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Introduction



Let us mop up the blood and appreciate Lucan's epic as a work of art, in the guise of the painting that serves as frontispiece. What would art critics have to say about this picture? Would they judge in the same way as the catalog of a recent London exhibition in which Théodore Géricault's *Study of Truncated Limbs* (c. 1818–19)¹ was displayed, remarking that it “transcends mere horror to achieve an aesthetic, sensuous quality that belies the macabre subject”?² Would they join in with Delacroix's 1857 response that it constitutes “the best argument in favour of Beauty as it was intended”?³

Today a study of Lucan no longer needs apology, for what was once considered to be not much more than a pile of truncated textual limbs in an unfinished and therefore unpolished epic corpus has been rehabilitated. Morford, Ahl, Johnson, Henderson, Masters, Leigh, and Bartsch have all fought the good fight.⁴ Accordingly, from my privileged position I am looking back to a wealth of scholarship that has changed our outlook on Lucan.

Much of the research on Lucan's epic account of the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey has focused on politics and ideology. In addition often it has exclusively addressed the question of Lucan's relationship to his presumed sources, not least the prose history of Livy and the account of Caesar himself, or has concerned itself with the influence contemporary rhetorical education and practice has had on Lucan.

1. Oil on canvas 52 × 64 (20.5 × 25.25), Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

2. Noon 2003, 81.

3. Noon 2003, 81.

4. Morford 1967, Ahl 1976, Johnson 1987, Henderson 1987, Masters 1992, Bartsch 1997, Leigh 1997.

My study, however, aims to take Lucan more on his own terms as a poet by examining a number of related techniques that combine to create a unique poetic form and vision. I argue for the importance of a unifying imagery based on the body, whether of the state, of the army, or of the poem itself, for a unifying literary purpose, in which traditional epic and heroic glory is replaced by a different conception of fame, particularly the fame of the poet, and for the unifying, pervasive, and positive contribution of two widely used poetic and rhetorical devices, epigrammatic *sententiae* and abundant repetition of both narrative moves and lexical items. By treating Lucan as a poet we will see how Lucan's epic technique shapes his literary *corpus*.

My first chapter, on Lucan's use of body imagery, explores the use of body vocabulary in Lucan's epic. We find it employed in at least five different connections:

the cosmic body
 the Roman state body
 the military corps
 the human body
 the textual body

By examining Lucan's treatment of individual bodies and social groupings I map out the parameters of Lucan's anatomical conceptualization of Rome, the Roman state, and the world as a whole. These parameters are then exemplified by a reading of *BC* 7 and a case study of the epic motif of the automated severed limb.

For the cosmic body Lucan uses gigantomachic imagery and personification to invest earth and heaven, most prominently the sun, with bodily presences, which enable them to take an active part in crafting his world of civil war. Second, the Roman state body is drawn into Lucan's project: throughout, *Roma* carries virtual bodily presence, and extensive play on the many meanings of *caput* positions strife for the *caput mundi* at the very heart of the epic. Third, in the military corps the bodies of the military leaders and that of the armies seem to merge, each representing the other. What is more, overlap of military and body vocabulary makes us read each soldier as epitomizing a larger body. Additionally, human bodies frequently stand in for soulless objects; they pile up and turn into defensive structures—guarding rather than being guarded. Lucan's poetics of namelessness relies heavily on substituting body parts such as *manus* for named characters when denoting those committing *nefas*. Finally Lucan frequently links his fate and fame with that of his textual body and thus designs these *funera mundi* as his own requiem. In sum, Lucan's interlocking

of different levels of often disturbing body imagery creates an epic body that is not whole and closed but unnervingly unfinished and open. By presenting his epic not as a classical whole but as an open body, a vivisection of the Roman Republic, Lucan once more calls the authority of epic into question and exposes the cracks and fissures in a genre that seeks to pass itself off as a seamless whole. Nevertheless, paradoxically Lucan writes himself and his desire for lasting fame into his epic corpus, as my case study of automated severed limbs demonstrates.

Chapters 2 and 3 of my study will further exploit the dichotomy between Lucan's open textual body and the desire for lasting fame that is written into it, while the fourth chapter looks at how the structural device of internal repetition that Lucan employs and the epic's focus on fame are reconciled.

The second chapter focuses on Lucan's care for himself in line with the ancient concern for lasting glory. Lucan works hard to become part of *Fama* so as to cement his lasting glory, and so do the protagonists of his epic. The *Bellum Civile* thus comes to embody Lucan's fame and stands in for the author once his body has perished. This is, however, merely one side of the multifaceted *Fama*, whose name in modern English does not only translate as fame, glory, and renown but also as rumor, report, tradition, and narration. Lucan also employs *Fama*'s other side by introducing narratives with the formula (*ut*) *fama est* "as the traditional story has it" or *fama ferebat* "it is rumored." In this way she plays an important part in Lucan's epic technique and even becomes a directing force in his epic, spinning a net that motivates much of the action in the plot. After outlining Lucan's relations with *Fama* and the ways he employs her in his epic I argue that despite the absence of any traditional personifications of the kind of Ovid's Hunger, Envy, Sleep, and *Fama* in the *Bellum Civile*, Lucan has created a figure in the witch Erichtho that draws many of her characteristics from the Ovidian and Virgilian personification of *Fama*. Erichtho, both embodiment of *Fama* and poet figure, is at the same time the most powerful persona in the epic, a fact that reinforces the preeminence of poet and *Fama* in the *Bellum Civile*. In an epic about fame, not fate, Lucan lends a voice to *Fama*, Erichtho a body.

Two sections at the end of this chapter then exemplify the workings of *Fama* in Lucan's epic in more detail through a reading of the many voices in *BC* 1 and an analysis of the many *epiphonemata* Lucan offers on one of his poem's *personae*, in which he weighs up a life in just a handful of verses. *Fama* is thus not only desired outcome but integral part that holds together Lucan's literary corpus.

Having bolstered in the previous chapters the epic's focus on fame, I examine in my third chapter a feature Lucan was famous for already in antiquity: his *sententiae* (cf. Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.90). Lucan strives on the syntactic level to

create unique and memorable phrases (*sententiae*), which secure the *Nachleben* of his epic body through excerptability. My reading of Lucan as a mine for one-liners is no modern imposition, but instead confirms that this style of reading brings out the strength of the poem's energetic formulation of its key themes: *sententiae* lay down the epic's laws and simultaneously create a discourse on epic values that spans the entire epic. In addition, to write subversive epic, Lucan sets himself to deconstruct the gnomic code, and creates antiproverbs for the purpose. Renaissance "proverb" collections derived from Lucan's work then stand witness for the *Nachleben* of his autarchic textual limbs. In particular, in 1695 Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff published a collection of 300 proverbs and epigrams extracted from Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.

The fourth chapter looks at the anatomy of repetition in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. I focus both on verbal repetition and on the repetition of events and pattern, which are often explicitly signposted as reiterations by Lucan. In a reading of selected passages from books 1 and 2, I point out that Lucan shows awareness of the fact that he is to tell an already well-known story, that of the Roman civil war. The epic's first simile in book 1 links the ever-rotating movements of the heavenly bodies to the ever-repeating fratricide of Roman history starting from Romulus and Remus. An old man's lengthy retrospective on the first Roman civil war in book 2 repeats the same story on a grander scale and provides a multitude of images of the slaughter of brothers by brothers. By singling out the so-called "raft of Vulteius" episode from *BC* 4, I demonstrate how this passage can be seen as a *mise en abyme*, a micro-image or miniaturization of the greater literary work it is part of. I conclude the chapter defining Lucan's poetics of repetition and considering how the principles of repetition and fame that permeate the epic can be reconciled. Employing medieval and Renaissance readings and continuations of Lucan, I then discuss the question how Lucan's poetic technique of repetition alters or influences the reader's expectations of how the epic will end.