation here may thus be compared to the Argus episode where again the moment of

21. *non habet infelix quae matri brachia tendat* (3, 724); cf. *alter ad intortos cupiens dare brachia funes / brachia non habuit* (3, 679-80), of one of the sailors. Similarly the adjective *truncus* features in each description and suggests the re-

metamorphosis itself marks the shift from mere narrative to physical violence. Just as the poet takes over from the god Mercury to describe the transformation of Syrinx, the previous «narrator» is engaged in killing Argus.

Pentheus boasts that his intended punishment of the supposed follower of Dionysus will turn his death into a «lesson», *documentum*. Similarly the story that his captive tells Pentheus has an unmistakable message; the perils of failing to honor and acknowledge the god. But the hermeneutic problem raised by the tale involves more than the difficulty of extracting a «moral» or lesson from a *fabula*, of distinguishing, as the Augustinian paradigm might suggest, between literal falsehood and «spiritual» truth. Rather the didactic function of the story depends upon the capacity of the narrative to cross the boundary from fiction to reality. The listener or reader by adopting the perspective of the characters within the fiction experiences legendary or unbelievable punishments as though they were happening to him. The challenge Dionysus' tale poses to its interpreter, to accept fictions as reality, therefore parallels precisely the experience of the metamorphosed figures. The character undergoing metamorphosis is confronted with an image that he cannot but regard as an illusion, and finds himself in a situation that can only be fantasy. Yet the climax of each story constitutes a moment of revelation in which he realizes that the «false» image is real and that the strange figure he confronts is in fact himself.

This revelatory shift from illusion to reality, the discarding of false images, has been thematically present throughout the book and has especially been connected with stories of metamorphosis. It is because Actaeon sees the goddess Diana «unveiled» (*posito ... velamine*, (3, 192) that he is changed to a stag. Semele also, although she does not undergo a metamorphosis, is punished for seeing her lover Jupiter without any mediating disguise. So too the elaborate simile through which Ovid compares the «sown men» springing from the ground to figures (*signa*) on a theater curtain being raised (3, 111-114)

semblance between Pentheus body stripped of limbs and the form of a dolphin, which also results from the removal of the sailors' arms and legs.

can also be related to the transition from representation to reality²²:

sic ubi tolluntur festis aulaea theatris
surgere signa solent primumque ostendere vultus
cetera paulatim, placidoque educta tenore
tota patent imoque pedes in margine ponunt.

(3, 111-114)

The simile traces the emergence of the *signa* as the faces appear, then the rest of their bodies, and finally their feet. But at the moment when the feet appear and the figures are complete, the *signa* are suddenly personified; like real men they «set their feet on the stage» (*imoque pedes in margine ponunt*, 3, 114). Correspondingly Ovid omits the transition from simile back to narrative, as though the figures themselves have stepped off the curtain to become the «real» warriors whom Cadmus encounters²³.

* * *

The dynamics of recognition constructed in the Pentheus and Actaeon episodes also possess a social dimension. The failure of recognition in both of these cases goes together with the irreversible exclusion of the individual victim from the group

22. In addition to signalling the fundamentally tragic nature of the stories that follow, as suggested by Hardie, «Class. Quart.», p. 246 n. 14.

23. This motif may also lend particular significance to another feature that connects Cadmus' encounter with the serpent and Actaeon's metamorphosis: both events occur at the same time of day, noon, and in both cases the poet uses a similar formula to describe the moment. Midday is the time when the *umbræ rerum* are diminished. (*fecerat exiguas iam sol altissimus umbras*, 3, 50; *iamque dies medius rerum contraxerat umbras*, 3, 144) The literal meaning of the phrase is clear; when the sun is directly overhead objects cast no shadow. And the inclusion of some indication of time formed a common element in this type of euphrastic passage (see F. Bömer, *Kommentar*, p. 346 ad 2, 417, for Ovidian parallels). But the words also, point to the visual revelation that forms the climax of each encounter; this is the moment when there is no discrepancy between images or illusions (*umbræ*) and things (*res*). For *umbra* = «mere image» see OLD, s.v. §10. The same connotations may be operative when the word occurs again at the climax of the Pentheus narrative as Pentheus beseeches his aunt «to be moved by the *umbræ* of Actaeon», (3, 720). If Autonoe were able to be moved by the image, that is to say narrative, of Actaeon she would not be dismembering the real Pentheus.

who watches or participates in his killing²⁴. So too Ovid's reader, in recognizing and identifying with the victim, adopts a perspective which differentiates his response from that of the audience within the narrative. The sequel to the Actaeon episode makes clear that the choice between these alternative visual perspectives on the death of the victim also has implications for the strategies that the Roman reader will adopt in interpreting a mythical tale like the story of Actaeon and in turn for his understanding of the relationship between Ovidian fiction and other forms of representation within the larger context of Roman culture.

First, the reader's capacity to recognize Actaeon and his resulting exclusion from the external perspective enjoyed by the audience of hunters goes together with the rejection of other conventional models for understanding and interpreting a text like the story of Actaeon. Ovid continually encourages the reader to treat his tales as fictions not worthy of belief, but at the same time, the punishments inflicted on those figures like Pentheus who fail to believe in the veracity of miraculous narratives seems to rule out the distance that would be offered by treating Ovid's stories as mere entertainments. Ovid similarly calls into question another strategy for interpreting mythological narratives, which is to treat them as moral exempla²⁵. And the difficulty Ovid creates for his audience in extracting a «lesson» from a tale like that of Actaeon results again from

24. Ovid's virtuoso catalogue of Actaeon's dogs, besides following in the learned tradition of Hellenistic predecessors (for details see P. M. C. Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, Oxford 1990, p. 199), also has the effect of suggesting that the dogs themselves, each of whom possesses a name and pedigree in the manner of a Homeric warrior, constitute a kind of «männerbund». The identification of the first dog Melampus as being of Spartan breed, *de Spartana gente* (3, 208), may even call to mind the origins of Actaeon's Theban compatriots, who descended from a race «sown» from the teeth of the dragon.

25. In most of the pre-Callimachean treatments of the Actaeon story, e.g. Stesichorus (fr. 236), Aesch. *Toxotides*, Eur. *Bac.* 334 ff., his punishment is depicted as the legitimate result of some challenge to the gods (for the background and further references, see Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, pp. 197-201). Ovid alludes to and rejects such moralizing interpretations in his own introduction to the Actaeon story with the following claim: «Yet if you investigate well you will find a charge against fortune in the matter, not a crime; for what crime does error hold?» (3, 141-2). For further discussion of the strategies Ovid employs to exculpate Actaeon from any possibility of guilt, see Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, pp. 133 ff.

his inversion of the reader's perspective within the narrative. The Actaeon story ends with the description of the dogs shredding their master's body and with the comment that the anger of Diana could only be appeased if her victim died through a multitude of wounds. Yet in the very next line Ovid begins the transition to his account of Semele as follows: «Public opinion was divided. Some think the goddess was too harsh; others praise her and deem her worthy because of her strict modesty. Each side finds its arguments. (3, 253-55)». Only Juno fails to take part in this debate; she is too busy rejoicing in the destruction of the relations of her rival Europa. Such dispassionate speculation about the propriety of Diana's conduct seems to have been rendered more than superfluous by the description of the extremity of the goddess' wrath which the narrator has just made in his own voice. No less jarring is this audience's conviction that the story of Actaeon is primarily about Diana. Indeed the kind of moral judgments that are here made about the goddess seem to reverse the questions about the culpability of Actaeon himself with which Ovid began his story. The effect of these discrepancies is to reinforce in the mind of Ovid's audience that their own responses to Actaeon's narrative are incompatible with what Ovid is describing as the contemporary reaction, just as they could not previously understand Actaeon's death in the same terms as those hunters who had failed to recognize their quarry. This incompatibility too derives from the difference in the perspective from which each audience has «witnessed» events. Those who debate Diana's conduct are separated from the actual death by a distance that is more than metaphorical. When we learn that Juno fails to take part in the conversation we realize that this audience consists of gods. Hence their interest in the behavior of Diana rather than of Actaeon and the divergence of their perspective from that of the mortal reader.

That Ovid should construct a «transitional» passage where the connection to the preceding episode is so problematic brings into play one of the fundamental interpretative problems posed by the book three, and indeed by the poem as a whole: should Ovid's work be considered primarily as a collection of self-standing episodes cleverly strung together, or should we place more emphasis on the idea of a *perpetuum*

carmen, a unified narrative whose individual parts are arranged to suit larger narrative and thematic ends? What this passage makes clear is that the answer we give to this question will depend upon which of the available perspectives on Actaeon's death we adopt. As Ovid's description of the goddesses provides a connection between the Actaeon story and the succeeding episode, so their own conversation represents an attempt to fit the story into a larger interpretative pattern. The debating divinities moralize the story, decocting a relevant universal lesson, while Juno's wrath historicizes it by making it one of a series of disasters destined to befall the house of Cadmus; both of these interpretative strategies are at odds with Actaeon's own point of view to which Ovid's audience has been given privileged access. The temptation in reading book three is to treat it as a collection of individual stories unified as much as anything else by thematic similarities, an interest in reality and illusion, and the extreme violence of their endings. The transitional passages and larger organizational patterns recede into the background, present only as a framework within which the single tales can be fixed. But it is equally possible to see book three not as an amalgamation of the tragic tales of Actaeon, Pentheus, and Cadmus, but as a unified treatment of a single historical theme, a *ktisis* narrative recounting the foundation and early development of Thebes. Within this structure, the episodes we have been discussing would play the role either of digressions or, as in the case of Pentheus, of *aetia* whose larger function is to account for the origin of a religious practice. Moreover the trajectory of the two potential narrative patterns increasingly diverges. Unlike tragic treatments where the fall of the individual protagonist precipitates a crisis within the community, here, despite the unrelieved series of disasters that afflict the royal family, the prospects for the city as a whole remain bright²⁶. Ovid estab-

26. For a somewhat different perspective, see Hardie, «Class. Quart.», p. 224: «It tells of a *ktisis* that goes wrong». This is not to deny the traditional use of Thebes, both in Latin poetry and in Attic tragedy, as a foil for the healthy, well-governed city (see esp. F. Zeitlin, *Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama*, in J. P. Euben, ed., *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, Berkeley 1986, pp. 101-41.), but to assert that within Ovid's narrative the ambiguities of Thebes' origins express themselves as a tension between the disastrous fates of individual members of the community and the processes of social cohesion by which the

lishes this pattern in his introduction to the Actaeon story, the first of the royal catastrophes. Apostrophizing Cadmus, the poet describes the death of his grandson as the first cause of mourning, «among so many favorable circumstances» *inter tot res secundas* (3, 138).

What is most important about the compositional ambiguities of book three is the correlation between the different levels of organization possible for the narrative itself and the levels of social organization the narrative describes. To treat the book as a unified whole is to read it as the story of a city, Thebes; on the other hand, to see the book as a collection of shorter narrative units is to focus on the individuals whose stories are told in the self-contained episodes. In this sense book three can serve as a microcosm for the poem as a whole. And while initially it seems that not much is at stake in the question of whether Ovid's reader chooses to adopt the perspective of a member of the Theban polis or of the doomed protagonists of the separate episodes, the entire poem poses the question of collective identity in more immediate terms. For if book three presents itself as the story of Thebes, then the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, as the progress of the final books makes increasingly clear, is the story of Rome, whose history subsumes and brings to a climax all the historical transformations that have gone before. As each of the successive Theban disasters is destined to be played out again and again, as a new «reader» takes the place of the victim, so what seems to be the mythical foundation narrative of the distant city of Thebes is revealed to be a blueprint for the historical processes that would shape the origins of the real city of which a large class of Ovid's readers were citizens²⁷. Consequently the decision whether to identify with the perspective of the group or the individual ceases to be an abstract narratological consideration and raises questions about where the individual reader situates himself within the actual civic landscape of the contemporary city.

city is formed. The founder Cadmus will indeed enter a second exile, and virtually every member of his family comes to a bad end, but the city itself, for as long as Ovid focuses on it, does not suffer the kind of public crises that result, for example, from the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles.

27. The connections between Theban and Roman origins, noted by K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Oxford 1975, p. 221, are described in detail by Hardie, «Class. Quart.».

A look back at Ovid's treatment of the alternative audiences to Actaeon's death provides striking confirmation of the link between imaginary Thebes and actual Rome. Ovid's refusal to allow his readers to share the literal or the moral perspective of either the spectators at the hunt or the divinities who reflect upon it also has the effect of contrasting the reception of his own text from that of other contemporary modes of representation where Actaeon's death might also be played out before Roman audiences. Both of these internal audiences experience the death of Actaeon in ways that recall specific types of public performance in Augustan Rome. The goddesses who attempt to extract a moral about the limits of divine anger from the tale, do so in a context that recalls a contemporary exercise in *declamatio*. Those taking part in the discussion employ the rhetorical faculties of *inventio* (*pars invenit utraque causas*, 3, 255) and *elocutio* (*eloquitur*, 3, 257) in order either to praise or blame (*culpetur probetur*, 3, 256) Diana's conduct²⁸.

If the goddesses convert Actaeon's death into the subject of a *controversia*, the human witnesses experience the same scene in an even more recognizable manner. The hunters' delight in the sight of the death of the stag and their reference to it as a *spectaculum* assimilate this event to a *venatio*, a wild animal hunt staged in the amphitheater or circus²⁹. We can perhaps go further and say that Diana's punishment of Actaeon recalls the spectacular punishment of criminals by throwing them to wild beasts. Indeed from at least the reign of Nero on the connection between the punishment of criminals in the amphitheater and especially violent episodes from Greek myth is

28. While we know of no declamation specifically on the theme of Actaeon's punishment, that such exercises could provide a context for the enactment of scenes from Greek myth is revealed by the use of other legendary episodes as subjects for *controversiae* and *suasoriae*: Cf. Sen. *suas.* 3, *Rhet. ad Her.* 1, 17 and 1, 18, and Iuv. 7, 115. See S. F. Bonner, *Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire*, Liverpool 1949, pp. 23 f.

29. For other examples of Ovid's construction of scenes as spectacles staged in a contemporary theater or amphitheater, see S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 33 ff. Interestingly, one of the episodes Hinds analyzes in these terms, the death of Orpheus (11, 22 ff.), is also one of the mythological scenes that we know would actually be re-enacted in the Colosseum. See K. M. Coleman, *Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments*, «Journ. Rom. Stud.» 80, 1990, pp. 44-73.

made not only by the writers who describe such spectacles but even by those who produced them. We know of «fatal charades», to borrow the title of a recent article on the subject, where the deaths of condemned prisoners were explicitly staged as reenactments of scenes like the death of Orpheus³⁰. While there is no evidence that the repertoire for this kind of performance included an «Actaeon», it is hardly impossible. Nero at any rate added mockery, *ludibria*, to his punishment of Christians, by clothing them in the skins of wild animals and throwing them to the dogs³¹.

If we are not justified in conjecturing that Ovid had specific enactments of the Actaeon story in mind, nevertheless his treatment of the episode emphasizes elements which also feature in later poetic treatments of *venationes* and of spectacles of criminals being thrown to the beasts. Not surprisingly, the goddess presiding over *venationes* was Diana, and in some of the epigrams of Martial she is described as taking punishment on the animal victims. For example, a wild sow who gave birth at the instant she was killed by hunters is described as «having experienced the power of each Diana»³². Another common motif in Martial's descriptions of *venationes* is that of the animal who turns against his own master. Thus we have a description of a lion tamer mauled by his own lion, and a description of the beast-charmer Orpheus done in by «an ungrateful bear»³³. In the same way Actaeon is killed by his own dogs.

30. Coleman, «Journ. Rom. Stud.». Though the earliest evidence for explicit invocations of scenes from Greek Myth comes from the reign of Nero, Coleman (p. 53) does cite a description by Strabo (6, 273) of the execution of a brigand who referred to himself as a 'son of Aetna' by placing him in a tall mechanical imitation of Aetna which then crashed down and deposited the criminal among the beasts. Since Strabo claimed that this happened in his own time, the passage shows that both the taste for elaborate conceits and the technical sophistication demonstrated by the later mythological tableaux were already a feature of Roman spectacle in the early Augustan period.

31. Tac., *Ann.* 15, 44,4; the suggestion that in doing so Nero had the myth of Actaeon specifically in mind was made by T. Klauser, *Die römische Petrus-tradition im Lichte der neuen Ausgrabungen unter der Petruskirche*, Köln, 1956, p. 12. See Coleman, «Journ. Rom. Stud.», p. 64, n. 176.

32. *experta est numen moriens utriusque Dianae*, *Lib. Spect.* 13,5. Cf. also 12,1, about the same event.

33. For the lion tamer, see *Lib. Spect.* 10, for Orpheus, *ingrato ... laceratus ab*

But Ovid's invocation of the amphitheater here has a purpose quite different from that of adding sensationalism to his narrative. On the contrary, it is only the internal audience of hunters who perceive Actaeon's death as simply an exciting *spectaculum*, comparable to a staged *venatio*. And as we have seen this perception is conditioned by their failure to recognize Actaeon; presumably if they knew that the deer was Actaeon they wouldn't be enjoying themselves so much. The reader, because he has no choice but to know who Actaeon is, must also watch the scene from the perspective of the victim and is therefore in a different position from the audience of the imagined spectacle. And since, according to the analysis of Coleman and others, the crowd's enthusiastic approval of the victim's death served as an important affirmation of the bond between the spectators and the authority of the emperor³⁴, Ovid's manipulation of the reader's perspective excludes him from the kind of participation that was crucial to the political dimension of the actual spectacles of the amphitheater.

The socializing element of spectacles of violence that we have detected in the play of perspective in the Actaeon episode emerges again in the first response of Pentheus to the coming of Bacchus. Pentheus' address to the Thebans in lines 3, 531-63 attempts to unite the entire Theban community around the exclusion and punishment of the stranger Dionysus. At the same time, because of the strongly Roman stamp of the king's rhetoric, the conception of civic unity that Pentheus attempts to put into practice again bridges the gap between mythical Thebes and contemporary Rome. The picture of the Theban heritage that he offers raises issues identical to the problems posed by the Romans' own conflicting constructions of their national identity³⁵. Indeed the expulsion of the Bacchic religion bore historical as well as literary associations for the Romans, who had themselves attempted to suppress the worship of Dionysus in 186, B.C.E., an episode

urso, 21, 7. See also the description in 18 of the «tame» tiger who was nevertheless capable of fiercely mauling a lion in the amphitheater.

34. Coleman, «Journ. Rom. Stud.», p. 72, with further bibliography.

35. In addition to the following discussion of Pentheus' speech, see also Hardie, «Class. Quart.», who discusses the parallels between the founding of Thebes and the founding of Rome, especially as represented in the *Aeneid*, in great detail.

which Livy at least depicts as a conflict between the traditional institutions of Roman society as a whole, and the alien and covert practices of a secret sect³⁶.

Pentheus' invective against Bacchus constructs an opposition between the native Thebans, who, like the Romans later, are the offspring of Mars and distinguished for their military prowess, and the decadent Eastern stranger Dionysus. It would be a disgrace for the valiant Thebans to be routed not by another army but by a *puer* distinguished for «locks dripping with myrrh, soft (*molles*) crowns, and clothing embroidered with purple and gold» (3, 555-56). Pentheus' references to the softness and effeminacy of the followers of Dionysus recalls not only a well-worn rhetorical topos but also its most recent literary manifestations, the several speeches in the *Aeneid* with which «natives» like Turnus give vent to their hatred of the foreign Aeneas³⁷. And Pentheus' exhortation raises precisely the same difficulties as the rhetoric of the Italians. The Thebans themselves, like the Argive Turnus, are arguably foreigners; conversely, in both cases the Eastern invader can claim to be returning to his own native land.

But in Pentheus' speech the negative characterization of the foreigner is complemented by another theme, which relates it to the poem's larger interest in questions of reality and illusion. Not only are the god's forces physically weak, they are illusory. Bacchus is a «*vanum numen*» (3, 559-60), an empty divinity, who relies on deceptions, «*magicæ fraudes*» (3, 534). The dancing and music to which he devotes himself appear in Pentheus' words not only as effeminate but as materially insubstantial in comparison to the too solid weaponry of the Theban soldiers. Thus the musical instruments of the god are described as «bronze beaten only with air», *aera tantum aere repulsa* (3, 532-3) and are said to be without strength. This concept too recalls a characteristic topos of Roman military rhetoric. When for example, in Livy's book ten, the Romans

36. Liv. 38,8-19, with the discussion of A. Scafuro, *Livy's Comic Narrative of the Bacchanalia*, «*Helios*» 16, 1989, pp. 119-42.

37. Cf. the speeches of Amata, *Aen.* 7, 359-72, of Numanus, *Aen.* 9, 614-20, and especially Turnus' outburst at *Aen.* 12, 97-100: *da sternere corpus / loricamque manu valida lacerare revulsam / semiviri Phrygis et foedare in pulvere crinis / vibratos calido ferro murraque madentis*.

encounter a Samnite legion which has been outfitted with a particularly splendid and distinctive costume, the Roman commander Papirius Cursor exhorts his troops not to fear what he describes as empty finery. Roman iron will prove the ineffectuality of Samnite gold³⁸.

In a manner that foreshadows the scene of his own death, Pentheus' attempt to unify the Theban state against the individual victim depends upon a failure of recognition. The king refuses to accept the reality either of the appearances and illusions created by the god or of the story of the god's origins, and links this refusal to a definition of Theban national identity. This failure to recognize the god is in turn tantamount to a rejection of Ovid's own narrative, since the poet has just related the miraculous birth of the god in his own voice. Hence the appropriateness of the god's rebuttal of the king by both appearing in disguise and constructing a false tale which mirrors all too clearly the actual punishments that await Pentheus. The kind of «recognition» that both the god and the poet require of their audiences in and of itself seems to necessitate the separation of the reader from the community, both the Theban community within the narrative and the actual Roman *civitas* which it recalls. To understand how the act of recognition at scenes of violence can possess such a «political» aspect, and correspondingly to perceive how intimately Ovid has integrated the process of interpreting his own text into the set of practices through which civic identity was defined at Rome, we can compare the dynamics of spectacle traced in the deaths of Actaeon in book three to the institution of sacrifice, where again the question of perspective translates directly into a capacity for participation in the group that presides over the death of the victim³⁹.

An interest in sacrifice and the role it plays in state building

38. *non enim cristas volnera facere; et per picta atque aurata scuta transire Romanum pilum et candore tunicarum fulgentem aciem, ubi res ferro geratur, cruentari*, Liv. 10, 39, 12.

39. The crucial role that representations of sacrifice play in the *Aeneid* and post-Vergilian epic is analyzed from a variety of perspectives in P. Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Vergil*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 19-56. For another discussion of how theoretical approaches to sacrificial practice can be used to illuminate Latin texts, see T. N. Habinek, *Sacrifice, Society, and Vergil's Ox-Born Bees*, in M. Griffith and D. J. Mastronarde, eds., *Cabinet of the Muses, Essays on Classical*

is explicit in the text of book three. Images of sacrifice feature in the book's first and last episodes and so provide a thematic frame uniting the death of Pentheus with the foundation of the Thebes. After the miraculous cow has led the followers of Cadmus to the site of Thebes, the first act of the settlers is to prepare a sacrifice⁴⁰. It is while collecting water for libations that the colonists encounter the dragon who kills them. While the intended victim is never specified, in other literary and artistic representations of the scene it is the cow itself which is sacrificed, and by stressing that the cow has never borne a yoke Ovid himself makes apparent her suitability for this role⁴¹. At the book's conclusion not only can the dismemberment of Pentheus be compared to a Bacchic sparagmos⁴², but the poem's final couplet treats his death as a warning to convince the women of Thebes «to attend the new *sacra*, to give incense, and to cultivate the sacred altars⁴³». In both cases the sacrifice unites its participants as members of a new community whose existence the rites themselves confirm. Thus the initial sacrifice can be clearly connected with the rituals of founding the city of Thebes itself, while the final lines make clear that it is as members of the Theban state (*Ismenides*) that the women will participate in Bacchic rites.

René Girard's interpretation of the sacrificial act, with its emphasis on the institution's sociological rather than religious dimensions, thus provides a fruitful theoretical framework for

and *Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, Atlanta 1990, pp. 209-223.

40. *sacra lovi facturum erat: iubet ire ministros / et petere e vivis libandas fontibus undas*. (3, 26-27).

41. The idea that the cow itself is to be sacrificed further suggests the symmetry and reciprocity between the killer and the victim. The Phoenicians prepare to sacrifice a cow which has never been touched to the god who in the form of a bull has just abducted and raped their king's virgin sister. The parallel is made even closer in Ovid's account of the sacrifice where Jupiter is explicitly named as the honorand. In most other versions of the story the heifer is sacrificed to a chthonic deity, either the earth, or, more commonly, Pallas Onka (cf., e.g., Apollodorus *Bibl.* 314.1). See F. Vian, *Les Origines de Thèbes: Cadmos et les Spartes*, Paris 1963, pp. 109-110, for discussion and citations.

42. As the frequent sacrificial imagery of the Euripidean model makes apparent.

43. *talibus exemplis monitae nova sacra frequentant / turaque dant sanctasque colunt Ismenides aras*. (3, 731-32)

interpreting Ovid's use of the motif of sacrifice in book three and in particular for establishing its connection to the issues of perspective and recognition⁴⁴. For Girard, the primary purpose of sacrifice is to regulate the cycle of violence that arises within any community as a result of competition. The animal victim in a sacrifice serves as a stand-in for an actual member of the community, against whom the violence of the group can be directed but whose actual death would provoke reprisals and thus precipitate further violence. Thus at the moment of its death the victim takes on the double role of insider and outsider; while its animal shape obviously differentiates it from the human spectators, nevertheless these spectators' capacity to recognize a resemblance to themselves in the victim is essential for the success of the sacrifice⁴⁵. Each sacrifice therefore simultaneously actualizes two possible conceptions of violence, one in which the collective use of violence against an outsider confirms and unites the community, and another in which the violence of the community appears directed against a member of the group, or indeed the spectator himself. Thus the shift in perspective that occurs at the moment when Actaeon and Pentheus are killed, when their own view of the violence practiced against them diverges utterly from that of the spectators and participants who view them as animals and therefore as legitimate prey, mirrors precisely the double perspective inherent in sacrifice. Correspondingly, the reader's own process of recognition, his capacity to place himself in the position of the victim so that his experiences pass from fiction to reality, which Ovid in the Pentheus episode marks as crucial to the interpretation of his narrative, also approximates the recognition that occurs at the moment of sacrifice when the spectator sees the animal victim as a surrogate for himself.

Looking back to Ovid's treatment of the foundation of

44. R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, (trans. P. Gregory) Baltimore 1977, esp. pp. 1-38.

45. «Sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding. Its vitality as an institution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement on which the rite is based. It must never lose sight entirely, however, of the original object, or cease to be aware of the act of transference from that object to the surrogate victim: without that awareness no substitution can take place and the sacrifice loses all efficacy». Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 5.

Thebes, we can see that the paradox Girard detects in the sacrificial act, whereby the violence that preserves the community is indistinguishable from the violence that destroys it, also appears in the events that prevent the initial sacrifice of the heifer from being carried out. Again too it is the shift in role from participant to victim that heralds the change from beneficial to destructive violence. The attendants of Cadmus prepare to assist at the sacrifice of the heifer and go off to find water, where they themselves, in the very act of drawing the water, are killed by the dragon. Yet the dragon will not enjoy his victory long before he is himself killed by Cadmus. And Cadmus in turn, at the moment of his own success, receives the warning that he too will become a serpent. Thus all Cadmus' descendants will experience a similar shift from perpetrators of violence to victims of violence, from hunter to prey. The instability in the roles of killer and victim which unfolds from and obstructs the initial sacrifice of the heifer reaches its climax in the mutual self-destruction of the «sown men» who spring from the teeth of the dragon. Each of these men is killed in the instant of killing a victim who is both identical to himself and is defined as his own brother. The processes of creation and destruction occur simultaneously; the moment of the men's birth is the moment of their death⁴⁶. To shift from a ritual to a larger political perspective on the violence in the episode, the process that began as bloodless colonization becomes the justified defeat of a foreign enemy and ends as civil war.

When Pentheus himself uses the legends of the city's origin in his exhortation to the Thebans to drive out the Bacchants, the lessons he draws from them reveal that he has misinterpreted this narrative as badly as he will later misinterpret the story Dionysus tells him. And for the same reason; it is precisely the significance of the warning to Cadmus, the revelation that every victor is at the same moment a victim, that escapes his grandson. The discrepancies within Pentheus' account of the Theban past, and its variance from Ovid's own version, are signalled by a crucial inconsistency which

46. *atque ita terrigenis rigido de fratribus unum / comminus ense ferit; iaculo cadit eminus ipse. / hunc quoque qui leto dederat, non longius illo / vivit et exspirat, modo quas acceperat, auras;* (3, 118-21).

Pentheus seems not to recognize, much less resolve. In lines 538 ff., Pentheus challenges the old men who came as exiles from Tyre not to allow their new land to be captured without a fight. Immediately afterwards he turns to the *iuvenes*, and tells them not to forget the courage of their ancestor the serpent, who alone slew so many foreign invaders. Even assuming that all the Tyrian colonists did not, as Ovid's narrative seems to suggest, perish at the hands of the serpent, and that therefore Pentheus is not directly contradicting the earlier account of these events, this section of his speech does serve to remind the reader of the impossibility, given the nature of the Theban past, of drawing the distinctions between conqueror and conquered, foreigner and native, that Pentheus attempts to mobilize to defeat the «foreigner» Dionysus.

The true measure of Pentheus' misinterpretation of the Theban foundation legend emerges most clearly from the rhetorical use he makes of the serpent himself. In Cadmus' case the idea of «becoming the serpent» was a source of fear; the divine voice arrived at the moment the serpent was defeated, and its message emphasized above all the impermanence of the victory that he had just won, and the danger that he too could become the victim. Pentheus however rejoices in the heritage of the serpent. In a very real sense he can claim to be the serpent already. His father is Echion, whose name means serpent and who is the only one of the men created from the dragon's teeth to be named in the text. Throughout the episode, Pentheus is referred to as Echionides or *Echione natus*, not only «the son of Echion», but simply «son of the serpent.» Correspondingly, Pentheus encourages the other young Thebans to take upon themselves the characteristics of the serpent: *animos... sumite serpentis* (3, 544-45). The serpent for Pentheus symbolizes the traditions of resistance and autochthony; its death does not act as a warning that any victor can also become victim but simply epitomizes the valor of dying for one's own country. But just as his own death at the hands of the Bacchants, with its sudden shift from watcher to watched, shows Pentheus «becoming the serpent» in the sense that Cadmus interpreted it, so too it points to the dangerous instability of the rhetoric of victory and defeat. As Agave embraces the severed head of her son, she cries out *io comites, opus hoc victoria nostra est!* (3-1728), a shout of triumph that

makes Pentheus' death seem the fulfilment of his own exhortations of his comrades to conquer.

* * *

Within the almost endless variety of metamorphosis narratives that make up Ovid's poem, the correlation between transformation and violence found in these episodes is by no means universal; nor is the presence of an internal audience or the focus on recognition. Nevertheless the poet's treatment of the Pentheus and Actaeon stories, and particularly the sacrificial paradigm implicit within them, has larger implications for the reader's interpretation of the work as a whole, not only because of these episodes' more or less explicit focus on problems of reading and recognition, but also because the specific issues that Ovid articulates here figure largely throughout the poem. The manipulation of perspective in these scenes, and the recreation of sacrificial tensions that it entails, offer the poet a powerful and vivid means of representing the costs of cosmic and political order, the most important thematic impetus of at least the poem's early books. From the poem's beginning, Ovid highlights the sufferings of the individuals whose death and sexual victimization by the gods provide a disorienting contrast to the larger processes of organizing the universe and establishing the authority of the Olympian gods. In the same way, the revelation of the similarity, indeed fundamental identity, between beneficial violence directed against a legitimate enemy and the devastating and uncontrolled violence within a social group confounds political categories at the heart of Rome's historical and rhetorical traditions.

Again in the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, views of sacrifice are linked explicitly to a philosophy of nature and history that forms an antithesis to the concluding account of Rome's imperial expansion. Pythagoras' speech has been treated (and dismissed) primarily as an exhortation to vegetarianism, but almost from the beginning of his tirade, the argument against eating animals becomes a condemnation of sacrifice⁴⁷. What is more, Pythagoras' attack on sacrifice as an institution makes use of a manipulation in perspective similar to

47. For the contrary argument that the emphasis on vegetarianism has the effect of trivializing even the serious and substantial parts of Pythagoras' speech,

those Ovid employs in the Theban narrative. Thus Pythagoras describes a heifer, whose «freedom from blemish and perfect beauty have been her downfall», (15,130 ff.)⁴⁸ watching in incomprehension the preliminaries to her own sacrifice⁴⁹. So too Pythagorean theories of metempsychosis locate a potential human consciousness in every animal, so that, in a very Girardian formulation, any killing of animals is figured as the disruption of «kindred souls through unspeakable slaughter» (*cognatas caede nefanda exturbare animas*, 15, 174 f.). Finally, the same theories of flux and transformation that lie behind Pythagoras' objections to sacrifice also have disconcerting implications for Roman history; despite the philosopher's inclusion of the cheering prophecy delivered by Helenus to «*penatigero Aeneae*», the view of history Pythagoras presents suggests that Rome herself is destined eventually to fall as every preceding empire has done⁵⁰. This tension between Pythagorean attitudes and the institutions and ideologies of the Roman state is hinted at in the sequel to the philosopher's speech, when the Roman king Numa, Pythagoras' student and the audience for this diatribe against sacrifice, embarks on the pacification of the Romans precisely by introducing new sacrifices (*sacrificos docuit ritus*, 15,483).

see Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, pp. 163-8. In particular, Solodow regards the description of the sacrifice of the cow discussed below as intentionally overblown. Conversely K. S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology in the Metamorphoses*, Ann Arbor 1994, pp. 133-66, who provides a full bibliography on the issue, sees the speech of Pythagoras as a sophisticated device through which the poet defines the generic characteristics of his poem against the traditions of scientific, especially Lucretian, epic.

48. Language that both recalls the description of the eponymous cow that led Cadmus to Boeotia and, even more suggestively, assimilates the sacrificial victim to the sexual victims of the poem's early books, one of whom, Io, is herself turned into a cow so beautiful that the goddess Juno requests her as a *munus* (1,612 ff.) while another Daphne was done in because of her own beauty. Like the heifer here, she «pleased too much» (*qua nimium placui mutando perde figuram*, 1, 547; cf., of the sacrificial heifer, *nam placuisse nocet* 15, 131).

49. Cf. Lucretius identical recreation of Iphigeneia's perspective in his description of the sacrifice at Aulis: *cui simul infula virgineos circumdata comptus / ex utraque pari malarum parte profusast / et maestum simul ante aras adstare parentem / sensit* (Lucr. 1, 87-90)

50. And as Hardie, «Class. Quart.», p. 225, points out, one of the cities whose fate illustrates Pythagoras' view of historical impermanence is Thebes itself, 15, 429.

But far from just providing the poet with another technique for questioning and controverting the ideology of order, the presence of sacrifice as a paradigm for Ovidian depictions of violence requires a re-examination of how the emphatic articulation of the victim's perspective functions within Ovid's text. Does Ovid, like his character Pythagoras or his predecessor Lucretius, generate sympathy for the victim in order to indict the practice of sacrifice itself, and by implication the visions of society and the cosmos that sacrificial ritual constructs? Girard's theory suggests that a capacity to identify with the victim, far from negating the community building potential of the sacrificial experience, forms an integral part of it. The violence of the sacrificial act bears an inherent ambiguity that makes it impossible to resolve into either «good» or «bad» violence. Thus Ovid's interest in vividly reproducing the victim's perspective can be understood as an effort not so much to undermine sacrificial practice as to appropriate it. The point about Pentheus' misreading of Theban origins is not that as a potential outsider and victim himself he ought to reject the practice of violence. The voice that warned Cadmus that he would become the serpent himself was not simply exhorting him to follow the Golden Rule. Rather the social efficacy of sacrificial violence depends upon the capacity for recognition that such reciprocity allows.

If we have read the encounter between Pentheus and Dionysus exclusively as a programmatic demonstration of the victory of an Ovidian narrative of metamorphosis, here linked with the perspective of the outsider and potential victim, over the rhetoric of Roman imperialism, the aftermath of Bacchus' speech necessarily complicates our response. Pentheus is transformed from the torturer of Bacchus to the victim of punishments even more cruel while the god himself appears no longer as the outsider whose worship is defined primarily by resistance to Theban authority but rather as the leader of a new community. And this community will be united by the collective killing of Pentheus in the same way that Pentheus had intended to exclude and punish the god. Just as this double transformation blurs the boundaries between victor and victim, so Ovid's account of the death of Pentheus demonstrates clearly how the same act of violence can simultaneously generate two radically different interpretations.

Nowhere is the discrepancy between the perspective of the victim and the onlookers more pronounced than here. For the Bacchants, who view Pentheus as a marauding boar, his killing is a victory worthy of celebration. At the same time, since Pentheus is recognizably human and possesses not the limbs of a deer or the fins of a dolphin but the arms of a man, it is all the easier for Ovid's audience of watchers to recognize themselves in the form of the son torn apart by his mother and aunts. A parallel discrepancy emerges in the final lines of the book with the comment that Pentheus' death served as a warning precisely for the Theban women to participate in the *nova sacra*. If Pentheus' death is an example of such a *sacrum*, then for Ovid's readers who recognize the victim as the son and nephew of his killers and simultaneously as a surrogate for themselves within the narrative, the ritual can only be a corrupt and horrifying one; the description of his dismemberment ends with the image of the women's *nefandis manibus* (3, 731). As in the case of Actaeon, the perspective that Ovid makes available to his audience seems to necessitate their isolation from the internal audience which is united by the victim's death. But at the same time, the capacity to identify with the suffering of the victim is also crucial to the operation of the story as a Bacchic exemplum. Pentheus' end demonstrates what happens to those who reject the worship of Dionysus; the more his audience is able to put themselves in the place of Pentheus, the more likely they will be to join in Bacchic rituals and avoid the anger of the god. Both of the opposite readings of Pentheus' death, like the king and the god himself, become increasingly similar even as they come to seem utterly incompatible. Even the spectator's ability to adopt the perspective of the victim, which Pythagoras uses to generate revulsion against sacrifice, can become an instrument for enforcing solidarity with the killers.

This interpretation suggests a new possibility for understanding how the exchange between reality and fiction relates to the dynamics of sacrifice, and by extension how Ovid's text situates itself with respect to sacrifice's socializing, community-building properties. The correlation between the reader's perspective and that of the victim within the narrative had implied that the moment of recognition when the fiction is accepted by its audience as real necessarily coincided with the

moment of sacrificial recognition when the participant identifies the victim's sufferings as his own. To read Ovid's account of Actaeon was to be removed from the position of the audiences who could collectively derive pleasure, excitement, and moral instruction from his death; by extension it meant the adoption of the perspective of the excluded individual rather than of Theban community as a whole, and correspondingly differentiated the experience of reading Ovid's account from other forms of contemporary performance like those of the arena. Yet the external perspective is present as well in Ovid's account. He too offers us a glimpse of the dogs tearing Actaeon's flesh. The purely visual aspect of Pentheus' dismemberment receives an exquisite simile comparing the limbs plucked from his body to autumn leaves born away on the breeze, an image which, like the Homeric similes it resembles, increases the pathos of the victim's suffering even as it renders his death more pictorially compelling. Taken in this way, the reader's recognition of Pentheus still differentiates him from the audience within the narrative, not because he will sympathize exclusively with Pentheus, but because it is only the reader who experiences both of the antithetical perspectives that the event allows. If we assume that it is precisely the tension between alienation and incorporation that is central to the sacrificial experience, then it is only the reader for whom Pentheus' death takes on a sacrificial dimension. This, I suggest, marks a different sense in which, at the moment of sacrifice, Ovid's text takes on the properties of reality: it is only Ovid's poem, not the «events» it describes, and not the other forms of contemporary spectacle that they resemble only for the audiences within the narrative, that becomes the locus for sacrificial ritual, even as Dionysus takes over from Pentheus the roles of leader, punisher, and producer of *documenta*.

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