A NOTE ON AE
cid, appears to be a serious obstacle to some scholars of Vergil. Before
commenting on a few aspects of it which presumably are dubious, let us first put
the passage briefly in its proper context. Here we encounter Mezentius, depicted
up to now by Vergil as a persistent scorner of the gods ('contemptor divum'), a
most cruel tyrant and a valiant warrior in battle, 1 not only seriously hampered by
a severe wound inflicted by Aeneas but also heart-broken and completely
dismayed by grief for his son Lausus. It is a pathetic soliloquy resulting from
Mezentius' realization that his only and deeply beloved son had fallen victim to
his personal enemy Aeneas. But it is also a confession of guilt, a reproach by a
repentant father 2—though he repents too late—who finally has to admit that his
sad loss is due to his own detestable conduct.

The crucial issue is presented by the first word of line 850. Scholars are in two
minds as to what reading to follow here. While some opt for 'exitium', 4 the
reading of the best MSS., others read 'ex(s)ilium', apparently on the authority of
Servius who interprets line 850 as follows: 'solatio enim viventis filii utrumque
fuerat ante tolerabile.' 6 Obviously 'utrumque' refers to Mezentius' exile and
wound. Servius' view won the support of some eminent Vergilian scholars of the
previous century, amongst others Heyne and Henry. The latter's comment is
characteristic of this view: 'Exilium (vs. 850) — not exitium; first, because it is
exilium which is interpreted by Servius: "Solatia enim viventis filii utrumque (scil.
exilium et vulnus) fuerat ante tolerabile"; and secondly, because nunc demum
shows that something is spoken of which existed before the death of Lausus... .' 7
Moreover, Servius' view has been accepted by a considerable number of editors
and translators of Vergil of our own century, amongst whom scholars of the
repute of Mackail and Williams. The former's comment, again, is typical of this
practically off-hand imitation of Servius' interpretation: 'exsilium (exilium),
which was read here by Servius, gives so much better sense than the
exitium of the MSS. (which Servius does not even mention) that it must be accepted. Death is in
fact all that Mezentius now desires.' 8

It is my firm conviction that the reading 'exilium' in line 850 by Servius and
other scholars is due to lack of subtlety of interpretation. For if the passage as a
whole is subjected to a closer examination, one senses that the said scholars
apparently have failed to notice that lines 846–54 not only consist of two clear
units but also deal with two separate issues. In fact, both 'exitium' and 'exilium'
are being dealt with in that order in this passage. The one therefore need not
exclude the other. As is clear from the phraseology, the first unit (846–50) is
dominated by the harsh antithesis of life and death. 9 It is brought to a magnificent
climax by Mezentius' heart-rending expression of grief in lines 849–50: 'heu,
nunc miser mihi demum / exitium infelix, nunc alte vulnus adactum!' Obviously
death ('exitium'), not exile ('exilium'), is here the important issue. Again, in the
second unit (851–54) it is the theme of exile that is dominant. The phraseology of
line 852, 'pulsus ob invidiam solio sceptrisque paternis', makes this perfectly clear. The whole passage is concluded by 1 ½ lines (855–56) which reiterate the life-death antithesis dominating the first unit.

In view of these observations, I suggest that 'ex(s)ilium' in line 850 be rejected and the reading 'exitium' be maintained for the following reasons. First, the reading 'ex(s)ilium' does not have the support of the best MSS. Second, the transition from death in lines 845–49 to exile in line 850 is too sudden and abrupt, if 'ex(s)ilium' is to be read. Third, if the reading 'ex(s)ilium' in line 850 is to be maintained, lines 851–52 ('idem ego . . . paternis') not only appear to be redundant but senseless as well. Fourth, it is perfectly clear that lines 851–54 deal with Mezentius' exile resulting from his people's hatred towards him for his gruesome behaviour. Fifth, 'nunc demum' does not necessarily 'show that something is spoken of which existed before the death of Lausus' (Henry). The phrase may therefore have a bearing on either 'exitium' or 'exilium'. Sixth, it should not be taken for granted that 'exitium' refers specifically to Mezentius' or Lausus' death. I believe it is used here of death in general. Seventh, the fact that death is 'all that Mezentius now desires' (Mackail) is, in my opinion, an argument in favour of 'exitium' rather than 'ex(s)ilium'. Finally, it is unlikely that a poet writing as economically as Vergil did would have referred twice to the same issue within the range of just over ten lines.

Assuming that the reading 'exitium' in line 850 is to be upheld, we shall next try to establish the intent of Mezentius' soliloquy. Here it must be borne in mind, however, that up to now Mezentius' attitude towards death, like that towards the gods, has been one of total indifference. That this was still the case at the moment of speaking is shown by lines 880–81 where, shortly before meeting certain death at the hands of Aeneas, he says: 'nee mortem horremus, nee divum parcimus ulli./ desine: nam venio moriturus.' In other words, Mezentius' own 'exitium' could not have been 'infelix' to himself. What could have been 'infelix' to him was the 'exitium' of Lausus who to him, an exile and scorner of the gods, was the embodiment of life and therefore his sole hope for the future. As long as Lausus was alive, he could not care at all for death. Now, however, death has deprived him of Lausus, thus shattering all his future hopes. Only by the complete loss of his dearly beloved son could death hit the innermost of his fatherly heart. For the first time Mezentius fully realizes that by destroying Lausus death has ruined himself. Pagé well observes: 'Mezentius says, “now at last death is bitter, now indeed my wound is driven home”. He knew before that he was wounded to death, but death, while his son lived, caused him little grief; now, however, all his fondest hopes as well have received a death-blow.'

So much for 'exitium'. What about 'vulnus'? Most commentators relate 'vulnus' to the bodily wound inflicted by Aeneas. This appears to be wrong. Mezentius knows that he will die because he has to die. There is therefore no further need of anxiety about the wound inflicted by Aeneas. What vexes him to death, however, is the awareness of his guilt, the realisation that he has wronged Lausus and caused his death as well. In view of our observations thus far, I
therefore take 'vulnus' as referring to the wound struck deep within Mezentius' heart owing to the death of Lausus. The comment of Kappes is significant: 'Nicht die äussere Wunde, sondern die tief ins Herz gestossene macht ihn zum Elendesten.'

As has been stated above, lines 851–54 introduce the theme of exile. Here Mezentius reproaches himself for disgracing the reputation of Lausus by his crimes and wicked behaviour of the past. In fact, he was ousted by his own people from his throne and kingdom in execration, in this manner causing Lausus to be stigmatized as the son of an exiled king and as one defrauded of the heritage that was his rightful due. At last he realizes not only his liability to severe punishment but also that his son's death was his punishment. This explains his readiness to meet death in whatever form it may present itself ('omnis per mortis', 854). The bitter truth, however, is that he is still alive, though he fully knows that he will soon meet death, and this he will do with a resolve as firm as that which always marked his life.

NOTES

3. Cf. specifically lines 851–54: 'idem ego, nate, tuum maculavi crimine nomen,/ pulsus ob invidiam solio sceptrisque paternis./ debueram patriae poenas odiisque meorum:/ omnis per mortis animam suntem ipse dedissem!'
13. I do not agree with Quinn 333 that 'crimine' in line 851 refers to Mezentius' cowardice in allowing Lausus to be killed by Aeneas. See also R.D. Williams, CR 11 (1961), 196; Sullivan (above, note 2) 223 and note 11.

14. Lines 855–56 read: 'nunc vivo, neque adhuc homines lucemque reliquo/sed linquam.' Note the finality of 'sed linquam'. Cf. also line 861: 'desine: nam venio moriturus'.

W.P. BASSON

University of the Western Cape

(a) 'TWO NOTES ON PETRONIUS'

(i) 104 [Lichas] 'videbatur mihi secundum quietem Priapus dicere: "Encolpion quod quaeris, scito a me in navem 2 tuam esse perductum."' exhorruit Tryphaena et 'pu­tes' inquit 'una nos dormiisse; nam et mihi simulacrum Neptuni, quod Bais (in) tetrastylo notaveram, videbatur dicere: 'in nave Lichae Gitona invenies'.

3 'hinc scies' inquit Eumolpus 'Epicurum hominem esse divinum, qui eiusmodi ludibria facetissima ratione condemnat'...

4 ceterum Lichas ut Tryphaenae somnium expiavit, 'quis' inquit 'prohibet navigium scrutari, ne videamur divinae mentis opera damnare?...' 

The omission of Lichas' dream in 104.4 is perverse (note pari somniorum consensu 106.3) but easily curable by reading 'ceterum Lichas ut (suum et) Tryphaenae somnium expiavit'. But expiavit is wrong: if Lichas had 'expiated' the dream, it would be absurd of him to say ne videamur divinae mentis opera damnare, but in any case, as Delz indicates, what need of expiatio? On other grounds Nisbet suggested expiaret. This need not imply the ritual proper, as is shown by expiaretur in 105.4, but it does imply that the dream needs something which could reasonably be called expiatio. This would mean that Lichas wanted to avert the thing portended by the dream(s), which is belied by his speech at 106.3.

To make the sentence good, one needs to change expiavit and one needs a verb which does not make nonsense with the omission of Lichas' dream. Delz suggested expavit. This mitigates the omission since we might understand that Lichas was terrified (i.e. more scared than before) at Tryphaena's dream because he had had his own. But this emendation introduces a most awkward chronology. Lichas' speech is best taken as answering Eumolpus' attempt at deprecation (on grounds both of what he says and also that his speech is narrated after Eumolpus' as opposed to Tryphaena's speech): to relate 'quis prohibet navigium scrutari...'?
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: