

HEADLESS BUT NOT HARMLESS: THE THEMATICS AND AESTHETICS OF  
DECAPITATION IN MARTIAL EPIC

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study looks at decapitation in epic poetry from Homer to the early Imperial Roman epics of Lucan and Statius (*Thebaid*). I examine a variety of epic instances of decapitation, paying particular attention to the significance and symbolism of decapitation in each author in terms of thematic scope and aesthetics. In Chapter 1, I begin by tracing the development of the theme of decapitation from Homer onwards, culminating in an investigation of the elaborations of the theme by Lucan and Statius. Of particular note here are the sensationally graphic scenes of Pompey's murder and head-embalming in Lucan (esp. *BC* 8.663-91), and Melanippus' decapitation, and Tydeus' subsequent "brain-eating" of his killer-victim in Statius (*Thebaid* 8.735-66), which receive fuller treatment in Chapter 2. I also, in an elaboration of Elaine Fantham's "Lucan's Medusa-Excursus: Its Design and Purpose," and Martha Malamud's article "Pompey's Head and Cato's Snakes," (*CP* 2003) consider the figure of Medusa and her decapitation by Perseus as a paradigm for the scenes in Lucan and Statius. Lucan presents a Medusa excursus in Book 9.619-69, framed by Pompey's decapitation and Caesar's 'confrontation' with the head in Egypt (9.1035-1108), which must be understood as a thematic unit. And frequent references in Statius to the gorgon-head on Pallas Athena's aegis, particularly in the "brain-eating" scene of Book 8, receive similar analysis.

The second chapter also consists of a discussion of audience reaction to scenes of decapitation, and the play of focalization Lucan and Statius create to complicate our viewing of the scenes. I examine reactions that the authors and characters within the epics themselves have to scenes of decapitation as a means of metaliterary readership response. The final chapter examines briefly the aesthetic attraction to scenes of the horrific and

grotesque, and specifically the tension and dilemma these scenes create in the reader/viewer. Part of my analysis involves consideration of relevant literature treating the aesthetics of horror, including Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (1982), and Noël Carroll's *Philosophy of Horror* (1990), to gauge the inherent aesthetic attraction to scenes of the horrific and grotesque.

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## I. VISU MISERABILE: EPIC DECAPITATIONS

### I. i. HOMER'S "ILIAD"

τοῖς μὲν γὰρ παιδαρίοισιν  
ἐστὶ διδάσκαλος ὅστις φράζει, τοῖσιν δ' ἡβῶσι ποιηταί<sup>1</sup>

BENVOLIO: First, on his head, in quittance of my wrongs,  
I'll nail huge forked horns, and let them hang  
Within the window where he yoked me first,  
That all the world may see my just revenge.<sup>2</sup>

Decapitation in the *Iliad* is uncommon,<sup>3</sup> and it is in every case marked specifically by the author as particularly horrific and savage. There are two categories of decapitation in the *Iliad*: the first group comprises battle narrative decapitations, those occurring in the midst of combat, among catalogues of amputated and crushed limbs and appendages; the second group contains threats of decapitation, often as retributive violence for a fallen friend or countrymen. I will consider instances of each group as a means of elucidating the themes and purposes of decapitation within the poem itself, and also as a precedent for the later elaborations of the decapitation *topos* in the works of Roman epic writers.

Homer lavishes stunning graphic detail on heat-of-battle decapitations, and marks the action as extraordinarily brutal and repugnant.<sup>4</sup> Peneleus' slaying of Ilioneus at 14.493-500 (in retaliation for the death of his kinsman Promachos) is certainly the most horrific:

τὸν τόθ' ὑπ' ὀφρύος οὔτα κατ' ὀφθαλμοῖο θέμεθλα,

<sup>1</sup> Aristophanes *Frogs* 1054-55.

<sup>2</sup> Marlowe *Doctor Faustus* (B-Text) IV.ii. 55-58.

<sup>3</sup> I count six sword-inflicted decapitations, *pace* Mylonas et al., (2008): 2 (10.454-57; 11.145-47; 256-61; 13.202-05; 14.493-99; 20.481-83), one caused by a spear (14.465-68 – labeled *phantasma* by Friedrich (2003): 19, because of the implausibility of a projectile leveling a blow capable of removing the head completely from the shoulders), as well as four 'threats' of decapitation (17.39-40; 125-27; 18.176-77; 334-35).

<sup>4</sup> As Segal argues (1971): 20.

ἐκ δ' ὤσε γλήνην · δόρυ δ' ὀφθαλμοῖο διὰ πρὸ  
καὶ διὰ ἰνίου ἦλθεν, ὃ δ' ἔξετο χεῖρε πετάσσας  
ἄμφω · Πηνέλεως δὲ ἐρυσσάμενος ξίφος ὅξυ  
αὐχένα μέσσον ἔλασσε, ἀπήραξεν δὲ χαμᾶζε  
αὐτῇ σὺν πῆληκι κάρη · ἔτι δ' ὄβριμον ἔγχος  
ἦεν ἐν ὀφθαλμῷ · ὃ δὲ φῆ κώδειαν ἀνασχών  
πέφραδέ τε Τρώεσσι καὶ εὐχόμενος ἔπος ηὔδα ·

This man Peneleos caught underneath the brow, at the bases of the eye, and pushed the eyeball out, and the spear went clean through the eye-socket and the tendon of the neck, so that he went down backward, reaching out both hands, but Peneleos drawing his sharp sword hewed at the neck in the middle, and so dashed downward the head, with helm upon it, while still on the point of the big spear the eyeball stuck. He, lifting it high like the head of a poppy, displayed it to the Trojans and spoke vaunting over it.<sup>5</sup>

As if the spear-strike's literal expulsion of the eyeball was not enough, Peneleos next slices the head clean off, helmet and all, and raises it aloft still impaled through the (now hollow) eye-socket 'like the head of a poppy.' This pattern of an initial hit with a spear, followed by the death-blow through decapitation (resulting in the severing of the head-filled helmet) is reprised in 20.478-83, in Achilles' dispatching of the Trojan Deucalion:<sup>6</sup>

Δευκαλίωνα δ' ἔπειθ', ἵνα τε ξυνέχουσι τένοντες  
ἀγκῶνος, τῇ τόν γε φίλης διὰ χειρὸς ἔπειρεν  
αἰχμῇ χαλκείῃ · ὃ δέ μιν μένε χεῖρα βαρυνθεὶς  
πρόσθ' ὁρόων θάνατον · ὃ δὲ φασγάνῳ αὐχένα θείνας  
τῇλ' αὐτῇ πῆληκι κάρη βάλε · μυελὸς αὔτε  
σφονδυλίων ἐκπαλθ', ὃ δ' ἐπὶ χθονὶ κείμενος ταυνοσθείς.

Now Deukalion was struck in the arm, at a place in the elbow where the tendons come together. There through the arm Achilles transfixed him with the bronze spearhead, and he, arm hanging heavy, waited and looked his death in the face. Achilles struck him with the sword's edge at his neck, and swept the helmed head far away, and the marrow gushed from the neckbone, and he went down to the ground at full length.

In both cases, considerable emphasis is placed on the pathetic and indefensible state of

<sup>5</sup> All Homer *Iliad* translation from Lattimore (1951).

<sup>6</sup> As noted by Janko (1991): 221 n. 489-505.

each victim: Ilioneus spreads his arms in vain surrender and Deucalion, in pathetic helplessness, with certain death awaiting, simply stands still.<sup>7</sup>

Decapitation of defenseless victims takes on a more gruesome tone when the victims are suppliants<sup>8</sup> – expressing a clear indication of the author's intent to magnify the horror.<sup>9</sup> Diomedes kills Dolon, at his knees and reaching toward his chin in a striking gesture of supplication,<sup>10</sup> with a quick blow to the neck:

ἦ, καὶ ὁ μὲν μιν ἔμελλε γενείου χειρὶ παχείῃ  
 ἀψάμενος λίσσεσθαι, ὁ δ' αὐχένα μέσσον ἔλασσε  
 φασγάνῳ ἄλξας, ἀπὸ δ' ἄμφω κέρσε τένοντε  
 φθεγγομένου δ' ἄρα τοῦ γε κάρη κονίησιν ἐμίχθη.

He spoke, and the man was trying to reach his chin with his strong hand  
 and cling, and supplicate him, but he struck the middle of his neck  
 with a swoop of the sword, and slashed clean through both tendons,  
 and Dolon's head still speaking dropped in the dust.

(10.454-57)

After revealing the Trojan's plans (and even more information than he was demanded, 433-41), despite his pleas and without any hesitation, Dolon is brutally executed. Diomedes' argument (and ultimate justification for the killing) that prisoners cannot be ransomed or released (449-51) is weak considering examples of the practice elsewhere in the poem (e.g. 11.101-06; 21.34-43).<sup>11</sup> The killing is cold-blooded, and the grisly scene

<sup>7</sup> On the helplessness of this scene see Friedrich (2003): 36-37.

<sup>8</sup> Fenik (1968): 83, cites examples of failed supplications in the *Iliad*: 6.46; 10.378; 16.330; 20.463, 21.74. I note only that all the suppliants are Trojans, and I find the example at 16.330 devoid of any sign of supplication on the part of Cleobulus, who is simply 'alive' when Oïlean Ajax catches him, but does not utter a sound before being gashed in his throat with a spear.

<sup>9</sup> Segal (1971): 20; Friedrich (2003): 45.

<sup>10</sup> Hainsworth (1991): 198 n. 454, cf. Gould (1973): 74-82.

<sup>11</sup> See Hainsworth (1991): 197.

provides the added horrific feature of having the severed head continue to mumble (plead?) as it rolls in the dust.<sup>12</sup>

Another example appears during Agamemnon's *aristeia* in Book 11. In the third of three separate attacks against pairs of Trojan fighters, Agamemnon dispatches two suppliants: Peisandrus with a spear throw (143-44), and Hippolochus through savage truncation: Ἰππόλοχος δ' ἀπόρουσε, τὸν αὖ χαμαὶ ἐξενάριξε | χεῖρας ἀπὸ ξίφει τμήξας ἀπὸ τ' αὐχένα κόψας, | ὄλμον δ' ὥς ἔσσευε κυλίνδεσθαι δι' ὁμίλου – Hippolochos sprang away, but Atreides killed him dismounted, | cutting away his arms with a sword-stroke, free of the shoulder, and sent him spinning like a log down the battle (11.145-47). While decapitated heads do roll in the *Iliad*, as we shall see (13.202-05), the image of an entire trunk tumbling 'like a log' is quite shocking, even fantastic.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as Hainsworth notes, Hippolochus receives the treatment here reserved for treacherous slaves in the *Odyssey* (22.475-77),<sup>14</sup> which, coupled with the fact that he is supplicating himself to Agamemnon, makes his death by decapitation pointedly grotesque.<sup>15</sup>

Threats of decapitation occupy an entirely different spectrum of the theme of decapitation in the *Iliad*. Euphorbus utters the first at 17.39-40 to Menelaus, boastfully

<sup>12</sup> Line 457 appears exactly at *Od.* 22.239, describing Odysseus' decapitation of the suppliant Leodes in a similarly graphic scene.

<sup>13</sup> See Friedrich (2003): 47, "... here we have unexpectedly reached one of the critical points again where gross realism suddenly becomes fantasy; the comparison makes our imagination slide imperceptibly from the natural to the supernatural."

<sup>14</sup> Hainsworth (1991): 241 n. 146.

<sup>15</sup> The term 'grotesque' is slippery, and has been defined in large-scale studies, with slight variation, by a number of critics since the 1960s: e.g., Kayser (1963); Jennings (1963); Barasch (1971); Thomson (1972); McNeil (1991). What is crucial for this analysis is the association of the grotesque as an aesthetic category; it is not simply 'bizarre,' or 'absurd,' though these adjectives help itimize it. Barasch identifies the grotesque as something which provides pleasure in what was once "painfully coarse, barbarous, immoral, incongruous, and extravagant" (Barasch (1971): 9; see also Gilbert (2001, PhD Dissertation): 170). And Kayser and Thomson link the paradoxical, unstable mixture of 'ridiculous' and 'terrifying' as fundamental to the grotesque: (Kayser (1963): 53; Thomson (1972): 21): a moving finger on a severed hand, or the blinking eye of a decapitated head uneasily blend humorously ludicrous with horrifying. It is this intermediary area between sadistic humor and horror that epic grotesquerie exploits and wields as a means of exciting, disgusting, and ultimately challenging its readers.



threatening retaliation for Menelaus' slaying of his brother Huperenor at 14.516-19: *εἴ κεν ἐγὼ κεφαλὴν τε τεῆν καὶ τεύχε' ἐνείκας | Πάνθῳ ἐν χείρεσσι βάλω καὶ Φρόντιδι δίῃ* - if I could carry back to them your head, and your armour, | and toss them into Panthoös' hands, and to Phrontis the lovely. The theme is continued by Hector only 100 lines later, who threatens to "cut off [Patroclus'] head from the shoulders and drag the corpse to give to the Trojan dogs" (*ἔλχ' ἵν' ἀπ' ὤμου κεφαλὴν τάμοι ὅξεί χαλκῶ, | τὸν δὲ νέκυν Τρωῆσιν ἐρυσσάμενος κυσὶ δοίη*. 17.126-27). The threat is then (re)phrased by Iris of Hector, who comes to Achilles to warn him that Hector plans to "set [Patroclus'] head on sharp stakes" (*μάλιστα δὲ φαίδιμος Ἑκτωρ | ἐλκόμεναι μέμονεν · κεφαλὴν δέ ἐ θυμὸς ἄνωγε | πῆξαι ἀνὰ σκολόπεσσι ταμόνθ' ἀπαλῆς ἀπὸ δειρῆς* - and beyond all glorious Hektor | rages to haul it away, since the anger within him is urgent | to cut the head from the soft neck and set on sharp stakes, 18.175-77).<sup>16</sup> Segal notes the shocking brutality of such a claim, eclipsing the example of Peneleus' decapitation of Ilioneus because the latter occurred in the "heat of battle without prior meditation," and that the head was not deliberately impaled but remained so as a result of the spear-cast.<sup>17</sup> This claim greatly exaggerates Hector's own threat of corpse abuse through decapitation, and we ought to consider the possibility that Iris' reported speech is "calculated to rouse [Achilles] from grief-stricken immobility to vigorous action."<sup>18</sup>

Hector's brutal threat at 17.126-27 and reported threat at 18.175-77 are transferred to Achilles himself at 18.334-35: *οὐ σε πρὶν κτεριῶ πρὶν γ' Ἑκτορος ἐνθάδ'*

<sup>16</sup> To this point in Book 17, every act of decapitation has been authored by a Greek warrior against a Trojan victim, and in the sole physical example after Book 17 (Achilles' slaying of Deucalion at 20.481-83), the same formula holds true. That the only outlet in the poem of violent kill-by-decapitation by Trojan warriors consists of threats and not actual action is not insignificant.

<sup>17</sup> See Segal (1971): 22-23.

<sup>18</sup> Edwards (1991): 168 n. 178-79.

ἐνεῖκαι | τεύχεα καὶ κεφαλὴν μεγαθύμου σοῖο φονῆος – I will not bury you till I bring to this place the armour | and the head of Hektor, since he was your great-hearted murderer. The focus of the threat has shifted now from Patroclus' corpse to Hector's living and breathing body. This moment of the poem is particularly climactic since it foreshadows the impending mutilation of Hector by Achilles in Book 22, and sets the stage for Achilles' blood-thirst inbetween. The focus of the poem has suddenly become the bodily integrity of Hector – will he become another decapitated Trojan victim at the hands of a Greek warrior? – and Achilles' treatment of his (soon-to-be) corpse.<sup>19</sup>

What separates battle narrative decapitations from the threats of decapitation is the premeditation of (intended) beheading as a mark of vengeance. The fact that none of the threats mentioned above reach fruition is significant. Decapitation in the heat of battle is largely excusable,<sup>20</sup> and although excuse does not detract from the excessive grotesqueness of slaying a suppliant, it is still within the bounds of warfare. Despite his threats, in the heat of his rage and ultimate act of corpse mutilation, Achilles does not go as far as decapitating Hector.

The closest example of this sort of line-crossing in the *Iliad* is associated with Oïlean Ajax, who severs the head of Imbrius' corpse and tosses it at the feet of Hector in (indirect) revenge for the latter's killing of Amphimachus at 13.202-205: κεφαλὴν δ' ἀπαλῆς ἀπὸ δειρῆς | κόψεν Ὀϊλιάδης κεχολωμένος Ἀμφιμάχοιο, | ἦκε δέ μιν σφαιρηδὸν ἐλιξάμενος δι' ὁμίλου · | Ἔκτορι δὲ προπάροιθε ποδῶν πέσεν ἐν κονίῃσι – the son of Oïleus, in anger | for Amphimachos, hewed away his head from the soft neck | and threw it spinning like a ball through the throng of the fighters | until it came to rest in the dust at

<sup>19</sup> The integrity and treatment of Hector's corpse here, and his very *flesh* later, becomes a focal point as Achilles threatens to eat Hector raw (22.347). Cf. Segal (1971): 61.

<sup>20</sup> See Friedrich (2003): 45.

the feet of Hektor. This is a 'revenge kill' of sorts, though transferred to Imbrius instead of Hector, and still within the heat of battle so lacking clear premeditation, but significant for corpse mutilation. Oïlean Ajax is a nasty character,<sup>21</sup> who provokes the wrath of Pallas and Poseidon for boastfulness, and is ultimately drowned at sea attempting his *nostos* (knowledge the author assumes his readers possess<sup>22</sup>). The fact that his actions represent the closest instance of actualizing the premeditated form of decapitation in the *Iliad* is not all that surprising, and marks the grisly nature of revenge threat decapitation as something outside the physical (and literal) bounds of a poem replete with savagery.

## I. ii. VIRGIL "AENEID"

him he left  
 whose heir he was;  
 the lot which he had chosen  
 before his death  
 in a painless twilight  
 his first knowledge of Homer—<sup>23</sup>

Enter a Messenger,  
 with two heads and a hand.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Virgil's famous opening proclamation, there is relatively little *arma-*singing at all in the *Aeneid* until Book 9, and even then actual combat occupies a staggeringly meager amount of actual narrative space.<sup>25</sup> Much of my analysis will focus on the scenes of decapitation in Books 9 to 12; the rest I will devote to Pyrrhus' slaying of Priam in Book 2. Decapitation in Virgil, like Homer, is separated into two rather

<sup>21</sup> See Janko (1991): 72 n. 201-3.

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich (2003): 46.

<sup>23</sup> Phillips (1985): 35, epigraph to Dante *Inferno* canto 4 plate 2.

<sup>24</sup> Stage direction (3.1.233) from *Titus Andronicus*.

<sup>25</sup> Horsfall (1987): 48, estimates (generously) that roughly two-fifths of Books 7-12 are devoted to actual combat.

clearly defined categories: battle narrative decapitations (as in Homer); and what I will call ‘anti-decapitation’ decapitations. This section will attempt to address the influence of Homeric scenes of decapitation in the *Aeneid*, as well as Virgil’s elaborations on the *topos*.

Virgil includes four descriptive battle narrative decapitations between Books 9-12, two of which are modelled on scenes from the *Iliad*, and the third may be as well (though not as obviously). Turnus’ killing of Lynceus at 9.770-71 is virtually a translation of *Il.* 20.481-82 (above) – where Achilles sends the head of Deucalion flying still encased in its helmet – : *huic uno deiectum comminus ictu | cum galea longe iacuit caput* – Shorn off by a single | Close-range stroke, in their sheer, far peace, lie a man’s head and helmet.<sup>26</sup> The grotesque image of the ‘full helmet’<sup>27</sup> severed from the body in the *Iliad* (cf. also 14.493-98 of Peneleus killing Ilioneus, above) is here reinvigorated by Virgil during the height of Turnus’ slaughter (as it was the height of Achilles’ battle fury in Book 20).<sup>28</sup>

Book 10 offers two scenes of decapitation: the first, at 10.394, is rather undescriptive: *nam tibi, Thymbre, caput Euandrius abstulit ensis* – Thymber, he cuts off your head with Evander’s sword. Thymber falls during Pallas’ troop-rallying *aristeia*, and Virgil wastes little time describing the decapitation in a way that Homer would certainly have relished. The scene is noteworthy, however, for Virgil’s apostrophe, which highlights the *pathos* of the scene: twin brothers made indistinguishable by the wounds given them by Pallas (390-93).

Later in Book 10, Virgil again references Homer in his description of the death of

<sup>26</sup> All Virgil *Aeneid* translations from Ahl (2007).

<sup>27</sup> See Henderson (1991): 63 n. 15 on the epic *topos* of “full” or “empty” helmets.

<sup>28</sup> See Hardie (1994): 237 n. 770-71.

Tarquitus at the hands of Aeneas: *ille reducta | loricam clipeique ingens onus impedit hasta; | tum caput orantis nequiquam et multa parantis | dicere deturbat terrae truncumque tepentem* ... – Aeneas, | Hefting a spear, pinned the massive weight of his shield to his breastplate. | As the man begged in vain and prepared to keep pleading, Aeneas | Slashed off his head. When it fell to the ground, re rolled over the headless, | Still warm trunk ... (10.552-55). This scene, far more descriptive than the death of Thymber, conflates certainly two (and possibly three) decapitation scenes from the *Iliad* mentioned above: the death of the suppliant Dolon at *Il.* 10.454-57, and the truncation and ‘corpse-rolling’ of Hippolochus by Agamemnon at *Il.* 11.145-47. If we extend the image of rolling corpses, we can perhaps add, as Harrison does, the tumbling head of Imbrius at *Il.* 13.202-05.<sup>29</sup> Like Dolon, Tarquitus supplicates himself to his attacker (Aeneas, here), but nevertheless loses his life.<sup>30</sup> And the striking image of Dolon’s head still mumbling (*φθεγγόμενον* 10.457) as it hits the dust is matched by Virgil’s *caput orantis* (554), a chilling grotesquerie that will become faddish particularly in Silver Latin poetry.<sup>31</sup> The rolling corpse models Hippolochus in *Iliad* 11, with the added effect of the *truncus* continuing to emit heat (*tepentem*).

The fourth example of battle narrative decapitation is at 9.331-33, during Nisus and Euryalus’ night slaughter. Nisus slays three attendants of Turnus’ favorite augur by

<sup>29</sup> So Harrison (1991): 212 n. 555-6. Though tossed rolling heads and rolling ‘trunks’ are two entirely different things.

<sup>30</sup> This is one of a series of supplicant slayings by Aeneas in his retributive rage over the death of Pallas (cf. 10.523-36; 594-601). Note that in the *Iliad*, all suppliants, despite their pleading, are nevertheless killed, Fenik (1968): 83.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ovid *Met.* 5.104-06; Seneca’s *Thyestes* 727-29, *Agamemnon* 903; Lucan 8.682-83 of Pompey; Statius *Thebaid* 5.236-38, 10.517-18; Silius *Punica* 5.416-17, 15.470. See Aristotle *de Part. Anim.* 3.10 for a fascinating gloss on *φθεγγόμενον* at *Il.* 10.457, and the ‘ridiculousness’ of this poetic phenomenon.

lopping off their ‘dangling necks’<sup>32</sup> (*pendentia colla* 9.331), before he attacks their master himself: *tum caput ipsi aufert domino truncumque relinquit | sanguine singultantem* – Then it’s their master whose head he lops off, whom he leaves a truncated | Torso pulsating blood (9.332-33). The entire episode (9.314-66) is modeled on *Il.* 10.469-525, where Diomedes and Odysseus slaughter sleeping Thracian allies of the Trojans,<sup>33</sup> but the decapitations (lacking in Homer’s account) evokes those in Euripides’ *Rhesus*, a tragedy on the same episode from the *Iliad*.<sup>34</sup> In his description of the off-stage action, a messenger recalls waking from a dream to hear the ‘snorting’ of corpses (*κλύω δ’ ἐπάρας κρᾶτα μυχθισμὸν νεκρῶν* – I hear the snorting of corpses as I raise my head, 789). *sanguine singultantem* captures the effect of the snorting in Euripides, an image as vile as it is ironic and pathetic, blending the snoring of sleeping men with the ‘snoring’ of their hollow throats.

In terms of battle narrative decapitations, Virgil is greatly indebted to Homeric models, which in two places he very nearly reproduces in translation. In the other examples, he either follows a non-Homeric model (*Eur. Rhe.*) or directly avoids elaboration altogether. In terms of vivid descriptions of violence, Virgil lacks originality, and is comfortable following anatomical descriptions of his predecessors; any element of

<sup>32</sup> Virgil cleverly prepares us for the drooping neck/rain-soaked poppy simile at 9.435-37 (of Euryalus) a carry over from Homer (*Il.* 8.306-308, on the death of Gorgythion) and Stesichorus (*Geryoneis* S15 col. ii 12-17, on Heracles’ wounding of Geryon), by slicing the heads off of the drooping necks of the three attendants (the Geryon ‘conveniently’ had three heads). While Euryalus’ decapitation is not described in the text, we do learn later both he and Nisus’ heads are stuck on pikes. The scene at *Aen.* 9.331 could be read as a pre-decapitation standing for the un-narrated decapitation (anti-decapitation, see below) of Euryalus (and Nisus) referenced later at 9.465-66, as well as an elaboration of the images in Homer and Stesichorus (as far as the patchy *P. Oxy.* manuscript allows analysis), who leave head(s) and body intact.

<sup>33</sup> See Hardie (1994): 130-31 n. 314-66 for a brief summary.

<sup>34</sup> Hardie (1994): 133 n. 333, notes the connection to *Rhesus*. While Homer does not explicitly refer to decapitations during the night slaughter, the scene does refer to sounds of men “gasping amid streams of blood” (*Il.* 10.521: *ἀνδράς τ’ ἀσπαίροντας ἐν ἀργαλέῃσι φονῇσι* – his men in the shambles of slaughter gasping their lives out). Euripides is likely drawing from this image when he refers to the “snorting of corpses” who have just been decapitated (*Rh.* 789: *μυχθισμὸν νεκρῶν*), see Ritchie (1964): 77 for the relationship between the two scenes.

horror and the grotesque in these scenes is owed to its presence in the original Homeric and Euripidean models. While Homer seems to enjoy describing bodily destruction and complex wounds, Virgil shifts the focus, rather, to the *pathos* of the scenes. The victims themselves are described with almost as much detail as the kill and their raging killer(s). Before Turnus' slaughter of Lynceus (9.770-71), Virgil lavishes detail on the panic, the swerving and scattering of the Trojans (9.756-59), and even the hypothetical statement that the war could have been ended if not for Turnus' *diro cupido* is a pathetic foreshadowing of his ultimate demise. Moreover, Virgil's apostrophe at 10.390-94 of the twin brothers distinguished now by their wounds, and the ironic surreal description of the 'snoring dead' at 9.332-33, provide a *pathos* to these scenes that far outstrips the anatomical descriptions that Virgil provides almost as an afterthought.<sup>35</sup>

The second group in the *Aeneid* is occupied by what I am going to call anti-decapitation scenes. Virgil often avoids narrating decapitation entirely, and provides his readers with the 'after-effects.' At the climax of their night raid, Nisus and Euryalus are captured and killed. The next day Virgil tells us their heads are impaled, *uisu miserabile*, on pikes (9.465-67). This scene is remarkable for two reasons: first, the Italians do to Nisus and Euryalus what Iris reports (to Achilles) Hector intended to do to Patroclus' head (*Il.* 18.176-77);<sup>36</sup> and second, the actual decapitations are excluded from Virgil's narrative. Euryalus, we are told, is stabbed through the ribs, and dies, 'like a drooping

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<sup>35</sup> Heinze (trans. 1993): 163-64, argues that not only was originality not Virgil's aim in describing wounds and violence, but also that "Virgil no doubt took offence at these detailed accounts on the grounds that they were too much like technical medical descriptions for the elevated style of epic." This is unlikely. Julia Nelso Hawkins' forthcoming research shows that Virgil is not uninterested in technical medical anatomy and surgery, but, rather, that he focuses more on other aspects of technical medicine. Given how prevalent medical knowledge seemed to be (especially anatomical) among the elite poets of the Hellenistic to the Augustan periods, it is highly doubtful that Virgil did not know that stuff and care about it (Nelson Hawkins, forthcoming).

<sup>36</sup> See Hardie (1994): 158 n. 465 and 65 n. 1-24 for further elaboration.

poppy, wet with rain' (9.431-37), and Nisus dies *confossus* (stabbed, transfixed), falling on top of his lover (9.444-45). Their decapitations happen *after* death, and thus represent the ultimate corpse mutilation only threatened in the *Iliad*, but even here indescribable by Virgil – the actual decollation is left, *uisu miserabil(issim)e*, to the imagination of the reader.<sup>37</sup>

The most striking decapitation scene in the *Aeneid* is, in fact, also left out of the narrative entirely (anti-decapitation): the decapitation of Priam in Book 2. The episode is worth quoting in full. Pyrrhus:

*hoc dicens altaria ad ipsa trementem  
traxit et in multo lapsantem sanguine nati,  
implicuitque comam laeua, dextraque coruscum  
extulit, ac lateri capulo tenuis abdidit ensem.  
haec finis Priami fatorum; hic exitus illum  
sorte tulit, Troiam incensam et prolapsa uidentem  
Pergama, tot quondam populis terrisque superbum  
regnatorem Asiae. iacet ingens litore truncus,  
auolsumque umeris caput, et sine nomine corpus.*

While he was speaking, he pounced on the quivering Priam,  
Dragged the king, slipping in pools of his son's blood, to the altar  
Grabbed his hair, yanked back his head with his left, with his right drew his  
gleaming  
Sword which he then buried up to the hilt in the flank of the old king.  
So ended Priam's role, as prescribed by the fates. His allotted  
Exit made him a spectator at Troy's Fires, Pergamum's Ruin,  
This man once in command of so many countries and peoples,  
Ruler of Asia! He's now a huge trunk lying dead on the seashore,  
Head torn away from his shoulders, a thing without a name, a cadaver.  
(2.550-58)

As Horsfall notes, Pyrrhus' actions are not altogether easy to follow.<sup>38</sup> He grabs Priam's hair with his left hand – presumably to pull the head back and expose the neck – only to

<sup>37</sup> For a similar scene cf. 12.511-12, where Turnus dangles the heads of Amycus and Diones from his chariot as trophies. There too, the actual decapitations are excluded from the narrative.

<sup>38</sup> Horsfall (2008): 416 n. 552. I am reminded by Siobhán McElduff that the confusion in this scene might be a consequence of Aeneas' failings as a narrator of graphic violence, as he displays continually throughout book 2.



deliver the death blow to the king's ribs. The language sets up a dramatic scene of decapitation only to eschew it, awkwardly, for a blow to Priam's side. We then, in Priam's famous epitaph (554-558), hear of his trunk, head torn from the shoulders, lying nameless on the shore. Horsfall cites Donatus (1.224.26) who is hopeless to reconcile Pyrrhus' death blow with the image of the headless corpse only four lines later.<sup>39</sup> The actual decapitation is nowhere narrated. Horsfall's comment on the scene as "a neglected oddity in V.'s narrative,"<sup>40</sup> is hardly appropriate even if we accept that the poem is, in fact, unpolished. Virgil explicitly avoids narrating the decapitation and, as in the 'anti-decapitation' decapitation of Nisus and Euryalus, we are left to imagine the removal of Priam's head by Pyrrhus himself, or some one else after the king has died. If we assume Pyrrhus removed Priam's head from his shoulders (as I believe we should), this marks the actualization of Achilles' threat to decapitate Hector at *Il.* 18.333-34, neatly (and grotesquely) completed by the great warrior's son.

It is worth considering the impact of actual historical decapitation on textual decapitation in the *Aeneid*. The Roman civil wars, which Virgil lived through, saw frequent use of decapitation as a means of slaughter and public display: the Rostra were "decorated with heads."<sup>41</sup> Cicero and Pompey were no doubt the most famous, iconic victims of the physical dismemberment of the Roman Republic, but they shared the fate of many fellow countrymen.<sup>42</sup> While the exact influence of these decapitations on Virgil and his readers is not immediately clear, they were a very real feature of the scenery of Rome, as heads were severed and displayed from at least the massacres orchestrated by

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<sup>39</sup> Horsfall (2008): 416 n. 552.

<sup>40</sup> Horsfall (2008): 416 n. 552.

<sup>41</sup> See Richlin (1999): 192; Butler (2002): 1, for the display of Cicero's head and hands at the Rostra.

<sup>42</sup> See Horsfall (2008): 422 n. 558 and Richlin (1999): 198-200, for considerable lists of notable decapitations during the civil wars.

Marius and Sulla in the 80s BCE (e.g., Cicero *De Or.* 3.10) to Galba's decapitation in 69 CE, when his head was paraded and mocked by Otho's camp followers (Suet. *Galba* 18-22). Perhaps the constant images of severed heads in the real world at Rome provided enough graphic detail for Virgil and his audience, who need look no further than the Roman Forum for images Virgil intentionally obfuscates in his poem.

Virgil is not a poet who relishes describing grotesque slaughter. Nor is the *Aeneid* a poem primarily about warfare. When he does describe brutal decapitations, he always follows earlier models; his innovation lies in his shifting of focus to heightened descriptions of *pathos*, which (as elsewhere in the poem<sup>43</sup>) far outweigh anatomical grotesqueries and pseudorealist surgical specificity. Virgil constantly delays the ultimate *Iliadic* section of his poem, and when it comes gives the fan of gratuitous slaughter and decapitation little to cheer for.

### I. iii. LUCAN "BELLUM CIVILE"

unus erit tantum amissum quem gurgite quaeres;  
unum pro multis dabitur caput ...<sup>44</sup>

I remember  
the first time I dismembered  
a family member,  
December  
I think it was ...<sup>45</sup>

With the same fervor that Virgil sought to distance his epic from the grotesqueries of *Iliadic* slaughter, Lucan endeavored to outdo his Greek predecessor.<sup>46</sup> Limbs fall,

<sup>43</sup> Cf. e.g. 9.442; 10.322, 338, and 387.

<sup>44</sup> Virgil *Aeneid* 5.814-15.

<sup>45</sup> Eminem "3 a.m." *Relapse* (2009).

<sup>46</sup> See von Albrecht (1999): 229-33, for discussion of Homeric influence in Lucan's *BC*.

viscera spill, and indeed heads roll with unprecedented frequency in Lucan's epic. The sheer mass of actual decapitations and referenced decapitations within the *Bellum Ciuile* render close examination of each instance virtually impossible for this study.<sup>47</sup> But by considering a variety of examples, I hope to elucidate themes, images, and motifs that Lucan presents in terms of decapitation in his poem and in response to earlier epic literature. I will consider scenes of battle-narrative decapitations (as in the sections on Homer and Virgil) as well as historical accounts of decapitation and corpse mutilations which occur in the poem. The section will end with consideration of the decapitation of Pompey in Book 8 as a direct response to the scenes of anti-decapitation in the *Aeneid*.

The *Bellum Ciuile* does not follow the typical trajectory of traditional military epic in a way that we have seen with Virgil and Homer. Lucan's poem is filled with (learned) digressions, delay, apostrophe; essentially structural elements which detract/distract from the civil war which his epic is *supposed* to be narrating. As a result, battle in the *Bellum Ciuile* functions more as an aesthetic element than a crucial narrative driving force. Violence, slaughter, and decapitations thus occur in greater number outside of the 'constraints' of battle narrative scenes (of which Lucan strategically avoids direct narration as it is<sup>48</sup>).

Decapitations are described, but in a way that more closely resembles a messenger speech in Euripides, Sophocles or Seneca than the epic battle narratives of Homer and Virgil. Book 2 offers a string of gruesome decapitations as part of a historical narrative voiced by an elderly survivor of the two phases of the first civil war (Marius 87

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<sup>47</sup> Book 2 contains eight decapitations alone within the span of less than 100 lines: 2.111-12, 121-24 (of Antonius), 124 (of the Crassi), 150-51, 160-61, 169-73, 189, 206.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. e.g., the *praeteritio* of the battle at Pharsalus 7.551-56, 617-46. See Johnson (1987): 97-100 on the strangeness of avoiding technical description of the supposed centerpiece of Lucan's narrative.

B.C. and Sulla 83 B.C.). The horrors described in this recount focus specifically on the symbol of inhumanity highlighted by corpse mutilation and anonymity of headless bodies.<sup>49</sup> Unidentified heads, we are told, were carried by victors, ashamed of having empty hands (111-12), headless corpses floated along the shoreline (189-90), the heads of unspecified leaders were paraded through Rome, a terror to her inhabitants (160), the narrator himself describes the grotesque difficulty of attempting to puzzle together the disfigured severed head of his brother with the mass of *trunci* spawned, paradoxically, by ‘Sulla’s peace:’

*meque ipsum memini, caesi deformia fratris  
ora rogo cupidum uetitisque imponere flammis,  
omnia Sullanae lustrasse cadauera pacis,  
perque omnes truncos, cum qua ceruice recisum  
conueniat, quaesisse caput.*

I recall how I myself, keen to place my slain brother’s  
disfigured face on the pyre’s forbidden flames,  
examined all the corpses of Sulla’s peace  
and searched through all the headless bodies for a neck  
to match the severed head.<sup>50</sup>

(169-73)

Corpses rot and blur with time, features faded (166-67). Anonymity is crucial to Lucan’s passage. Virtually no one is mentioned by name in this historical catalogue of slaughter, and those who are (Baebius 119, Antonius 121, the Crassi 124) are mutilated (and/or decapitated) to the point of being unrecognizable. Specific killers are conspicuously absent – in sharp contrast to death-blow scenes in Homer and Virgil – there are no *aristeiai* in this narrative, there is no *kleos*, only victims, nameless or otherwise

<sup>49</sup> See Fantham (1992): 110 n. 160-73.

<sup>50</sup> All translations of Lucan *BC* are from Braund (1992).

effectively rendered as such.<sup>51</sup> The architects of this slaughter are Marius and Sulla, implicated in all the crimes by the narrator-witness, but never directly described in physical combat.

Despite an almost complete reworking of the technical elements of descriptive violence and war in Homer and Virgil, many of the same themes associated with decapitation in those epics also appear in Lucan's description of the horrors of (previous) civil war. The theme of retributive violence is prevalent throughout the account (Marius' *poenae scelerum* (penalty for his crimes) 75; the vengeance of Rome's enemies is accomplished by Rome herself, 84-85 and 91-93; partisan vengeance for Marius' own offences exacted by Sulla: 139, 173-74, 187, and 201).<sup>52</sup> Moreover, violence against innocents picks up the theme in Homer and Virgil of violence against suppliants: the needless slaughter of the elderly and children (105-110, 143-144). The effect of creating *pathos*, which we saw specifically employed in decapitation scenes by Virgil is in Lucan greatly elaborated.<sup>53</sup> Baebius (119-21), Antonius (121-24), and Scaevola (126-29) are mournfully apostrophized. Slaves murder masters, sons fathers, children compete for their parent's severed head (148-51). Most dramatically, as stated above, is the abuse leveled against corpses; threatened in Homer (by Euphorbus, Hector, and Achilles), actualized (not overstated) in Virgil (in the decapitation of the corpses of Nisus, Euryalus

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<sup>51</sup> So Eldred (2002): 77, of the Vulteius raft episode in *BC* 4: "there is no epic *kleos*, there is no sacrifice for the good of the community, and there is no prospering of the Roman state (there is no Roman state). Instead of Homeric or Virgilian names of everlasting glory, Vulteius and his men receive anonymity and lack of distinction that becomes corporeal as the raft is heaped high with one gory pile."

<sup>52</sup> See Fantham (1992): 90-93 n. 67-223.

<sup>53</sup> Lucan's poem is filled with emotion. Homer and Virgil insert somber subjective considerations into their epics, but Lucan's apostrophe is passionately striking, ever indicative and aware of impending apocalypse (see Albrecht (1999): 242-43; see also Behr (2007): esp. chap. 1 on Lucan's use of apostrophes as a rejoinder to Virgil's apostrophes in the *Aeneid*).

and Priam), and here blown out of proportion by Lucan.<sup>54</sup> The account is inundated with headless trunks; in a bizarre (and typically Lucanian<sup>55</sup>) paradox, the headless bodies are so numerous that they even become instruments of death, *uiua graves elidunt corpora trunci* – living bodies are smothered by heavy headless trunks (206).

As stated above, Lucan is at pains to avoid technical descriptions of the battle at Pharsalus, which he finds utterly repulsive, and its integral characters, and instead narrates generalities of a slaughter too extensive to recount in full. Within his catalogue of descriptive questions alluding to the atrocities committed at Pharsalus, is a horrific scene of decapitation: in the most stunning flourish of narrative *praeteritio* in the poem, Lucan questions why he would enumerate

*quis pectora fratris  
caedat, et, ut notum possit spoliare cadauer,  
abscisum longe mittat caput: ora parentis  
quis laceret, nimiaque probet spectantibus ira,  
quem iugulat, non esse patrem.*

who strikes his brother's  
breast, cuts off the head and throws it far away  
so he can plunder the familiar corpse? who mangles  
his father's face and proves to those who watch by his excessive wrath  
that the man he slaughters is not his father?  
(7.626-30)

The effect of a decapitated head tossed from the body conjures images of Oïlean Ajax's treatment of Imbrius' head at *Il.* 13.202-05 – the lone brutal example (though somewhat tenuous) of decapitation as corpse mutilation in the *Iliad*. Ajax throws the head of his fallen foe at Hector in furious (and gloating) retribution for the death of Amphimachus

<sup>54</sup> This theme of corpse abuse will be further expanded and magnified during the murder and decapitation of Pompey in Book 8, which will be examined in a later chapter.

<sup>55</sup> See Martindale (1976) on paradox and hyperbole in Lucan. Cf. e.g., 3.719-21: *ingentem militis usum | hoc habet ex magna defunctum parte cadauer: | uiuentis feriere loco* – this your corpse already | largely dead has the heroic value of a soldier: | it will be struck in place of a living man.

moments before. In the example in Lucan, however, brother throws the head of brother afar in order to create false anonymity while he plunders the familiar corpse; similarly, son mangles father's face so as to remove any sense of familial connection. The theme of (loss of) identity from the historical narrative in Book 2 is continued at the apex of Lucan's long delayed war narrative. Of course, as in the earlier examples, Lucan provides no names in his description of the battle: civil war deserves no valor, and thus no heroes are glamorized in the course of his account. Just as Lucan seeks to create anonymity in his telling, so to the characters in his poem attempt to 'unfamiliarize' themselves with the victims of their own brutal slaughter.<sup>56</sup>

These scenes of decapitation<sup>57</sup> (and their associated themes) look ahead, ultimately, to the death of Pompey in Egypt in Book 8, arguably the centerpiece of Lucan's epic.<sup>58</sup> In terms of technical action, the Egyptians, and Achilles in particular, stab Pompey in a small boat off the coast of Egypt (618-19), and Septimius, a Roman, cuts his head off (667-73). Around this framework, Lucan lavishes macabre elegance, ingenuity and bizarre grotesquerie, which separate this scene of decollation from previous epic models in striking ways.

The scene is loaded with *pathos*. The gods (542-50), Ptolemy (550-60), and Fortuna (599-604), are all apostrophized scornfully at the outset of the episode for allowing Pompey to incur such a '(civil) crime' (604) away from Rome; and Pompey (606-8) mournfully, and paradoxically, whose head is severed "with his own sword:"

<sup>56</sup> Other instances of face-mangling in *BC*, blurring precisely who's who, e.g., 2.166-68, 170; 6.224; 7.575.

<sup>57</sup> As elsewhere: *BC* is filled with allusions to Pompey's ultimate demise in Book 8, cf. e.g., 1.685-86 *hunc ego, fluminea deformis truncus harena | qui iacet, agnosco* – him I recognize, lying on the river sands, | an unsightly headless corpse.

<sup>58</sup> So Most (1992): 397, " ... for the crucial scene upon which the *Bellum Ciuile* is concentrated as a whole is that of the decapitation of Pompey in Egypt."

*Pellaeusque puer gladio tibi colla recidit, | Magne, tuo* – and the boy of Pellas cut your head off, Magnus (607-8).<sup>59</sup> The brilliantly delayed *tuo* is at once pathetic and pointedly bizarre: setting us up for the previous apostrophe of Ptolemy at 556-57 (*quid uiscera nostra | scrutaris gladio* – why probe our guts | with the sword?), only to remind us that it is in fact Pompey’s own soldier who decapitates him.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the actual death scene is broken by Cornelia who “fills the air with pitiable words” (*miserandis aethera complet | uocibus* – with pitiable words she fills | the ether, 639-40), begging Pompey’s assassin to kill her first (653-61). Her request, that Pompey “see *her* face before he die” (645-46), ironically, and pathetically, suggests to Septimius a more gruesome way of torturing Pompey: the *caput* that will be the focus of attention, of course, is in fact Pompey’s own head, which Septimius brutally hacks from his shoulders.<sup>61</sup>

Cornelia’s interjection cuts the action of Pompey’s murder and delays his actual death. Back in the boat now, Septimius grabs the head of Pompey, still breathing, and *semianimus* (670), before he: *collaque in obliquo ponit languentia transtro. | tunc neruos uenasque secant, nodosaque frangit | ossa diu: nondum artis erat, caput ense rotare* – puts the drooping neck across a bench. | Then he severs muscles, veins; and long he takes to break the knotty | bones; not yet was it an art to send heads rolling with the sword, 671-73). The half-hearted apology for the grotesque crushing of the knotty neck bones as a result of some sort of transitional period between decapitation by axe and sword<sup>62</sup> does nothing to detract from the horror and grisly decapitation which Lucan describes with considerable enthusiasm. The head is then thrust, still apparently ‘living’ and even

<sup>59</sup> See Hutchinson (1993): 316-17 on this section of text.

<sup>60</sup> See Mayer (1981): 157, *gladio ... tuo*.

<sup>61</sup> Hutchinson (1993): 322-23.

<sup>62</sup> See Mayer (1981): 163 n. 673.



attempting speech, on an Egyptian pike (682-84) – Lucan’s grim reprise of the sub-*topos* of the ‘murmuring’ severed head. Again, as in Virgil’s depiction of Nisus and Euryalus, the threats of Hector and Achilles in the *Iliad* are actualized in Lucan’s poem. But where Virgil explicitly avoided narration of the physical act of decapitation, Lucan treats Pompey’s death, to use Hutchinson’s words, with “wilfully nasty gusto.”<sup>63</sup> But Lucan is not finished. Pompey’s head is then embalmed, in order that “proof of the guilt remain” for Ptolemy (688):

*tunc arte nefanda  
submota est capiti tabes, raptoque cerebro  
exsiccata cutis, putrisque effluxit ab alto  
humor, et infuso facies solidata ueneno est.*

Then by the hideous art  
the fluid is taken from the head, the brain removed  
and skin dried out, and rotten moisture flowed away from deep  
within, and the features were solidified by drugs instilled.  
(688-91)

Decapitation is not enough for Lucan. The embalming, *arte nefande*, places the murder squarely in the realm of corpse mutilation, as well as in the realm of the dark (and morally suspect) arts of Erichtho whose horrific treatment of corpses in Book 6 is clearly referenced here.<sup>64</sup> Lucan shows us the microscopic details of the sort of decapitation only threatened in the *Iliad* and obscured in the *Aeneid*, and then takes it even further by mutilating the already severed and impaled head with the wicked art of embalming.

The mutilation continues as Pompey’s *truncus* is later described as battered by waves and rocks on the Egyptian shoreline:

*pulsatur harenis,  
carpitur in scopulis hausto per uulnera fluctu,*

<sup>63</sup> Hutchinson (1993): 325.

<sup>64</sup> See Erasmo (2007): 116; Toynbee (1996): 41 for the rarity of embalming at Rome. Both reference the embalming of Poppaea’s corpse, for further ref. see Dio. 62.27 and Tacitus *Ann.* 16.6.1.

*ludibrium pelagi, nullaue manente figura  
una nota est Magno capitis factura reuulsi.*

He is battered on the sands,  
torn to pieces on the rocks while drinking in the water through his wounds,  
the plaything of the sea, and when no distinctive shape remains  
the single mark of Magnus is absence of the torn-off head.

(708-11)

We are reminded immediately of the corpses struck by the waves in at 2.189-90 (a clear foreshadowing of Pompey's ultimate demise), but this scene is also a grisly reworking of *Aen.* 2.557-58.<sup>65</sup> Where Virgil sought dignified *pathos*, Lucan's *pathos* is modified by the wicked paradox of Pompey's very headlessness being his identifying feature. In a macabre metatheatrical allusion, the corpses on the shore in Book 2 represent for Lucan, Virgil's 'Priam:' affecting grotesque *pathos*, generated by the chilling description of an eye-witness of former civil war atrocities. Lucan's Pompey, the *ludibrium pelagi*, however, is a new creation entirely. There are no smoke and mirrors in Lucan; Pompey dies in ways Virgil (and surely Homer) only imagined in nightmares.<sup>66</sup>

More chilling still is Pompey's unnaturally prolonged death.<sup>67</sup> He is stabbed (618-19), he delivers an internal Stoic monologue (622-35), Cornelia interjects (639-61), his head is cut off, Septimius hacks at his neck "for a long while" (*diu*, 673), his head is still mumbling when it is fixed on a pike (682), and is embalmed so as to retain its features

<sup>65</sup> We may also be inclined to recall Palinurus at *Aeneid* 5.814-15: *unus erit tantum amissum quem gurgite quaeres; | unum pro multis dabitur caput* – One man alone will be lost. You will search for him out on the sea's swell: | One single life will be offered to save many. The body lost in the waves is simple enough, but perhaps Lucan toys with the concept of one *caput* having to be sacrificed for many. Lucan inverts the idea in the *Aeneid* of one sacrifice for the sake/good of many by narrating the holocaust of the Roman state for the sake/good of one – Caesar (see Hardie (1993): 30; Eldred (2002): 69-70). While Palinurus represents the main sacrifice in the *Aeneid* needed for the eventual founding of Rome, Pompey's is just the most famous *caput* of thousands sacrificed for Caesar.

<sup>66</sup> Perhaps Virgil felt a certain amount of discomfort expressing the death of Priam in such grotesque terms considering he likely modeled the King's demise on Pompey's death (see Horsfall (2008): 417-18; Hinds (1998): 8-10).

<sup>67</sup> On this aspect of extended death, see Hutchinson (1993): 321-23; Malamud (2003): 33, "Pompey's death is drawn out in a manner worthy of opera ..." Erasmo (2007): esp. 112-113.

(688-91). As if this were not enough, further references to decapitation and Pompey's head in particular appear throughout the next two Books,<sup>68</sup> climaxing in the scene where the head is presented to Caesar (9.1012, 1032-34), where it has changed features from its initial embalming, further grotesque indication of Pompey's continued prolonged death.<sup>69</sup>

With Lucan we have entered uncharted territory in terms of many of the epic themes of decapitation presented in Homer and Virgil. Anonymity has replaced an emphasis on individualized *kleos* which was pivotal in the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*; indeed, interest has moved entirely from inflictor of wounds to the 'pathetic' victim who receives them.<sup>70</sup> Decapitation in Lucan is almost entirely extra-militaristic, functioning less as a product of heat-of-battle death-blow, more as overt corpse mutilation. While at times Virgil hinted at mutilation, Lucan, a true aesthete of horror, built his entire poem around the grotesque mutilation of dead Romans. The anti-decapitations of Virgil have been inverted/perverted into the focal point of Lucan's narrative (climaxing in the impossibly extended 'death-scene' of Pompey). His is a poem of the decapitation of a world functioning without a mind, a *discors machina*.<sup>71</sup> Where Virgil sought to distance

<sup>68</sup> Cf. e.g., 9.136-41 Pompey's head is paraded through Egypt; 9.158-61 Pompey's son, Gnaeus, talks of burning his father's head on a pyre; 9.675-80 in a mythological interlude, Perseus decapitates Medusa, which must be read in terms of Pompey's own decapitation; 10.4-5 and 347-48, threats to Caesar's own head; 10.516-19, Pothinus decapitated "by Magnus' death" (*Magni morte perit*).

<sup>69</sup> Erasmo (2007): 116.

<sup>70</sup> See Most (1992): 399.

<sup>71</sup> *totaque discors | machina diuulsi turbabit foedera mundi* – and the whole | discordant mechanism of the universe torn apart will disrupt its own laws (1.79-80). See Johnson (1987): esp. 16-19, on the functioning of Lucan's bizarre universe. See Bartsch (1997) chapter 1, for discussion of the dismemberment of human flesh in *BC* as dismemberment of the Roman state. Marlowe, ever a fan of Lucan's work, similarly connects bodily composition with political power in Edward II (here monarchy with decapitation):

*Lanc.*: Look to see the throne, where you should sit,  
To float in blood, and at thy wanton head  
The glozing head of thy base minion thrown.  
(I.i.131-33)

...  
*Warwick*: ... by my sword,  
His head shall off. Gaveston, ...  
... it is our country's cause

his epic from grotesque brutality, even writing the pivotal decapitation of Priam out of his poem, Lucan created a poem *about* decapitation.

#### I. iv. STATIUS "THEBAID"

εἰς ἀνδροβρώτας ἡδονὰς ἀρίζεται  
κάρηνα πυρσαῖς γένυσι Μελανίππου σπάσας<sup>72</sup>

Wee Thomas was a friendly cat.  
He would always say hello to you  
were you to see him sitting on a wall.  
(Pause.)  
He won't be saying hello no more,  
God bless him. Not with that lump of a brain gone.<sup>73</sup>

While Statius' *Thebaid* contains considerable epic elaboration and innovation, particularly in terms of macabre violence and decapitation, in many respects it marks a return (a reversal of the anti-Virgilian tendencies of Lucan) to traditional features of the treatment of death and slaughter: *aristeiai* abound, Homeric violence is clearly referenced (and re-capitulated), anonymity appears only as a marker of general casualty and futility of war, while named heroes and catalogues of warriors *do* exist. As a result, as in Homer and Virgil, decapitations occur more commonly in battle-narrative scenes versus their (almost entire) inconspicuous absence in Lucan. With that said, Statius is not shy to saturate his poem with Silver Age innovations and grotesqueries which display the

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That here severely we will execute  
Upon thy person.

...

*Mort.*: Thus we'll gratify the King:  
We'll send his head. ... Let him bestow  
His tears on that, for that is all he gets  
Of Gaveston, or else his senseless trunk.

(II.v.21-25,55-58)

<sup>72</sup> Euripides *Meleager* frag. 537 (Collard/Cropp).

<sup>73</sup> Martin McDonagh, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*.

inventiveness of his art,<sup>74</sup> rivaling those in the *Bellum Ciuile* – and indeed Lucan's influence is not insignificant.<sup>75</sup> This section will consider battle-narrative decapitations in the style of Homer and Virgil in the *Thebaid* (and elaborations on particular *topoi* already discussed), as well as Statius' grotesque elaborations of *pathetic* decapitations and his own inversion of Virgilian anti-decapitation, specifically in the slaying of Melanippus by Tydeus in Book 8.

Battle-narratives supply the largest portion of decapitations of the *Thebaid*, and many of the scenes mirror examples from Homer and Virgil. The image of head-filled helmets flying free from their trunks is recast by Statius during Tydeus' *aristeia* at 8.695-99: Tydeus, like a wolf

*non secus obiectas acies turbamque minorem  
dissimulat transitque manu; tamen ora Thoantis,  
pectora Deilochi, Clonii latus, ilia torui  
perforat Hippotadae; truncis sua membra remittit  
interdum galeasque rotat per nubila plenas.*

Like him, Tydeus: blind to the troops and the lesser crowd lined up in the fray against him, he nonetheless, in passing, stabbed (in the face) Thoas, (in the chest) Deïlochos, (side) Clonius, and (groin) grim Hippotadês; severed limbs he tossed back to their stumps, hurled skyward helmets whose casques were full.<sup>76</sup>

The models for the decapitations are *Il.* 14.496-98 and 20.481-83, of Ilioneus and Deucalion, respectively, and *Aen.* 9.770-71 of Turnus' slaying of Lynceus. The

<sup>74</sup> See Hutchinson (1993): 300.

<sup>75</sup> *Siluae* 2.7 perhaps expresses "immoderate admiration" for Lucan (Vessey (1973): 46), but admiration nonetheless, e.g. 19-23:

*Lucanum canimus, fauete linguis,  
uestra est ista dies, fauete, Musae,  
dum qui uos geminas tulit per artes,  
et uinctae pede uocis et solutae,  
Romani colitur chori sacerdos.*

We sing of Lucan, keep holy silence; this is your day, Muses, keep quiet, while he who made you glorious in two arts, in the measures of 'bounded' speech and 'free,' is honored as high priest of the Roman choir.

<sup>76</sup> All translations of Statius from Joyce (2008).

description is not as clinical as in Homer, but it does not need to be: the effect is cinematic horror. The series of kills, described in rapid succession providing only the victim and his ‘afflicted’ body part, leads to a gruesome, macabre image of Tydeus hurling severed limbs back to their own trunks and full helmets whirling round through the clouds (*per nubila*).

Similarly, during Hippomedon’s *aristeia*, lopping-off “unsuspecting necks” (*necopina colla*) with his sword, he “leaves truncated bodies behind him, falling/rolling” (*linquit truncos post terga cadentes*, 9.224). *cadentes* here conjures images of the ‘corpse-rolling’ of Hippolochus by Agamemnon at *Il.* 11.145-47, as well as that of Tarquitus’ corpse at *Aen.* 10.555. Again the description is brief, but horror and *pathos* are Statius’ aims. The Labdacidae victims are “terrified, balled together in breathless flight” (*trepidi cursu glomerantur anhelos*, 9.222), stalked from behind by blood-thirsty Hippomedon – bizarrely melded in a simile with his (previously Tydeus’) horse as a Centaur<sup>77</sup> – with unsuspecting necks hewn from their shoulders.

Statius’ reworking of the ‘night-raid’ *topos* also contains a scene of decapitation, as it does at *Aen.* 9.332. Hopleus and Dymas (and comrades) venture into Theban territory to recover the bodies of Tydeus and Parthenopaeus, but it is Danaus, mentioned only during this scene in the poem, who *caput amputat Hebrus*: | *nescius heu rapitur fatis*, *hilarisque sub umbras* | *uita fugit mortisque ferae lucrata Dolores* – Danaus cut off the head of Hebrus; | carried off by the Fates unconscious, alas! his life | fled laughing to shades below, spared the throws of hard death, 10.315-17. Again, Statius stresses the fact that the victim is caught “ignorant/unaware” (*nescius*) by his killer. But the (ironic) *pathos* continues, as Hebrus’ life flees “cheerfully” (*hilaris*) to the shades below, “saving

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<sup>77</sup> Hippo-medon the ‘horse-ruler’ is elsewhere compared (by simile) to a Centaur at 4.139-44.

itself" (*lucrata*<sup>78</sup>) from the sorrows of a hard life. That the *uita* of Hebrus flees laughing to the Underworld is a pretty clear indication of the pain and suffering of Statius' universe. The scene is replete with grotesque slaughter, usurping the horrific elements in both Homer and Virgil, but not so much as to strip the scene fully of a sense of *pathos*.<sup>79</sup> Statius beautifully rewrites Virgil's image of blood mixing with wine<sup>80</sup> into a simile of blood mingled with water to create a wine of sorts running into mixing bowls and goblets.<sup>81</sup> Another gruesomely splendid rewriting of the scene is Thiodamas' "boredom" with slaying inert souls (*iam taedet inertes*<sup>82</sup> | *exhaurire animas, hostemque adsurgere mallet* – Now it bored him, | this draining of inert souls—he'd rather face foes on their feet!, 10.294-95). I think we are free to consider Thiodamas' boredom as perhaps a metaliterary interjection of Statius' own boredom with the 'night-raid' *topos* – a subtle wink at his predecessors.

Statius also employs a variety of extravagantly bizarre decapitation descriptions, building upon his predecessors. In *Thebaid* 10, Amyntor finds himself trapped inside the Theban gates, and is decapitated, despite his entreaties:

*et pronas tendentis Amyntoris ulnas  
fundentisque preces penitus ceruice remissa  
uerba solo uultusque cadunt, colloque decorus  
torques in hostiles cecidit per uulnus harenas.*

<sup>78</sup> *lucrata*: "making a gain of", i.e., "saving itself from." See note in Williams (1972): 72.

<sup>79</sup> Pace Williams (1972): 66 n. 262-325.

<sup>80</sup> Aen. 9.349-50: *purpuream uomit ille animam et cum sanguine mixta | uina refert moriens* – Spewing the crimson of life, he returns to the bowl a new mixture: | Wine and his blood as he dies.

<sup>81</sup> *Theb.* 10.311-13: *proturbat mensas dirus liquor: undique manant | sanguine permixti latices, et Bacchus in altos crateras | paterasque redit* – a ghastly stream tossed the platters aside; everything dripped | blood mixed with water as wine of a sort ran into deep | punch bowls and goblets.

<sup>82</sup> *inertes*, more fitting of sleeping bodies, is Shackleton Bailey's emendation of *inanes*.

While Amyntor holds out imploring arms  
and pours forth prayers, his neck is cut clean through and, still  
entreating, his head falls on deaf ground as the splendid torque  
fell through his wounded throat and onto “enemy” sands.  
(10.515-18)

The attempted supplication (and its rejection) follows the Homeric example of Dolon’s entreaties at *Il.* 10.454-57, and of Hippolochos’ at 11.146-47, as well as that of Tarquitus at *Aen.* 10.554. All supplicants are slain, and all continue, grotesquely, to mumble after their heads are removed (this also follows the account of Pompey at *BC* 8.682-84, who, with head fixed on a pike: *dum uiuunt uoltus atque os in murmura pulsant | singultus animae, dum lumina nuda rigescunt ...*). A head falling while still speaking continues the *topos* we have seen in Homer, Virgil, and Lucan, but the image of the necklace falling, without a neck to prevent it, is bizarre and entirely incidental to the actual death. Necklace, head, and words all crash to the ground, a macabre use of repetition and zeugma, completing the grotesquely inventive description.<sup>83</sup>

Another elaboration of the theme of severed limbs continuing to function is the scene at 7.644-46, of Caeneus’ decapitation at the hands of Haemon. After the removal of head from shoulders, Statius describes a head whose “staring eyes sought trunk, as soul sought head” (*diuiduum trans corpus hiantes | truncum oculi quaerunt, animus caput* 7.645-46). The image blends scenes from *Aen.* 10.395-96, of a severed limb longing for the rest of its body (*te decisa suum . . . dextera quaerit | semianimesque micant digiti ferrumque retractant* – Your right hand, lopped off, now misses its master; its fingers | Still have a shadow of life: they twitch and they claw at the sword-hilt), with Virgil’s model, Ennius *Ann.* 454 Skutsch, of “eyes longing for the light” (*semianimesque micant*

<sup>83</sup> See Gilbert (2001, PhD dissertation): 106. Also, for the opposite idea of having a voice *muffled* in death, see *Theb.* 10.275-76, of a victim who “leaves behind him groans muffled in helmet” (*galeis inclusa relinquit | murmura*), see Williams (1972): 68 n. 275-76.



*oculi lucemque requirunt*). Statius elaborates upon his Virgilian model by having *animus* seek *caput*, making the longing mutual.<sup>84</sup> The image is as pathetic as it is grotesque, and the text requires a double reading of the incident.

Statius also includes Lucanian type images of un-named heads and bodies, and cannon-fodder casualties<sup>85</sup> which emerge from the crowd of victims of this cataclysmic tragedy. Lucan stresses anonymity in his descriptions of battle and slaughter, and while Statius typically seeks a return to the traditional technique of heroic character-based battle narrative, he too, at times, reverts to *en masse* grotesque generalities as a means of emphasizing the futility of war. In a sort of reverse pageantry of militaristic spectacle, a Boschian nightmare of heads, limbs, trunks, spears, shields, bows, plumed helmets all bob and jostle for position over the surface of a river<sup>86</sup> – a hodgepodge of nameless bodies choking the flow of water, shattering the conception of war as admirable endeavor (as it was at 8.402-05).<sup>87</sup> The picture of nameless corpses, trunks and corpse-less heads floating down a suffocating river sit well in a Lucanian universe (cf. e.g. *BC* 2.111-206, a

<sup>84</sup> See Smolenaars (1994): 292 n. 645f.

<sup>85</sup> To borrow a phrase from Henderson (1999): 241.

<sup>86</sup> *Theb.* 9.259-65:

*iam laceri pronis uuluntur cursibus artus  
oraque et abscisae redeunt in pectora dextrae,  
specula iam clipeosque leues arcusque remissos  
unda uehit, galeasque uetant descendere cristae:  
summa uagis late sternuntur flumina telis  
ima uiris: illic luctantur corpora leto,  
efflantesque animas retro permit obuius amnis.*

And now in the tumbling current mangled limbs race by,  
heads and lopped-off right hands bump against their torsos,  
lances, light bucklers, bows with their strings snapped ride the waves  
as horsehair crests keep helmets afloat; upriver and down,  
the water is littered with bobbing spears, the streambed with men  
whose bodies wrestle with death; souls bubble forth and are choked  
back by surrounding water, caught in the clutching current.

Statius may be recalling a similar moment at *BC* 7.292-94, when Caesar envisages “streams of blood and kings trampled under foot and the Senate’s mangled body and nations swimming in an immense sea of slaughter.”

<sup>87</sup> See Dominik (1994): 102.

veritable checklist of grotesqueries), and here the image, as in Lucan, underscores the complete waste of human life and the futility of civil war.

There are two more examples of ironic grotesquerie I would like to consider which might be classified in the Lucanian sense of *pathos*-inspiring anonymous slaughter. The first appears at 3.127-32, concerning the mourning of mothers for their slain children:

*scrutantur galeas frigentum inuentaue monstrant  
corpora, prociduae super externosque suosque.  
hae pressant in tabe comas, hae lumina signant  
uulneraque alta rigant lacrimis, pars specula dextra  
nequiquam parcente trahunt, pars molliter aptant  
brachia trunca loco et ceruicibus ora reponunt.*

They peer at the helmets of stiffened dead and indicate  
cadavers they've found, flinging themselves on both strangers and kin.  
Some women steep their hair in gore, some seal eyes shut  
and rinse the deep wounds with their tears; others draw forth spear  
points with tender and wasted skill, or else gently fit  
limbs into their sockets or set heads back upon necks.

Mothers rummage through the helmets (on or off trunks?) to identify their loved ones, they dip their hair in the blood of their relatives in an attempt to conserve it,<sup>88</sup> they close the eyes of the dead, treating them *molliter*, as though they were still alive,<sup>89</sup> and (most staggeringly) stick faces (heads) back on necks. The image pointedly inverts the scene in Lucan where brother tosses head of brother away from his trunk so he might pillage an 'un'-familiar corpse (7.626-28). A similar image appears at *Theb.* 12.24-26, Thebans sifting through the remnants of their dead: *hi tela, hi corpora, at illi | caesorum tantum ora uident alienaque iuxta | pectora ...* (some focused on weapons, some on corpses, | others only on severed heads alongside mismatched | torsos ...). Again, mismatched

<sup>88</sup> Cf. 5.235-37; 12.320 for similar actions. See Snijder (1968): 91 n. 129.

<sup>89</sup> Snijder (1968): 91 n. 131.

heads and bodies stress anonymity<sup>90</sup> of countless casualties in a futile war, but emphasis is placed on the survivors, family, *women*, who must sift through the carnage to puzzle together pieces of loved ones. Our perspective is theirs (*hi ... hi ... illi ...*). Such an emphasis on the mourning family of the victims highlights the *pathos* of each scene (mourning *pathos* which bookends the poem: Books 3 and 12), and places the *Thebaid* arguably more squarely in the sphere of suppliant/lamentation (Euripidean) tragedy than traditional epic,<sup>91</sup> and is perhaps – in this way – more humane than the unredeemably tragic world of Lucan, comprised of heartless monsters and mindless minions.

The most gruesome decapitation (and episode) in the entire poem is the death of Melanippus and Tydeus' anthropophagy of his victim-killer's severed head (8.716-765).<sup>92</sup> At the close of Tydeus' *aristeia* (literally *bringing* it to a close) he is struck and doubled-over by a spear hurled by Melanippus, who is hesitant to take credit for his actions. Tydeus responds by striking back at Melanippus, and as a last (meal) request, he demands his companions bring to him the body (specifically the *caput*) of his victim-killer. Capaneus is quick to action. Book 8 closes with a flourish of horror (751-66):

*erigitur Tydeus uoltuque occurrit et amens  
laetitiaque iraque, ut singultantia uidit  
ora trahique oculos seseque adgnouit in illo,  
imperat abscisum porgi, laeuaque receptum  
spectat atrox hostile caput, gliscitque tepentis  
lumina torua uidens et adhuc dubitantia figi.  
infelix contentus erat: plus exigit ultrix  
Tisiphone; iamque inflexo Tritonia patre  
uenerat et misero decus immortale ferebat  
atque illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri  
aspicit et uiuo scelerantem sanguine fauces –*

<sup>90</sup> Note how in *BC Pompey* is identified precisely as a result of his corpse's lacking a head.

<sup>91</sup> See Henderson (1998): 240-43.

<sup>92</sup> Indeed, cannibalism represents the most horrific display of battlefield *ira*, far beyond the bounds of what ancients would have considered 'appropriate.' Cannibalism appears in only one other place in extant epic literature, Silius *Punica* 6.41-53, see Braund and Gilbert (2003): 275-78.

*nec comites auferre ualent —: stetit aspera Gorgon  
crinibus emissis rectique ante ora cerastae  
uelauere deam; fugit auersata iacentem  
nec prius astra subit quam mystica lampas et insons  
Elisos multa purgauit lumina lympa.*

Struggling to rise, Tydeus raced with his gaze to meet him: mad with joy and rage when he saw that face gasping for air, saw those fierce eyes, and in the sight *perceived himself*, he insisted they cut off his enemy's head and bring it to him. Seizing it left-handed, he gazed, savage and bloated, seeing his hot eyes glaring yet hesitant to meet his own. Luckless, he was content.

Vindictive Tisiphonê drove him  
one step further.

Her father swayed, Tritonia by now had returned,  
bringing the wretch immortal glory, but—!

When she saw  
him, sluiced with foul gush of a brain smashed into gobbets,  
his jaws evilly stained with living blood, as companions  
strove to wrest the thing from him, her harsh Gorgon stood,  
snake-hackles rising, crests upreared before her face,  
shielding the Goddess. She turned from the fallen man and fled,  
nor did she ascend to the stars before the Mystic Lamp  
and the wide waters of blameless Elisos had purged her bright eyes.

Statius again has entered the realm of Lucanian 'overkill.' Capaneus removes the head of the still breathing Melanippus (*singultantia ... ora*), in an image reminiscent of Pompey's decapitation at BC 8.669-70, and of the decapitations of sleeping men during Nisus and Euryalus' night-raid at *Aen.* 9.332-33.<sup>93</sup> The head is still showing signs of life even when Tydeus grabs it, as it, remarkably, hesitates to meet the eyes of its victim-killer (756). As in the scene of Pompey's decapitation in Lucan (and in virtually the same location: end of Book 8), Statius explicitly and graphically narrates the decapitation that Homer threatens in the *Iliad*, and Virgil writes out of his *Aeneid*.

As in Lucan, the simple act of decapitation is not enough for Statius. Tydeus

<sup>93</sup> The night-raid victims are *sanguine singultantem* in *Aen.* 9 and Pompey's mouth is *singultus* in BC 8. All three draw (Lucan and Statius, perhaps inadvertently via Virgil) from the image in Euripides' *Rhesus* 789, of decapitated corpses 'snorting' (*μυχθισμὸν*), see above.

himself seems content merely to gaze at his enemy's severed head (757-58), but Statius with Tisiphone acting as his agent demand more.<sup>94</sup> Tydeus' anthropophagy of Melanippus' severed head completes the request of Dis at 8.71-72 for a particularly horrific crime (*sit qui rabidarum more ferarum | mandat atrox hostile caput* – let someone, like a rabid beast, | gnaw his enemy's head), and also actualizes the brutal threat of Achilles to eat Hector raw (*Il.* 22.347), and Hecuba's wish to eat Achilles' liver (*Il.* 24.212-13) in the *Iliad*.<sup>95</sup> Tydeus' anthropophagous act is deemed so repulsive, such an act of criminal *nefas* that Athena, who had received divine sanction from Jupiter to bestow immortality on her favorite (7.759), flees from the sight to cleanse herself, contaminated by the horrific spectacle (765-66), allowing Tydeus to die.<sup>96</sup>

The act is savage, gruesome and appalling (both war deities flee the scene, Mars follows Athena at 9.4-7, anticipating Jupiter's own flight from the battlefield in Book 11), and Tydeus' own fellow Argives complain about his *nefas* (*ipsi etiam minus ingemuere iacentem | Inachidae, culpantque uirum et rupisse queruntur | fas odii ...* - even his fellow Inachidae groaned the less | the less at his loss; they blamed their champion, complained he had | broken the rules of engagement, 9.2-4). But remarkably there is a gentle *pathos* in the willingness of Capaneus and Tydeus' fellow fighters to comply with their companion's last request – paradoxical considering the request (and inevitable cannibalism) is so ghastly. And more, in their promise, despite their knowledge to the contrary, that he will return to the battlefield (*saeui rediturum ad proelia Martis |*

<sup>94</sup> See Braund and Gilbert (2003): 277.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Segal (1971): 61, and Henderson (1998): 235 n. 55. See Braund and Gilbert (2003): 278: "Excessive anger is what characterizes Achilles in the *Iliad* – it leads to his withdrawal of his fighting services from the Greek army. And excessive anger is what characterizes Statius' Tydeus, the warrior who is introduced as *immodicum irae* (1.41), in the *Thebaid*. With *this* difference: *his* anger goes beyond that of Achilles and beyond the bounds of civilized society to manifest itself as eating raw the living brains of his enemy."

<sup>96</sup> See Ganiban (2007): 123-24.

*promittunt flentes* – weeping, | they swore he’d return to the fray, to the clash of savage Mars, 8.731-32).<sup>97</sup> The tenderness of his friends adds a *pathos* which is sharply contrasted with the rage and brutality of Tydeus’ anthropophagy. This dichotomy is breathtaking, and indicative of the macabre brilliance of Statius’ writing.

In the wake of literary tradition, the anthropophagy is fairly peripheral. Homer references Tydeus’ death at *Il.* 14.114, but makes no mention of his meal; Tydeus, as McNelis notes, in fact comes across rather favorably throughout the *Iliad* (cf. 4.376-400; 5.800-08).<sup>98</sup> Virgil also makes no reference to the anthropophagy in the *Aeneid*. Statius’ source appears to have been the lost epic-cycle poem the *Thebais*. The scholium on *Il.* 5.126 preserves the details of the scene from the *Thebais*:

Τυδεὺς ὁ Οἰωνέως ἐν τῷ Θηβαικῷ πολέμῳ ὑπὸ Μελανίππου τοῦ Ἀστάκου ἐτρώθη, Ἀμφιάρεως δὲ κτείνας τὸν Μελανίππον τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐκόμισε, καὶ ἀνοίξας αὐτὴν ὁ Τυδεὺς τὸν ἐγκέφαλον ἐρρόφει ἀπὸ θυμοῦ. Ἀθηνᾶ δὲ κομίζουσα Τυδεῖ ἀθανασίαν, ἰδοῦσα τὸ μίasma, ἀπεστράφη αὐτόν.

Tydeus, son of Oeneus, was wounded by Melanippus, son of Astacus, in the Theban war. Amphiaraus killed Melanippus and brought his head, and Tydeus, opening up his skull, greedily gulped down his brain. Athena was bringing down the immortality serum for Tydeus; but when she saw the *miasma* she turned away from him.

Even here the account is slightly different. Statius has Capaneus retrieve Melanippus’ body and sever his head whereas the scholium (and presumably the *Thebais*) attributes this to Amphiaraus. By removing the influence from Amphiaraus, Statius places culpability squarely upon Tydeus’ shoulders, intensifying the horror of the scene.<sup>99</sup> This navigation away from the standard epic predecessors is a key feature of the scene, and a clever innovation on the myth.

<sup>97</sup> Hutchinson (1993): 93.

<sup>98</sup> McNelis (2007): 132.

<sup>99</sup> McNelis (2007): 133.

Statius relies heavily on Homeric and Virgilian models, particularly in terms of battle-narrative decapitation: the image of full-helmets, mumbling severed heads, supplicant decapitations all follow Homer and Virgil with relative exactness. Statius' macabre innovations, however, place him firmly in the tradition and wake of Lucanian grotesque horror, climaxing in the lengthy episode of Tydeus' treatment of Melanippus' head. Whereas Lucan removed the gods entirely from his epic – a statement about the horror of civil war – Statius created an epic so full of *nefas* that the *superi dei* forcibly remove *themselves* from the course of events: self-imposed abolishment of divine apparatus.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, Statius' last two Books move his epic from the realm of Homer and Virgil, to that of Lucan.<sup>101</sup> Lucan's obsession with horror served as vitriolic invective against 'power politics'; in Statius this obsession was submissive acceptance of the futility of actions, and sympathy for the victims, particularly for women and children.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Strategic avoidance of incurring the posthumous wrath of Petronius, to which Lucan fell prey (?), cf. *Satyricon* 118-19.

<sup>101</sup> See Pollmann (2004): 16.

<sup>102</sup> See Williams (1972): xx.

## CHAPTER II: AUFERTE OCULOS: DECAPITATION, VISION, AND FOCALIZATION

It had the grip on me.  
 It was the unholy grip of Satan.  
 I looked into its dead black eyes,  
 and I could see meself  
 screaming back at meself<sup>103</sup>

I would like to consider the decapitations of Pompey in Book 8 (and the head's re-emergence in Book 9) of the *Bellum Civile* and of Melanippus in Book 8 of the *Thebaid* in more detail. I am interested in vision and gaze in these scenes: who is watching and who is being watched, and the various layers of spectatorship (intratextual and extratextual audience's) intricately structured by each author. I will examine the figure of Medusa (and the Gorgoneion on the aegis of Pallas) and her importance in terms of gaze in these scenes – apotropaic emblem and traditional creator of the *ekphrastic* 'freeze-frame.' I am also interested in these episodes in terms of intertextuality; Statius as a reader of Lucan. I begin with Statius before looking back to Lucan.

The climax of Book 8 and the (anti-)climax of Tydeus' *aristeia* function as a product of degraded spectacle, a 'spectacular *nefas*'<sup>104</sup> demanded by Dis at the outset of the Book. While not named specifically in Dis' command to Tisiphone, the reference to Tydeus and his crime is incontrovertible: *sit qui rabidarum more ferarum | mandat atrox hostile caput* – let someone, like a rabid beast, | gnaw his enemy's head (71-72). Dis' injunction to Tisiphone does not, however, serve simply as a checklist of atrocities he wants committed during the course of the war. He demands a spectacle of *nefas* so unprecedented and horrifying it offends the gods to witness it: *triste, insuetum, ingens*,

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<sup>103</sup> "I Sell the Dead" (2009).

<sup>104</sup> Ganiban (2007): 40.



*quod nondum uiderit aether | ede nefas* – [produce something] evil, alien, huge, something the sky has not | yet seen (67-68) ... *iuuet ista ferum spectare Tonantem* – *that's* a sight should please the brutal Thunderer! (74). The emphasis is on viewership, intratextual (the *superi dei*, Jupiter in particular) and extratextual (his readers). The use of the verb *edere* in line 68 has particular 'spectacular' connotations, as it could be used of producing public games (*munera*), as well as of producing poetry<sup>105</sup> – Statius (writer) and Dis (producer) are having fun. Dis demands an audience to witness his horror show unfold, the first chapter/scene of which contains the *nefas* of Tydeus.<sup>106</sup>

The final flourish of Tydeus' *aristeia* is a visual extravaganza. Friends "cheer him on" (*hortantes socios* 713) as they watch him tear through opponents, riddled with spears, a one-man wrecking-ball behind a barricade of corpses (700-05).<sup>107</sup> Pallas – guardian, protectrix, for the moment, anyway – meanwhile, cannot bear to watch, hiding her eyes behind her shield, and she flies off to persuade Jupiter to provide immortal glory for her favorite, knowing his end is near (713-15). *ecce* (716) marks a slight scene shift, but it also draws our visual attention to a spear cast (anonymously), which cuts the air and pierces Tydeus in his midsection. Its author (*auctor* 717), Melanippus, fearing to expose himself to the sight of Tydeus and his comrades, hides among the Aonians, but their

<sup>105</sup> Lovatt (2005): 274, 285; Ganiban (2007): 182, 184-85.

<sup>106</sup> Dis' injunction ultimately, and most naturally, looks ahead to the fratricidal duel between Polynices and Eteocles in Book 11, the 'main-event,' as it were, of this spectacle (Dis even invites the ghosts of guilty Thebans up from the underworld to watch, delightedly 11.420-23). But it need not limit analysis of visuality and spectatorship to that scene alone. On the various audiences in Book 11, see Bernstein (2004) who considers the dominant gaze of Jupiter and Adrastus, in particular, and Ganiban (2007): 180-206, who shifts focus to the perspective of Dis and the Furies.

<sup>107</sup> The comparison between Tydeus and Scaeva during his *aristeia* in *BC* 6.144-262 has been well noted by G. Williams (1978): 203. There too visuality and spectacle are crucial elements: Scaeva acts always "with Caesar watching" (*Caesaris in uultu* 6.159). Of course, the comparison anticipates Tydeus' *nefas* since Scaeva represents the ultimate perversion and debasement of epic *uirtus*: *pronus ad omne nefas et qui nesciret in armis | quam magnum uirtus crimen ciuilibus esset* – eager for every wrong, he did not know | how great a crime is valour in a civil war, 6.147-48; see Henderson (1998): 172-76; Bartsch (1997): 52; Sklenár (2003): 49-58; and McNelis (2007): 131-32.

cheers reveal him (719-20). The Aonians and Pelasgi strangely seem to function more as audience members applauding their man than active participants in the conflict.

Tydeus strikes back at Melanippus with (nearly) what last strength he has left, and brings his killer-victim down. Tydeus then demands the head of Melanippus be brought to him (*caput, o caput, o mihi si quis | apportet, Melanippe, tuum* – The head! oh, the head! Oh, if someone would just | bring me your head, Melanippus!, 739-40).<sup>108</sup> After Capaneus brings Melanippus to Tydeus, the latter gazes into his still living killer-victim's eyes and strangely sees himself (*seseque agnouit in illo* 753<sup>109</sup>). The head is then removed from Melanippus' shoulders, Tydeus grasps it with his left hand and gazes into Melanippus' eyes, which "hesitate to meet his own" (*adhuc dubitantia figi* 756<sup>110</sup>). In a fit of *furor* brought on by Tisiphone (filling the void of immortal 'protectrix' left by Pallas' absence), Tydeus goes a step further and devours the brains of Melanippus' severed head. This act of unbounded *ira* prompts further visual audience response: the snake hairs of Pallas' *aegis*-bound Gorgoneion stand erect in order to block the goddess' eyes from viewing the atrocious action of her favorite<sup>111</sup> – at the same time as she had

<sup>108</sup> Statius' version of the myth differs from the examples in Apollodorus 3.6.8, and the *scholia* (AbT) at *Il.* 5.126, which specify that Amphiaraus killed Melanippus and brought his head to Tydeus. See Beazley (1947), and Gantz (1993): 517-19 for specific detail of the literary and artistic tradition of the scene.

<sup>109</sup> So Ross (2004): 230, "Tydeus sat up and turned his gaze and, mad | with joy and anger, saw his gasping face | and glancing eyeballs – and he saw himself." Also Wilson Joyce (2008): 225, "Struggling to rise, Tydeus raced with his gaze to meet him: mad with joy and rage when he saw that face gasping for air, saw those fierce eyes, and in the sight *perceived himself* ...". Shackleton Bailey translates: "[Tydeus] recognizes himself in the other" (2003): 57. *sese* could also be rendered "handiwork" (as Mozley (1928), construes it), in which case Tydeus sees in the face of Melanippus his own act of slaying the foe. The scholarly division hinges on the function of *in illo* in 753. Is the antecedent of *illo* simply the face that Tydeus stares into (as Ross, Wilson Joyce, and Shackleton Bailey construe the demonstrative) or is the antecedent more abstract, referring to the whole act of Tydeus' slaying of Melanippus (as Mozley reads)? Both readings are possible, and Statius may be deliberately complicating the image here.

<sup>110</sup> Wilson Joyce (2008): 225 renders the Latin "... [Tydeus] seeing the hot eyes glaring yet hesitant to meet his own," which supplies the object of *figi* as Tydeus' own eyes. The eyes could simply be "hesitating to become fixed," or "rigid," but the emphasis on vision, gaze, and viewership in the scene prefers Wilson's translation.

<sup>111</sup> Hutchinson (1993): 93, finds a comic wit to this image of the erect snake heads that I would love to understand more fully.

swooped down to deliver the divinely sanctioned immortality serum (*decus immortale* 759). Pallas flees the scene, denying Tydeus immortality, and rushes to purge her eyes of the crime she has witnessed.<sup>112</sup> The ‘scene of the crime’ is bookended by images of Pallas’ inability to witness Tydeus in the midst of his swan-song (anti-) *aristeia*. She shields her own eyes at 714, avoiding the sight of Tydeus’ honorable blood, and at 763-65 the Gorgon’s head protects Pallas from viewing Tydeus’ jaws dishonorably sluiced with Melanippus’ brain pulp.<sup>113</sup> Pallas’ failure to save her favorite from his own unbounded rage must be read in conjunction with her timely suppression of the same emotions during Tydeus’ monomachia in Book 2.496-681.<sup>114</sup> There the goddess convinces Tydeus to calm his rage and depart, having received enough help from the gods during his battle, one vs. fifty Thebans (2.682-90).<sup>115</sup> That Pallas there was able to intervene sharply juxtaposes her absence during his even more rage-driven anthropophagy, and further, her displacement by Tisiphone heightens the sense that infernal forces have not only taken control of Tydeus, but that they greatly outmatch their *superi* counterparts.<sup>116</sup>

Pallas’ are not the only eyes offended by Tydeus’ crime. Statius carries the scene through to Book 9, an uncommon feature of Roman epic book endings,<sup>117</sup> and probably

<sup>112</sup> *nefas* defiles. See Masters (1992): 212-13; Braund and Gilbert (2003): 277; Ganiban (2007): 127 n. 46 on *nefas* as a contaminant. Wilson Joyce (2008): 411 n. 765-66, notes the potential association with mystery religion (“mystic lamps” and water drawn from Elisos), in which initiates were purified *before* being allowed vision. Here the process is inverted, and Pallas, having already seen, must be cleansed.

<sup>113</sup> See Wilson Joyce (2008): 410 n. 758-764.

<sup>114</sup> Tydeus himself references his earlier battle during a mid-*aristeia* speech at 8.666-67: *ille ego inexpletis solus qui caedibus hausit | quinquaginta animas* – I’m the killer who—single-handed—took fifty lives!

<sup>115</sup> See Feeney (1991): 364-67, (following C. S. Lewis); Hershkowitz (1998): 259-60, for an allegorical reading of Pallas’ role in this scene.

<sup>116</sup> See Ganiban (2007): 125-27 for a compelling discussion of Tydeus’ more natural connection to Tisiphone and, by implication, Dis, than Pallas.

<sup>117</sup> See Fowler (2000): 251-59 on Book endings generally; McNelis (2007): 133 n. 31.

indicative of the egregiousness of the crime.<sup>118</sup> The Book begins with the complaints of the Argives, Tydeus' fellow warriors, that their own companion had transgressed the laws of hatred in battle (*ipsi etiam minus ingemuere iacentem | Inachidae, culpantque uirum et rupisse queruntur | fas odii* 2-4). And to round off the revulsion of the intratextual audience at Tydeus' crime, Mars, male war god, whose propensity for *furoris* even characterized by Statius openly (*furebas* 9.5), turns away in disgust:

*quin te, diuum implacidissime, quamquam  
praecipuum tunc caedis opus, Gradiue, furebas,  
offensum uirtute ferunt, nec comminus ipsum  
ora sed et trepidos alio torsisse iugales.*

(Although You, Marcher, the least  
squeamish of the Gods, were wreaking havoc at fever pitch,  
You, they say, scowled at such "heroics," averted Your  
face, and even guided your panicky team elsewhere.)  
(9.4-7)

Tydeus has overstepped the bounds of divinely sanctioned *ira*,<sup>119</sup> and as a result, all active audience members, divine or otherwise, turn their eyes away from his/the scene's sight: all except the Gorgoneion on Pallas' *aegis* and, by implication, Tisiphone and the infernal gods. The variety of interwoven gaze within the scene is complicated enough in terms of the intratextual audience (e.g., why does Tydeus see himself in the face of Melanippus' severed head? how are we to understand the role of the Gorgoneion in terms of gaze?), but the scene becomes even more confusing when we factor in the role of reader, extratextual viewer, whose own 'gaze' and response to the subject is focalized vicariously through the multiplicity of viewership within the poem, and from the perspective of the author. Should we, like Pallas and Mars, turn our gaze as readers away

<sup>118</sup> McNelis (2007): 133.

<sup>119</sup> See Braund and Gilbert (2003): 277; Ganiban (2007): 124-25, on breaking the bounds of anger in warfare.

from the scene Statius is narrating? Or should we suffer the consequences of eliding ourselves with such fellow viewers as a severed Gorgon head and the *infernus dei*? We will return to these questions.

and next by the hair into hall was borne  
Grendel's head, where the henchmen were drinking,  
an awe to clan and queen alike,  
a monster of marvel: the men looked on.<sup>120</sup>

Lucan seeks to move us,  
but also to repel,  
distance, and entertain.<sup>121</sup>

I would like to take a side-step to discuss Lucan's rendering of Pompey's decapitation and the role of Medusa in the *Bellum Civile*, both of which prove influential upon Statius in his crafting of the scene of Tydeus' anthropophagy. Elaine Fantham's "Lucan's Medusa-Excursus: Its Design and Purpose" and Martha Malamud's "Pompey's Head and Cato's Snakes" (elaborating on the findings of Fantham) both analyze Lucan's mythological excursus in Book 9.606-889 of the *Bellum Civile* concerning the decapitation of the Gorgon Medusa and her serpentine brood in terms of Ovidian influence. My focus will be to expand on their supplementary claim of the connection between Medusa's head and Pompey's head, and, in particular, the variety of spectatorship and gaze which Lucan lavishes on the decapitation scenes in Books 8 and 9.

Both papers identify the crucial connection between Pompey's gruesome decapitation and the subsequent beheading of Medusa by Perseus in the mythological

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<sup>120</sup> *Beowulf* 1647-50 (tr. Gummere).

<sup>121</sup> Hutchinson (1993): 324.

narrative of Book 9.<sup>122</sup> Both Pompey and Medusa die unseen: Pompey veils his head in an attempt to shield witnesses from viewing his death (eyes closed, mouth shut) (8.612-21), just as Medusa dies with Perseus and Pallas both averting their gaze (9.675-81). In both cases Lucan provides a description of the decapitations which effectively undercuts his narrative credibility. Pompey's head is "claimed" (*fatentur* 666<sup>123</sup>) by witnesses not to have changed in its appearance after death (663-667), but Lucan's next description of the head's embalming completely contradicts this retrojective statement:

*o summi fata pudoris!  
inpius ut Magnum nosset puer, illa uerenda  
regibus hirta coma et generosa fronte decora  
caesaries comprehensa manu est, Pharioque ueruto,  
dum uiuunt uoltus atque os in murmura pulsan  
singultus animae, dum lumina nuda rigescunt,  
suffixum caput est, quo numquam bella iubente  
pax fuit; hoc leges Campumque et rostra mouebat,  
hac facie, Fortuna, tibi, Romana, placebas.*

O destiny of deepest shame!  
So that the ungrateful boy can recognize Magnus, that shaggy  
hair by kings revered and locks which graced his noble  
brow were grasped and on a Pharian spear—  
while his features are alive and sobs of breath impel  
the mouth to murmur, while unclosed eyes are stiffening—  
the head is fixed: when it commanded war, never  
was there peace; it swayed the laws, the Campus and the Rostra;  
with this face you stood proud, Roman Fortune.  
(8.678-86)

Far from the careful arrangement of his corpse Pompey had planned, his head is fixed on a pike, mouth still mumbling (undoing his attempt to remain silent as he died 8.616-17), and his eyes, specifically closed at 615, instead are exposed and staring (*nuda*).<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the head is next embalmed (*arte nefanda*), literally monumentalizing the

<sup>122</sup> Fantham (1992): 110; Malamud (2003): esp. 37-39.

<sup>123</sup> See Erasmo (2007): 113 on *fatentur* and the credibility of Lucan's account.

<sup>124</sup> See Malamud (2003): 36.

changed expression, petrified by poison:

*nec satis infando fuit hoc uidisse tyranno:  
uolt sceleris superesse fidem. tunc arte nefanda  
summota est capiti tabes, raptoque cerebro  
adsiccata cutis, putrisque effluxit ab alto  
umor, et infuso facies solidata ueneno est.*

And the sight of it was not enough for the monstrous tyrant:  
he wants proof of his wickedness to survive. Then by their hideous art  
the fluid is taken from the head, the brain removed  
the skin dried out, and rotten moisture flowed away from the deep  
within, and the features were solidified by drugs instilled  
(8.687-91)

In his description of the death of Medusa in Book 9, Lucan cleverly blends the image of  
authorial credibility with the description of Medusa's decapitation:

*ipsa regit trepidum Pallas, dextraque trementem  
Perseos auersi Cyllenida derigit harpen  
lata colubriferi rumpens confinia colli.  
quos habuit uoltus hamati uolnere ferri  
caesa caput Gorgon! quanto spirare ueneno  
ora rear quantumque oculos effundere mortis!  
nec Pallas spectare potest ...*

Herself does Pallas guide the anxious man, and with Perseus turned away  
she steers the Cyllenian scimitar which trembles in his hand  
and ruptures the wide junction of the snaky neck.  
What a look the Gorgon had, her head cut off  
by the wound of the hook-shaped weapon! How much poison I must think  
her mouth breathed out and how much death her eyes shot forth!  
Even Pallas could not watch ...

(9.675-81)

Just like Perseus and Pallas, Lucan averts his gaze from the actual decapitation. His  
description – shifting from the third to the first-person (*rear*) – *imagines* what the death  
of the Gorgon must have looked like. And his supposition, as Malamud adroitly  
recognizes, represents the very image of Pompey's embalmed head.<sup>125</sup>

Following the Medusa excursus Pompey's head is again brought out (continuing

<sup>125</sup> Malamud (2003): 37.

the increasingly drawn-out process of his demise, see above), this time to confront Caesar in Egypt. This scene caps the narrative of intertwined decapitations in Books 8 and 9, and we must read the confrontation in light of these other episodes. At the end of Book 9, Caesar unveils the head of Pompey:

*sic fatus opertum  
detexit tenuitque caput. iam languida morte  
effigies habitum noti mutauerat oris.  
non primo Caesar damnauit munera uisu  
auertitque oculos; uoltus, dum crederet, haesit;  
utque fidem uidit sceleris tutumque putauit  
iam bonus esse socer, lacrimas non sponte cadentis  
effudit gemitusque expressit pectore laeto.*

So he spoke, exposed  
and held aloft the covered head. Already his appearance, drooping  
in death, had altered the form of the familiar face.  
Caesar at first sight did not condemn the gift  
and turn away his eyes; he lingered till he could believe the face;  
and when he saw the confirmation of the crime and thought it now  
was safe to be the loving father-in-law, he poured out tears which fell  
not of their own accord

(9.1032-39)

Unlike Perseus and Pallas, who avert their gaze from Medusa at the moment of the death-blow (9.676; 681), Caesar stares directly at the head which Lucan has cast metaphorically and symbolically as the head of the Gorgon.<sup>126</sup> As Malamud notes, Caesar is linked explicitly with the unnamed infernal deity invoked by Erichtho during the necromancy scene in *BC* 6. This deity causes the earth to tremble, strikes the Furies with their own whips, even rules the *superi dei*, and most noteworthy to our study, can look upon the uncovered Gorgon (6.744-49).<sup>127</sup> Like the unnamed deity, Caesar, assimilating the powers of demonic infernal forces, is immune to the gaze of the Gorgonic head of

<sup>126</sup> As Wick (2004): 436 n. 1036 notes, the language here recalls the moment of the Gorgon's severed head in Ovid, which further links the scene of Pompey's unveiling with the 'Medusamotiv': Zu *auertere* und *haerere* im Zusammenhang mit Medusa cf. e.g. Ov. *Met.* 5,179 + 183.

<sup>127</sup> See Malamud (2003): 38.



Pompey.

We can take the claim of Caesar's elision with the *infernī dei* a bit further. The night after the battle of Pharsalus, the Caesarian forces are haunted and frenzied by "maddened dreams" (*somni ... furentes* 7.764), none more ferociously than Caesar himself. Shades of slain countrymen haunt Caesar like the Furies (Eumenides) haunted Orestes (778), and "infernal monsters" lash him (*hunc infera monstra flagellant* 783). Remarkably, instead of being hampered by this onslaught of demonic madness, Caesar is able to channel the *furor* for his own cause.<sup>128</sup> Lucan goes as far as to claim, through apostrophe, that Caesar and the Furies/infernal deities must be working together to produce such monstrous *nefas*:

*at tu quos scelerum superos, quas rite uocasti  
Eumenidas, Caesar? Stygii quae numina regni  
infernumque nefas et mersos nocte furores  
in pia tam saeue gesturos bella litasti?*

—But you, Caesar, what gods of wickedness, what Eumenides  
did you invoke with ritual? What powers of the Stygian realm,  
what horror of hell and Furies stepped in night  
did you propitiate when soon to wage a wicked war so savagely?—  
(7.168-71)

Much of Caesar's infernal madness (and Lucan's scripting of it) is articulated in visual terms. Caesar cannot pull his eyes away from the slaughter daylight exposes on the fields of Pharsalus (*nulla loci facies reuocat feralibus aruis | haerentes oculos* – the appearance of the place in no way checks his eyes from fastening | upon the deadly fields, 7.788-

<sup>128</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998): 20. Contrast the opposite effects of Pompey's similarly haunting dream in which a Fury-like Julia appears, raving (3.9-34). While both Pompey and Caesar ignore the negative implications of their dreams, Caesar is strengthened by his nightmarish apparitions and Pompey is destroyed by his. See Hershkowitz (1998): 38 n. 89.

89).<sup>129</sup> He sees gore-fed rivers and towering mounds of corpses (789-90), he watches bodies sink into putrefaction (790). It delights him (*iuuat*) that he cannot see the Emathian land, and that his eyes scan carnage-strewn fields (794-95). Most disturbingly, he breakfasts among the heaps of the slain in order to discern the faces and features of the dead (792-94). Caesar then denies the corpses proper burial and funeral rites, and thrusts the sight of this spectacle of *nefas* on the heavens (*ne laeta furens scelerum spectacula perdat, | inuidet igne rogi miseris, caeloque nocenti | ingerit Emathiam* – And not to lose the joyful sight of his wickedness, in a frenzy | he refuses those unfortunates the pyre’s mflame and forces on to guilty | heaven the sight of Emathia, 797-99). We must, I think, compare Caesar’s intently grotesque gazing at the Pharsalian slaughter with Pompey’s own inability to witness the same brutal scene. Again, Lucan apostrophizes:

*nonne iuuat pulsum bellis cessisse nec istud  
perspectasse nefas? spumantes caede cateruas  
respice turbatosque incursu sanguinis amnes,  
et soceri miserere tui.*

Does not it delight you to retire defeated from battle and not watch  
this horror to the end? Look back at the squadrons covered  
in foaming gore, at rivers muddied by the influx of blood,  
and take pity on your father-in-law.

(699-701)

The emphasis in both scenes is on the act of viewing and “spectacle:” *perspectasse* at 700 is matched by *spectat* (791), *spectacula* (797).<sup>130</sup> In both cases spectatorship is tied to “pleasure” (*iuuat*). Caesar, elided with demonic Eumenidean forces, can view (delightedly) what others shun from their sight.

Caesar is, in effect, the anti-Perseus. Perseus, allied with Pallas and Mercury, is

<sup>129</sup> Caesar’s eyes, his gaze, seem to ‘cling’ (*haereo*) always a bit longer than they should: here and also at BC 9.1036, his face clings to Pompey’s severed head for an uncomfortably long time.

<sup>130</sup> See Hutchinson (1993): 87 n. 17.

guided (even controlled<sup>131</sup>) by the *superi dei* throughout his 'heroic' encounter with Medusa. And the entire effort is shrouded in averted and indirect glances. Caesar, conversely, elides with the *inferi dei*, even perhaps cast as a Fury himself,<sup>132</sup> and greedily gazes on the destruction he has wrought culminating in his confrontation with the Gorgonic head of his son-in-law.

Much like the scene of Tydeus' anthropophagy in Statius' *Thebaid*, Lucan, through various intratextual audience reactions and visual response to scenes of graphic/grotesque horror, creates a complex play of focalization.<sup>133</sup> As a reading audience, we are the furthest removed in the layering of perspectives Lucan has scripted in his visual spectacle, and our viewing of the scenes depends on the views (often divergent) of spectators within the narrative, and of Lucan as narrator/author himself. Pompey's decapitation in the skiff off the Egyptian coast, for example, is announced as a visual spectacle by Pompey himself, who commands his wife Cornelia and son Sextus to stand afar and watch:<sup>134</sup>

*remane, temeraria coniunx,  
et tu, nate, precor, longeque a litore casus  
expectate meos et in hac ceruice tyranni  
explorate fidem ...*

<sup>131</sup> Papaioannou (2005): 222-23, discusses divinity's role in the Medusa excursus, and the "inactive" anti-heroic Perseus: "Minerva is the real mastermind of the Gorgon hunting plan, which is actually introduced as a 'deal' (*pacta*, 9.666) conceived and directed by the goddess (9.666ff.) ... Even the severing of Medusa's head is only seemingly performed by Perseus, for it is Minerva who actually directs and appropriates his trembling (*tremens*) armed hand (9.675f.), which, thus alienated from its owner, is identified with the (borrowed) weapon that it holds."

<sup>132</sup> Cf. 7.557: *his Caesar, rabies populis stimulusque furorem* – Here Caesar, maddening the people and goading them to frenzy. See Hershkowitz (1998): 221.

<sup>133</sup> For complexity of viewership see Fowler (1990) in *Aeneid* and (2000): esp. 99-107, in Silius' ekphrastic account of narrative panels in the *Punica*, e.g.: "In theory we can read the points of view of (at the very least) the characters in the pictures, the artists who made them, the receiving audience of Romans in Liternum, Hannibal and the Carthaginian viewers at the moment described by Silius, Silius himself as narrator and/or author, the contemporary Roman audience of the *Punica* implied and/or real – and ourselves."

<sup>134</sup> See Ahl (1974) on Pompey's need to be witnessed, his need for public recognition and glory.

Stay behind, my reckless wife,  
and you too, my son, I pray, and watch my fortunes  
far from the shore, and on this neck put to the test  
the tyrant's loyalty

(8.579-82)

*ceruice* not-so-subtly (and ironically, coming from Pompey's mouth) announces that the audience – reader, Cornelia and Sextus – will be watching the spectacle of Pompey's decapitation. Lucan then complicates the role of the spectator he has masterfully set up for the scene by announcing the chilling paradox of Cornelia's viewing dilemma: *attonitoque metu nec quoquam auertere uisus | nec Magnum spectare potest* – and in stunned terror cannot turn her gaze away; | cannot look at Magnus (591-92). Cornelia's reaction, stunned with fear, neither able to look nor avert her eyes, anticipates our own reaction to the horrific events of Pompey's final moments.

Even Pompey's reaction to his death depends on complicated focalizations, as he views his own death self-reflexively, as an external audience, attempting to create an image of his death worthy of Stoic praise to be remembered by his wife and son (*uidet hanc Cornelia caedem | Pompeiusque meus* – Cornelia sees the murder, | my Pompey too, 632-33), and future generations of Romans, whom he imagines watching him (*saecula Romanos numquam tacitura labores | attendunt, aeuumque sequens speculatur ab omni | orbe ratem Phariamque fidem* – 'Future ages which never will be silent about the toils of Rome | are watching now, and time to come observes from all the world | the boat and loyalty of Pharos,' 622-24). At first he attempts to block the audience – intratextual and extratextual, those present and anyone who might 'view' his death from accounts of it in the future – from viewing his murder by veiling his face and closing his eyes (613-17), but as the blades strike his side, he becomes actor in and spectator of his own tragedy,

recalling the description of his dream the night before Pharsalia (7.7-14). As Malamud notes, this doubleness of his character is cleverly emphasized by the phrase *seque probat moriens* (620), which doubles in definition: Pompey is the Stoic who “proves” himself by dying, but also the actor who “applauds” his own Stoic death.<sup>135</sup>

By his efforts to maintain the image of a Stoic in death, Pompey also seeks to monumentalize himself. He literally becomes a statue as he dies (*seruatque immobile corpus* – he keeps his body motionless, 620), and Lucan’s description verges on *ekphrasis*. Pompey attempts to maintain an image of immutable calm that future generations will ‘view’ him as they might a statue – Lucan here functions as a literary sculptor. In grotesque paradox, Pompey’s “applauding” of his own death is followed by his true monumentalization in the form of petrifying embalming, which creates a physical monument of his failed Stoic demise. This is the true “sculpture” – through a second *ekphrastic* description (682-91) – of Pompey that Lucan records for posterity, and which Caesar will confront directly in Book 9 as the symbolic deformed head of the Gorgon Medusa.

The thematics of Medusa’s gaze and the ambiguity of its potency also provide a complexity of focalization and viewership. Medusa’s gaze functions as the focal point for the entire decapitation narrative, and the reader’s attention moves alternately between the Gorgon and her petrifying stare.<sup>136</sup> The complexity lies in the ambiguity of the danger of Medusa’s gaze: “did she kill by the act of looking, or merely by being seen full-face?”<sup>137</sup> Repeatedly, the answer seems to favor the latter: the land of Libya is rough with stones which Medusa’s face had looked upon (*non mollia suco | sed dominae uultu conspectus*

<sup>135</sup> See Malamud (2003): 34.

<sup>136</sup> See Fantham (1992): 99; Papaioannou (2005): 223.

<sup>137</sup> Trans. Fantham (1992): 100.

*aspera saxis* – not softened by the furrow, | but rough with stones its mistress's face had looked upon, 9.624). But at 652 the play on active/passive grammatical ambiguity complicates matters still further: *nullum animal uisus patiens* - no living thing can bear the sight/can bear to be seen.<sup>138</sup> Most dramatically, at the moment of decapitation, Pallas quickly spreads the serpent hair and covers the face of Medusa in order that Perseus avoid deadly petrification even though he *looked away* (*uultusque gelassent | Perseos auersi* 681-82).

The gaze takes on a frightening metapoetic shift at 632-35, when we, the reader, are exposed in frontal view to the head of Medusa. The serpents: *femineae cui more comae per terga solutae | surgunt aduersa subrecta fronte colubrae | uipereumque fluit depredo crine uenenum* – like a woman's hair flowing loose on her back, rise rearing up as her face confronts us, and from her combed locks the viper's venom streams.<sup>139</sup> Medusa's face confronts us directly. *aduersa ... fronte*, as Fantham notes, is a traditional idiom of opponents locked in battle, and is used repeatedly in Lucan Book 7 of kinsmen facing each other.<sup>140</sup> In facing Medusa full-frontal, Lucan plays with a variety of metapoetic and viewer response special effects. By meeting the Gorgon's face, we are symbolically turned to stone, the victimized objects of her gaze. This corrupting of visual layering – whereby the text suddenly sees us – uncomfortably breaks in on our voyeurism as readers/watchers of the scene Lucan is describing: the seer has suddenly become the

<sup>138</sup> Trans. Fantham (1992): 104.

<sup>139</sup> The text contains Franken's transposition of 632-33.

<sup>140</sup> See Fantham (1992): 101-03: "first in Caesar's exhortation *ne aduersa conspecti fronte parentes | commoueat* (7.321); then in battle itself: *uidere parentes | frontibus aduersis fraternaue comminus arma* (465), varied in Caesar's intervention: *aduersosque iubet ferro confundere uoltus* (575), and renewed for the last time at 7.621: *ore quis aduerso demisso faucibus ense | expulserit moriens animam*."

seen.<sup>141</sup>

We are also forced to engage in a staring competition with the Gorgon, sharing the experience of the opponents locked in battle whom Lucan describes (*adversa ... fronte*) repeatedly in Book 7.<sup>142</sup> Since our gaze as readers is focalized through Perseus' veiled side-glances (we like him, only witness the decapitation through the conjectural description of the narrator, who is equally blind to the action), we are made, by the metapoetic moment, to face the "face" that Perseus (and even Pallas) never had to. Moreover, as it is entirely unclear how exactly Medusa's gaze-power functions, we face vicariously Perseus' fear of being petrified by simply having Medusa see us, and not necessarily the reverse. This metapoetic moment also anticipates the confrontation between Caesar and the severed Gorgonic head of Pompey in Book 9, providing the added viewing dilemma of eliding ourselves – if we choose to stare back – with the demonic Caesar who alone can face the Gorgon's gaze unhesitatingly.<sup>143</sup>

There is a further difficulty of focalization during the confrontation between Pompey's head and Caesar in Book 9. The fact that Caesar is forced to dissemble to the

<sup>141</sup> This is exactly the dilemma of triangulation described by Philostratus in his discussion of the artistic renderings of Narcissus at *Im.* 1.23 (though the images may be only imagined, Elsner (2007): 137-38). The image, which contains the intratextual gaze between Narcissus and his own reflection in the pool, breaks down as the layering of viewership involves the described viewer of the painted scene and the extratextual reader of Philostratus: οὗτος μὲν οὐκ οὐδ' ἐπαῖει τι ἡμῶν, ἀλλ' ἐμπέπτκωκεν ἐπὶ τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῖς ὥσθι καὶ αὐτοῖς ὄμμασιν ... - this youth does not hear anything we say, but he is immersed, eyes and ears alike (1.23.3). Are we reflected in the pool as well? Are we in fact trapped in the self-obsessed scene which petrifies Narcissus, and has Narcissus become the viewer of our own reflective tragedy? This intrusion on our viewership as readers/watchers disrupts the safety of voyeurism. This is compounded by the fact that Philostratus describes Narcissus' gaze as γοργόν (1.23.4) – and indeed, many images of preserved Narcissus frescoes contain the pool's reflection which bears striking resemblance to the Gorgon head (e.g., The Fresco of Narcissus from the Casa di M. Loreius Tiburtinus; the Fresco of Narcissus with Eros and Echo from the Casa dell' Argenteria, Pompeii (VI.7, 20/22)). Just as Narcissus is 'frozen/petrified' in perpetual self-reflection, the Gorgon, looking full-face at the viewer/reader, petrifies us. See Elsner (2007): esp. 167-70 for a full discussion.

<sup>142</sup> See Fantham (1992): 102.

<sup>143</sup> I fail to see the indication anywhere of Caesar's "reluctance to look at Pompey's head when it is shown to him" as Erasmo (2007): 123 observes. *non primo Caesar damnauit munera uisu | auertitque oculos; uultus, dum crederet, haesit* (9.1034-36) – he seems not to condemn the gift, not to avert his eyes, and to hold fast his gaze.

audience of his devotees rather than express openly his joy at receiving his nemesis' head (9.1038-42), indicates a certain power associated with Pompey's Gorgon-like gaze.<sup>144</sup> As Eldred notes, both Caesar and Pompey become the simultaneously subject/object of each other's gaze. The extratextual viewer, reader as spectator, then, is trapped, oscillating between each intratextual viewer's position, "forced to choose where lies her desire."<sup>145</sup> While we may hesitate to pledge our allegiance one way or the other, the audience watching the confrontation in the Egyptian palace – Caesar's minions – ultimately decide for us. The crowd: *abscondunt gemitus et pectora laeta | fronte tegunt, hilaresque nefas spectare cruentum, | o bona libertas, cum Caesar lugeat, audent* – hide their groans and veil their hearts | with happy brow, and cheerfully–O happy liberty!–they dare | to gaze upon the bloody crime though Caesar grieves (1106-8). Pained with the same viewing dilemma as Lucan and his readers, they repress their groans, veil their hearts with cheer, and gaze at the bloody *nefas*.

Lucan, as author/audience in the layering of focalization, offers his own particular influence on our reading/viewing of the text, most dramatically through constant authorial interjections. The prelude to Pompey's decapitation contains, as we have seen, scornful apostrophes of Egypt, the gods, and Ptolemy (8.542-560), and of Fortuna (599-606). Lucan breaks off his account mid-head severing to apostrophize brutally Septimius for his role in the *nefas* (676-81), and Ptolemy again after the account (692-700). And in Book 9, during the confrontation, head-to-face, between Pompey and Caesar, Lucan directs his scorn against Caesar, condemning his hypocrisy by lengthy apostrophe (9.1046-62). Lucan's disbelief and anguish expressed in his interjections parallels the

<sup>144</sup> See Ormand (1994): 54-55; Eldred (2002): 79.

<sup>145</sup> Eldred (2002): 79.



shocked reaction of the intratextual audience<sup>146</sup> – Cornelia’s reaction to watching Pompey die (8.591-92), the averted gaze of Perseus and Pallas at the decapitation of Medusa, the pained viewing audience at the Egyptian court reacting to Caesar’s crocodile tears (9.1104-08) – which cues the response of the extratextual audience, who read/watch on, despite our own implication in Lucan’s narrative crime.

Lucan’s apostrophes serve to shock us, but they also create a dilemma in the reader. The most famous event of apostrophe in Lucan appears in the *praeteritio* before his description of the battle of Pharsalia:

*hanc fuge, mens, partem belli tenebrisque relinque,  
nullaque tantorum discat me uate malorum,  
quam multum bellis liceat ciuilibus, aetas.  
a potius pereant lacrimae pereantque querellae:  
quidquid in hac acie gessisti, Roma, tacebo.*

Mind of mine, shun this part of the battle and leave it to darkness  
and from my words let no age learn of horrors  
so immense, of how much is licensed in civil war.  
better that these tears and protests go unheard:  
whatever you did in this battle, Rome, I shall not tell.  
(7.552-56)

The authorial dilemma – to narrate crimes of civil war – is a personal one to Lucan: he addresses his mind (*mens*) specifically. Masters cites a poetic conflict in the author: “Lucan is at war with himself, torn between a tradition his *pietas* demands that he respect, and the requirement of innovation, whose price is the *nefas* of parricide, of destroying what gave him birth.”<sup>147</sup> Lucan wishes he could relegate this part of the tale (and his poem) to darkness (*tenebrisque relinque*), essentially blindfold himself and his reading public so that no age might learn of the immense horrors of Pharsalia (*nullaque*

<sup>146</sup> See Segal (1994): 266, for a similar interplay between intra- and extratextual audience response to graphic horror in the Tereus and Philomela episode in Ovid *Met.* 6.424-674.

<sup>147</sup> Masters (1992): 215. See also Henderson (1998): esp. 185-86; Hershkowitz (1998): 197-98, for similar sentiments.

*tantorum discat me uate malorum*). Although Lucan's intrusive narrative presence helps to distance him from the story he tells, it nevertheless does not occlude his directorial lens. The personal anguish associated with narrating the crimes of civil war guides our own anguish in terms of reading his eventual description. Just as Lucan is implicated in the narration of events of *nefas*, so too are we the readers condemned in reading it: "read Lucan. And 'be damned'. With the poet and Caesar: *damnabimur* (9.986)." <sup>148</sup>

The scenes of decapitation in Lucan function largely through cinematic visuality and the variety of viewer perspectives through which the extratextual audience's perception of events is channelled. From the examples we have seen, the scenes are framed, paradoxically, around the conspicuous difficulty of visual representation: a 'negative-gaze.' Characters avert their eyes; the author himself seeks to relegate his description to darkness or to explicit conjecture; and the only character untroubled by the events around him (Caesar) elides himself with the demonic forces of the *infernī dei*. As an extratextual audience, we are implored *not* to look when Lucan paints his scene; by looking we become a voyeuristic audience in that we see what the author and the characters within the text beg us not to. And amid all the spectacular *nefas*, we too, like Cornelia watching Pompey's demise, stunned with fear, cannot look, yet cannot turn our gaze away: *nec ... auertere uisus | nec ... spectare potest* (591-92).

E come 'l pan per fame si manduca,  
così 'l sovràn li denti a l'altro pose  
là 've 'l cervel s'aggiugne con la nuca:

Non altrimenti Tidëo si rose

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<sup>148</sup> Henderson (1998): 186. Also: "[Lucan's] extraordinary poem breaks rules, inflicts pain and suffering. Don't bother to reclaim this classic in the name of a 'literature': this tyrannical text – wild, accusing, ranting – screams a curse on its readers and upon itself: it *challenges*." (168). See also Johnson (1987): 118-21 on Lucan's (turbulent) relationship with Caesar (and Caesarism).

le tempie a Menalippo per disdegno,  
che quei faceva il teschio e l'altre cose.

La bocca sollevò dal fiero pasto  
quel peccator, forbendola a' capelli  
del capo ch'elli avea di retro guasto.

... and like a starving man devouring bread  
the upper one gnawed into him below  
just where the brain-pan meets the spinal cord,  
and, not unlike Tydeus crunching up  
the brow of Menalippus in his rage,  
attacked the skull and all the trimmings too ...  
From the bestial dish the sinner raised his mouth  
and used what hair was left (upon that skull  
he'd hollowed from the back) to wipe his lips.<sup>149</sup>

Pompey's physical death and decapitation in *BC* spans over 70 lines (8.618-91), and his extended symbolic decapitation continues to the end of Book 9 and the (its) confrontation with Caesar in the Egyptian court. This exceedingly drawn-out death scene displays Lucan's art at its most sadistic, anticipating the elaborately impossible murders of modern horror film.<sup>150</sup> What Statius has done with the scene of Melanippus' decapitation and Tydeus' anthropophagy is conflate all the extended scenes of Pompey's decapitation seamlessly into one 'cinematic' moment.

Physically, Pompey's death and Melanippus' death bear striking similarities. Both men are dying as their heads are removed: Pompey is stabbed at 8.618-19 before his eventual decapitation at 667; Melanippus is speared at 8.727, carried to Tydeus by Capaneus at 746-49, before his decapitation at 753-55. Both men are gasping for air (*BC* 670 *spirantia* ... *ora*, 682-83 *os* ... *singultus*; *Theb.* 752-53 *singultantia* ... *ora*); and the

<sup>149</sup> Dante *Inferno* canto 32.127-32; 33.1-3 (tr. Phillips).

<sup>150</sup> Elaborately exaggerated death-scenes are 'part and parcel' of many modern horror films. Cf. e.g., Dario Argento's "Suspiria" (1977), "La Terza madre" (2007); Takashi Miike "Ôdishon" (1999); the drawn-out torture and crucifixion of Jesus in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

eyes of each are still staring (*BC* 683 *lumina nuda*; *Theb.* 756 *lumina torua ... adhuc dubitantia figi*). Both heads receive further ‘criminal’ assault after separation from the *truncus*: Pompey’s head is embalmed *arte nefanda* (688), and Tydeus gnaws on Melanippus’ head, breaking the bounds of what is acknowledged as *fas* (his companions *rupisse queruntur fas odii* 9.3-4).

The scene of divine aversion (in particular the aversion of Pallas, 9.681-83) during the Medusa excursus in *BC* is paralleled by the self-expulsion of Pallas and Mars at the crimes of Tydeus’ anthropophagy (8.760-65; 9.4-8 respectively). And the confrontation between Caesar and Pompey’s severed head in Book 9 of the *Bellum Civile* finds its match in the staring-competition between Tydeus and Melanippus’ head at *Theb.* 8.751-56. Remarkably, Statius even includes the symbolic correspondence between human head and Gorgoneion (which Lucan created via mythological excursus), as the Gorgon Medusa on Pallas’ *aegis* reacts physically to the *nefas* of Tydeus’ anthropophagy (8.763-65). We could even take the acknowledgment further, citing that both Gorgonic Pompey and *aegis*-bound Medusa in Statius show signs of life after death: Pompey at 9.1033-34, has changed his expression as it is brought out to Caesar, continuing this elaborately extended grotesque death-scene (*iam languida morte | effigies habitum noti mutauerat oris* – already his appearance, drooping | in death, had altered the form of the familiar face).<sup>151</sup> Where Lucan neatly intertwined and extended scenes of Pompey’s decapitation, Statius lumps the elements into one gruesome cinematic shot.

As in the *Bellum Civile*, the emphasis at the end of *Thebaid* 8 is on the visual components and complex focalization. As with Lucan, who frames the decapitation of Pompey as something to be watched (Pompey’s command to Cornelia and Sextus at

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<sup>151</sup> See Erasmo (2007): 122-23.

8.579-81), so Statius articulates his scene explicitly in terms of a viewing spectacle as Dis' injunction at 8.71-72 is manifested in Tydeus' spectacular *nefas*. Dis demands a spectacle – of beastly anthropophagy, and denied burial and funeral rites (71-74) – that will (sarcastically) “delight” the gods and Jupiter in particular (*iuuet ista ferum spectare Tonantem* 74), and the whole scene at the end of Book 8 is performed directly ‘in the face’ of the *superi dei*. Lucan, we recall, uses similar terminology to describe Caesar’s breakfast on the corpse-filled field of Pharsalia: *ne laeta furens scelerum spectacula perdat, | inuidet igne rogi miseris, caeloque nocenti | ingerit Emathiam* – And not to lose the joyful sight of his wickedness, in a frenzy | he refuses those unfortunates the pyre’s flame and forces on to guilty | heaven the sight of Emathia (7.797-99). The difference, of course, is if there is any element of divine machinery functioning in the *Bellum Civile* it has left long before Lucan’s narrative begins, leaving the forces of the *inferi dei* as the main movers and pushers. In Statius, however, we have frontrow seats to the exchange of power; Tydeus’ shift from the protection and nurturing of Pallas to that of Tisiphone marks a major shift in the functioning of cosmic order (*plus exigit ultrix | Tisiphone* – vindictive Tisiphonê drove him | one step further, 757-58).

Tydeus’ elision with infernal powers in the form of his induced madness by Tisiphone mirrors Caesar’s own connection with the *inferi dei* elaborated above. Tydeus is, from the start, verging on madness, *immodicus irae* (1.41), and of all the characters in Statius’ narrative we might have expected him to fall under the *aegis* of Tisiphone rather than the more customary Pallas. Tydeus’ interaction with Dis in Book 8 is preceded by an earlier moment of criminal teamwork of sorts. Tisiphone intervenes during a fight between Tydeus and Eteocles by ensuring the spear-cast by Tydeus will miss its mark – a

spear-cast, we are told, would have ended the war, had it not been for Tisiphone:

*ibat atrox finem positura duello  
lancea (conuertere oculos utrimque fauentes  
Sidonii Graique dei), crudelis Erinys  
obstat et infando differt Eteoclea fratri.*

A ferocious weapon hurtling to put a stop  
to the war. All eyes were on it, all men for it; patron Gods  
of both sides—Sidonian and Greek—watched as the cruel Fury  
blocked it, keeping Eteocles safe for his infamous brother.  
(8.684-87)

The significance of the spear-cast is exemplified by the visual attention it draws from men and gods alike, all fixate on the potential outcome, but it is Tisiphone (not Pallas) who intervenes in order that the brothers can meet at the end of Book 11.<sup>152</sup>

Like Caesar (whom Statius is directly evoking), Tydeus' connection with the *infernus dei* gives him symbolic demonic powers, manifested in his staring contest with the Gorgonic head of Melanippus. Pallas and Mars avert their gaze from Tydeus' *nefas*, just as Pallas does during the Medusa excursus in *Bellum Civile* 9. In the *Thebaid*, Pallas goes as far as having to cleanse her eyes in a sort of inverted Mystery rite (see above). The symbolic link between Melanippus' head and Medusa is affirmed by the direct reference to the Gorgoneion on Pallas' *aegis*. The physical reaction of the gorgon Medusa to the defilement of another severed head is a grotesque touch by Statius, but it also highlights the symbolic connection between the two.<sup>153</sup>

The Gorgon head appears in Statius again at the most heightened moment of horror and *nefas* in the poem, just as the brothers' duel begins at 11.414-15: ... *et Gorgone cruda uirago abstitit* - the Virago (sporting her Gorgon's head). The appearance of the Gorgon head at the two most horrific scenes in the poem indicate its apotropaic

<sup>152</sup> See Ganiban (2007): 125-26 n. 39.

<sup>153</sup> See Wilson Joyce (2008): 411 n. 762.

power, shielding Pallas from the contamination of viewing gruesome *nefas*. Interestingly, Statius inverts the traditional function of the Gorgon's apotropaic gaze: instead of casting a fearsome intimidating sight it now blocks the goddess from viewing a fearsome intimidating sight.<sup>154</sup>

But the other function of the Gorgon gaze is its petrifying power. Even after death, Medusa's head is known to have terrific powers, as indicated by the variety of literary accounts of Perseus' slaying of the Gorgon and the subsequent use of her head.<sup>155</sup> Of course in *Thebaid* 8, the suddenly animated Medusa head does not literally petrify Tydeus and Melanippus, but its gaze has the effect of petrifying the scene of Tydeus' anthropophagy, creating an *ekphrastic* 'freeze-frame' of the crime. A statue group from the pediment of the Temple of Pyrgi from the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE captures this moment exactly.<sup>156</sup> Tydeus gnaws Melanippus' head while Pallas looks on, grasping her *aegis* and thrusting the Gorgoneion forward, while her left hand contains the immortality elixir she had intended to give Tydeus.

<sup>154</sup> McNelis (2007): 58.

<sup>155</sup> See Pindar *Pyth.* 10.46-48: ἔπεφνέν τε Γοργόνα, καὶ ποικίλον κάρα | δρακόντων φόβαισιν ἤλυθε νασιώταις | λίθινον θάνατον φέρων – he killed the Gorgon, and came back with her head that glittered with serpent-locks, to kill the islanders by turning them to stone; Ovid *Met.* 5.227-29: *quin etiam mansura dabo monimenta per aeuum | inque domo soceri semper spectabere nostri, | ut mea se sponsi soletur imagine coniunx* – but I will make you a monument that will endure for ages, and in the house of my father-in-law you will always stand in view so that my wife may find solace in the statue of her promised lord; Luc. *BC* 9.654-58, anachronistically:

*illa sub Hesperiiis stantem Titana columnis  
in cautes Atlanta dedit; caeloque timente  
olim Phlegraeo stantis serpente gigantas  
erexit montes, bellumque inmane deorum  
Pallados e medio confecit pectore Gorgon.*

She turned to stone the Titan, Atlas, who stood beneath  
the Pillars of the West; and long ago, when heaven  
feared the Giants supported on Phlegraean snakes,  
she raised them up as mountains and the Gorgon on the centre  
of Pallas' breast concluded the frightful battle of the gods.

<sup>156</sup> Temple at Pyrgi, Museo Villa Giulia, Rome. See Bonfante and Swaddling (2006): 26 for a detailed description.

The *ekphrastic* framing of the scene by the gaze of Medusa also influences its focalization. Tydeus' crime is focalized through the Gorgon head, since it is the only active intratextual audience member who has not turned away in disgust. Our association as an extratextual audience with the Gorgon Medusa is unsettling, as we might be expected to follow the lead of the gods who avert their eyes. By continuing to read/watch, we elide ourselves with infernal forces, burning our eyes while Pallas rushes off to cleanse hers (764-66).

As an audience, our perspective jumps between Medusa's external intratextual gaze and the scene she is watching, which contains the two perspectives of Tydeus and Melanippus' head, engaging in a staring competition. Just as the reader as spectator oscillates between the perspectives of Pompey and Caesar during their staring competition in *BC* 9, we are caught in the same viewing trap with Tydeus and Melanippus. But whereas Lucan explicitly avoids description of Pompey's gaze (does he look back at Caesar? are his eyes still *nuda* as they were at 8.684?), Statius describes Melanippus' eyes as avoiding the gaze of Tydeus (*lumina ... adhuc dubitantia figi* – eyes glaring yet hesitant to meet his own, 756).

That Statius is crafting a scene modeled on the confrontation between Caesar and Pompey's head in *BC* 9 seems clear, but through this encounter he may be making another literary allusion as well.<sup>157</sup> McNelis makes an interesting connection between

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<sup>157</sup> In a note on the scene, Wilson Joyce (2008) argues that Tydeus' call for Melanippus' head functions ritualistically as the call for the head of the "Dark (October) Horse," a ritual held in honor of Mars in the Campus Martius on the Ides of October (409 n. 736-41). After the chariot race, the best horse of the winning team was stabbed with a spear and decapitated, and its "tail" (Burkert (1983): 69, suggests its phallus) was carried bleeding to the Regia to be preserved. Following the decapitation was a ritualistic battle, meant to vent unbounded rage in a life-affirming way (Burkert (1983): 53-54). Wilson Joyce encourages us to read Tydeus' staring competition with Melanippus as the mock battle of the October Horse ritual. And, as Wilson Joyce acknowledges, the horror of the scene for Roman readers – alongside the cannibalism – would result from the defilement of the head of the (symbolic) October Horse, "a



Tydeus' self-recognition as he looks into Melanippus' face at 8.753 (*seseque agnouit in illo* – in his sight *perceived himself*) and a similar moment of self-recognition as Aeneas scans pictures of himself and other heroes of the Trojan War adorning Juno's temple in Carthage at *Aen.* 1.488: *se quoque principibus permixtum agnouit Achiuis* – And he detected himself, mixed in with the Achaean commanders.<sup>158</sup> Of the images Aeneas views, one depicts the exploits of Tydeus' son Diomedes after his slaughtering of Rhesus and other Trojans during the night raid (*Aen.* 1.471: *Tydides multa vestabat caede cruentus* – Hideously butchered by Tydeus' blood-drenched son, Diomedes). Statius echoes the description of Tydeus' son in the *Aeneid* at the outset of book 9, when Tydeus himself is described as 'bloody' (*cruenti | Tydeos*). These scenes and all the others have a literary background in either the *Iliad* (Diomedes' raid derives from *Il.* 10) or in other poems of the epic cycle (*Aethiopis*, *Cypria*), and Virgil seems to intentionally "evoke the sequentially oriented narrative style of the epic cycle."<sup>159</sup> The relationship, McNelis argues, following Barchiesi, between the *Aeneid* and the literary past is captured by analogy through Aeneas' recognition of himself in the temple artwork, crystallizing the dynamic relationship between earlier representations of Aeneas and the current scene Virgil is describing.<sup>160</sup> The verbal parallel between Aeneas' and Tydeus' moments of self-recognition invite a similar conclusion: perhaps Tydeus' seeing himself through

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desecration of the very ritual intended to reestablish communal control over the spirit of war" (409 n. 736-41). These claims might be further supported by the references to Diomedes' blood-thirsty horses during the chariot race of Book 6. Hippodamus, driving an opposing chariot, falls to the ground: *Thraces equi ut uidere iacentem | Hippodamum, redit illa fames, iam iamque trementem | partiti furiis* ... - when his Thracian horses saw | him fallen, their infamous hunger returned: they went berserk, | would have torn the trembling man to pieces ... (6.486-88). Just as Melanippus embodies the "Dark Horse," so ironically, Hippomedon is, perhaps ironically, "Horse-Tamer." The horses (in)famous hunger suddenly returns like a fit of madness, and they race to "divide" his body in their frenzy. The horses' hunger for human flesh anticipates Tydeus' own frenzied hunger to devour Melanippus, but in Book 8 the roles are reversed.

<sup>158</sup> See McNelis (2007): 134-35.

<sup>159</sup> McNelis (2007): 135. See also Barchiesi (1999): 333-34.

<sup>160</sup> Barchiesi (1999): 333; McNelis (2007): 134.

Melanippus also comes from the literary past, in this case of the cyclic epics (from which his scene of cannibalism is clearly derived).<sup>161</sup>

Whatever the exact explanation for Tydeus' self-reflexive moment, it represents, above all, the most complicated viewing dilemma in the scene, capped by a moment of utter insanity that can only end in a bizarre autosarcophagous blood-splattering: Tydeus would make a lousy Narcissus. Our perspective as extratextual viewer shifts between a variety of viewpoints framing the scene of Tydeus and Melanippus and within their own staring competition itself. The uneasiness we feel sliding between Tydeus' maddened glare and Melanippus' trepidatious avoidance of direct eye contact is exacerbated by Tydeus' self-recognition, which bleeds into each perspective: no matter whose perspective we choose, we see and are seen by 'bloody' Tydeus.

Statius plays with the perspective he provides the reading audience as a narrator. Whereas Lucan (author/narrator/extratextual audience) is omnipresent during his narrative and the scene of Pompey's decapitation in particular, Statius is virtually nowhere to be found. Lucan, as we have seen, tries time and again to blind our eyes from the events he describes by breaking off his narrative, attempting to "consign his subject to darkness."<sup>162</sup> This occurs most dramatically at *BC* 7.552-56 in the midst of retelling the battle of Pharsalus. Statius, conversely, does not interject until *after* the duel between Polynices and Eteocles at Book 11.574-79:

*ite truces animae funestaque Tartara leto  
polluite et cunctas Erebi consumite poenas!  
uosque malis hominum, Stygiae, iam parcite, diuiae:  
omnibus in terris scelus hoc omnique sub aevo*

<sup>161</sup> Homer and Virgil make no mention of Tydeus' anthropophagy, but the scholium on *Il.* 5.126 preserves the details paraphrased from the *Thebais*, one of the epic cycle poems. See above p. 35 for a fuller description.

<sup>162</sup> Feeney (1991): 277.

*uiderit una dies, monstrumque infame futuris  
excidat, et soli memorent haec proelia reges.*

Away, brutal souls! pollute the gloomy Abyss with  
your deaths! Exhaust all the torments of Erebus! Away,  
you Stygian Goddesses: spare our world such woes! In all  
lands and in every age, let no one day alone have seen  
this breed of foul deed, let this monstrous infamy fall  
from memory—only kings should recall such a duel.

While Lucan can barely bring himself to narrate events as he is describing them, Statius shows absolutely no direct authorial hesitation until after providing the grisly descriptions. Moreover, Lucan's apostrophe before Pharsalus is self-directed, indicating his personal struggle with narrating events of *nefas*; Statius' is not, and indeed, it need not be since he is not struggling with whether he should describe the horrific events of his story, because he already has.<sup>163</sup> As Ganiban notes, Statius addresses the Furies, asking that they spare posterity from remembering the crimes he has described. While remembrance of *nefas* in Lucan is tied directly to the poet's own literature (implicating him in the crime of propagating it), Statius attaches himself and the crimes he narrates to the powers of the *inferi dei*, who have been instrumental in the functioning of horror throughout the poem.<sup>164</sup> This has the bizarre effect of diminishing the power Statius has as an author/narrator of events. Lucan certainly struggles with the implications of narrating criminally horrific acts, but he is always in control of his medium: he is the director; it is just a matter of determining how much to edit. Statius, by deferring to the demonic forces in his own story creates a shifting of power/control that is decidedly unsettling.

<sup>163</sup> See Ganiban (2007): 203-204.

<sup>164</sup> Ganiban (2007): 204.

### CHAPTER III: VIEWING PLEASURE AND VIEWING PAIN: THE HORROR-PARADOX

ὅμως δ' ἴδοις ἂν ἡδέως ἃ σοι πικρά;<sup>165</sup>

those things which in themselves are horrible,  
as cruel batailles, unnatural monsters,  
are made in poetical imitation, delightful.<sup>166</sup>

He's everything I hate. He's everything that ...  
I'm supposed to be against. But the only time I ever feel anything is when ...  
Don't tell anyone, please.<sup>167</sup>

I want to end this paper with a brief consideration of the seemingly inherent aesthetic attraction to scenes of the horrific and grotesque, and specifically the tension and dilemma these types of scenes create in the reader/viewer. I have touched on these issues in earlier analyses of particular scenes, particularly in Lucan and Statius, but this chapter will look a bit more generally at the disturbing tension grotesque horror – and the poet of grotesque horror – imposes on its audience.

There is a documented “pleasure in witnessing things that should not be seen, and hearing things that should not be told.”<sup>168</sup> It is a disturbing phenomenon described by Plato in *Republic* 4.439e-440a, where Leontius is unable to pull his eyes away from corpses rotting in the street despite his revulsion – both at their sight and at his own inability to look away:

ἀλλ', ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ποτὲ ἀκούσας τιτ' πιστεύω τούτῳ· ὥς ἄρα Λεόντιος ὁ Ἀγλαΐωνος ἀνιὼν ἐκ Πειραιῶς ὑπὸ τὸ βόρειον τεῖχος ἐκτός, αἰσθόμενος νεκροὺς παρὰ τῷ δημίῳ κειμένους, ἅμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ, ἅμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραίνει καὶ ἀποτρέπει ἑαυτόν, καὶ τέως μὲν μάχοιτό τε καὶ παρακαλύπτειτο, κρατούμενος δ' οὖν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, διελκύσας τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, προσδραμών πρὸς τοὺς νεκρούς, “ἰδὸν ὑμῖν,” ἔφη, “ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος.”

<sup>165</sup> Euripides *Bacchae* 815.

<sup>166</sup> Sir Philip Sydney *The Defense of Poesie*.

<sup>167</sup> “Seeing Red,” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

<sup>168</sup> Ganiban (2007): 49.

“But,” I said, “I once heard a story which I believe, that Leontius the son of Aglaïon, on his way up from the Peiraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution at the same time felt a desire to see them and a repugnance and aversion, and that for a time he resisted and veiled his head, but overpowered in despite of all by his desire, with wide staring eyes he rushed up to the corpses and cried, ‘there, you wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle.’”

Leontius’ inability to avert his gaze, caught between incompatible responses of desire (ἐπιθυμοῖ ... ἐπιθυμίας) and disgust (δυσχεραῖνοι), is so disturbing to him that he curses his own eyes: ὦ κακοδαίμονες.<sup>169</sup>

Aristotle describes a similar reaction, but as it applies to the μίμησις of horrific images, at *Poetics* 1448b 10-12. As Leontius found a certain degree of pleasure in viewing the horrors of the physical world around him – albeit reluctantly – Aristotle remarks that we look pleasurably at the representations of things that are otherwise painful to view: ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὁρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἡκριβωμένας χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν – we enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us, such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses. Aristotle does not elaborate beyond simply stating that mimetic objects, no matter how horrific, are inherently (σύμφυτος) enjoyable to everyone (τὸ χαίρειν ... πάντας).

Julia Kristeva’s musings on the abject address the difficulty of the dichotomy of viewer reactions to scenes of grotesque horror. The abject concerns the human reaction – horror, or even physically manifested in the form of vomiting – to a disruption in meaning resulting from the loss of distinction between subject and object. The most powerful example illustrating this response is a viewer’s confrontation with a corpse

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<sup>169</sup> See Allen (2000): 135-36.

where the encounter is traumatic in that it reminds the viewer of his/her own materiality/mortality: “[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject.”<sup>170</sup> What is perhaps more disturbing, Kristeva continues, is the overwhelming pull the abject has on the viewer: “it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us;”<sup>171</sup> more troubling still, “it follows that jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion.”<sup>172</sup> Like Leontius, we are, despite ourselves, continually drawn to the abject. Kristeva claims the abject has such a dramatic pull because it represents, for us, the disruption of meaning; the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.”<sup>173</sup> The corpse is the ultimate disrupter because it dramatically breaks down the boundary between life and death, and confronts our natural rejection of death’s insistent inevitability:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.<sup>174</sup>

Studies of modern horror fiction and film similarly view the object of horror as something that breaks certain typically defined boundaries. Noël Carroll, in his work *The Philosophy of Horror*, defines the cause of horror as something impure, something which

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<sup>170</sup> Kristeva (1982): 4.

<sup>171</sup> Kristeva (1982): 4.

<sup>172</sup> Kristeva (1982): 9.

<sup>173</sup> Kristeva (1982): 4.

<sup>174</sup> Kristeva (1982): 3.

is “categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless.”<sup>175</sup> Our inescapable attraction to the “impure,” and the paradoxical mixture of the incompatible responses of pleasure and disgust produced by reading/viewing grotesque horror, Carroll argues (almost apologetically), results from the fact that “anomalies command attention and elicit curiosity.”<sup>176</sup>

The emblematic moment in the *Bellum Civile* representative of the horror paradox, as we have discussed earlier, is Cornelia’s frozen stare as she watches Pompey’s horrific murder: *attonitoque metu nec quoquam auertere uisus | nec Magnum spectare potest* - and in stunned terror cannot turn her gaze away; | cannot look at Magnus (591-92). The “impurity” of Pompey’s death (the murder itself and the grotesque embalming, *arte nefanda*, of his head), the contradictory nature of having Septimius, a fellow Roman and perhaps even a former soldier of Pompey,<sup>177</sup> perpetrate a *scelus* more abominable than the crime of Brutus (8.609-10), the categorical incompleteness of Pompey’s severed head, and the conflation between animate and inanimate as his head continues to function after being severed, all incite enthralled and disturbed reactions to the scene. Cornelia experiences the paradox as an internal struggle, manifested in her physical petrefaction – and this personal struggle becomes a metaphor for Lucan’s own difficulties narrating his poem made explicit through constant strained authorial interjections.

This disturbing tension between incongruous reactions to grotesque horror on the

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<sup>175</sup> Carroll (1990): 32. Much of Carroll’s argument is based on Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* (1966). See also Ganiban (2007): 49.

<sup>176</sup> Carroll (1990): 195. The conclusion, Carroll admits, sounds somewhat platitudinous, but he offers this concession: “Three remarks seem appropriate here: first, the very comprehensiveness of the explanation of the phenomena that we are seeking might tend to make the solution appear truistic and trivially broad, even when it is not; second, that the theory seems commonsensical need not count against it – there is no reason to think that common sense cannot contribute insight; and last, as perhaps a corollary to the latter observation, that competing explanations resort to arcane sources is not of necessity a virtue in their favor” (195).

<sup>177</sup> See Mayer (1981): 157 n. 607-8, following Housman from a reference in Ter. *Adel.* 958.

personal level in Lucan, becomes a cosmic struggle in Statius. The intrapersonal struggle exhibited by Cornelia is blown apart by Statius during Melanippus' decapitation and Tydeus' anthropophagy, as various characters adopt a single element of the response: infernal gods, and Pallas' *aegis*-bound Gorgon watch unhesitatingly; the gods, most notably Pallas and Mars, turn away in disgust. Tydeus, like the scene of Pompey's decapitation, is similarly impure and categorically interstitial: his cannibalism, his "raw-eating" breaks the fundamental distinction between humanity and beast-world, and renders him a madman, beyond the limits of the social world somewhere between man and beast.<sup>178</sup> Statius manipulates most poignantly divinity (*superi* and *inferi*) as an intratextual audience, who react to the horrors of Tydeus' savagery in varying ways as a means of pinpointing the fine line between pleasure and horror. Lucan's approach is perhaps more psychoanalytically unresolved – or at least, he and his characters have not *yet* reclined on Freud's couch. Lucan, through moments of apostrophe, and his characters hesitate to grapple with the division between their aversion to atrocities and their pleasure in describing/viewing them.<sup>179</sup>

These representations (*μυμήσεις* to Aristotle) of horror and of the horror paradox are crucial for framing the extratextual audience response. Carroll discusses the relationship between intra- and extratextual audience and its importance in terms of gauging how we as readers react to horror and how the author (poet/director) intends to move us:

The characters in works of horror exemplify for us the way in which to react to the monsters in the fiction. In film and onstage, the characters *shrink* from the monsters, contracting themselves in order to avoid the grip

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<sup>178</sup> See Segal (1974): esp. 298-302.

<sup>179</sup> For Lucan's struggle with the paradox inherent in narrating a story about *nefas* cf. *BC* 7.552-556. For discussion see Feeney (1991): 277; Masters (1992): 148; Hershkowitz (1998): 197-98.



of the creature but also to avert an accidental brush against this unclean being ... The emotional reactions of characters, then, provide a set of instructions or, rather, examples about the way in which the audience is to respond to the monsters in the fiction ...<sup>180</sup>

Perhaps the most breathtaking metaliterary example of this intratextual audience response cue appears in the film within the classic film version of *King Kong* (1933), when the fictional director, Carl Denham, stages a screen test for Ann Darrow, the fictional heroine of the film within the film.<sup>181</sup> Denham supplies a set of instructions for the way his fictional character is supposed to react to the horror of the scene, but we can also read it as a cue for how we (extratextual audience) are supposed to react to the first appearance of Kong:

Now look higher. Still higher. Now you see it. You're amazed. You can't believe it. Your eyes open wider. It's horrible, Ann, but you can't look away. There's no chance for you, Ann. No escape. You're helpless, Ann, helpless. There's just one chance, if you can scream. But your throat's paralyzed. Try to scream, Ann. Try. Perhaps if you didn't see it, you could scream. Throw your arms across your eyes and scream Ann, scream for your life!!!

While certainly our response to the horror of Kong or Tydeus during his anthropophagy, or to the scene of Pompey's grisly decapitation will not manifest itself in the exact ways it does for the intratextual characters for whom the experience is all too real, our focalization through the characters does provide a mirroring-effect that ideally parallels (but does not duplicate) their responses. Like Cornelia in *BC* and Ann Darrow in *King Kong*, we are petrified by the horror, repulsed, but unable to look away.

As indicated by the metaliterary scene directions coaching Ann Darrow to act herself very literally into the disturbing tension of the horror paradox, this mixture of incompatible responses is the aim of the author/director of grotesque horror: to put the

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<sup>180</sup> Carroll (1990): 17.

<sup>181</sup> Carroll (1990): discusses this scene at 17-18.

reader/viewer in an uncomfortable position where he/she is forced to respond to the disturbing descriptions of violence and death with a sadistic pleasure – or else turn away.<sup>182</sup> Perhaps implicit in the reading – though quite explicit in the act of writing – is a general truth about the human response to scenes of grotesque horror. What horror and the grotesque, and what authors like Lucan and Statius, exploit so effectively is the desire in their reading audience to witness time and again acts of grotesque horror.<sup>183</sup> We find ourselves in constant anticipation of the next crime of *nefas*, of some new grotesque bodily rending, the pushing of epic conventions beyond the limits set by Homer and Virgil.

The ‘negative gaze’ around which both the *Bellum Civile* and the *Thebaid* are constructed serve to intensify our desire to watch the horror even more. Lucan, through the *praeteritio* before his description of the battle of Pharsalia (7.552-556), builds the suspense and tension to a fevered pitch. It is certainly an example of his own internal struggle of narrating a scene of *nefas* as Masters and others have shown (which cues our own response), but it also heightens our anticipation of seeing *nefas* committed. Likewise, in the *Thebaid*, the constant attempt by Statius to avert our gaze through the intratextual aversion to scenes of grotesque horror by the *superi dei*, with whom we *ought* to elide, conversely incites our urge to look all the more.

Both texts attack their own and our eyes:<sup>184</sup> characters in the *Bellum Civile* and *Thebaid* mash faces and rend eyes, arrows and spears pierce eyeballs, the eyes of

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<sup>182</sup> See Gilbert (2001, PhD dissertation): 180-81. It is just this excessive violence and grotesquerie that has in fact distanced many readers from the epics of Lucan, Statius, Silius and others. Duff (1943): xi, likely speaks for many when he writes of Silius’ battle scenes in the *Punica* (though he extends the sentiment to other epic poets as well): “the details of slaughter become in [Silius], as they become in better poets, monotonous and repulsive.”

<sup>183</sup> See Ganiban (2007): 69-70, on Statius’ use of *nefas* and horror as a means of subverting elements of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>184</sup> See Henderson (1998): 236 n. 58.

decapitated heads search for their trunk; the texts themselves are grisly self-blinding machines.<sup>185</sup> And we are caught in the middle of the visual paradox. Like Oedipus in the *Thebaid*, who, while he demands his eyes back in Book 7 so that he can witness the *nefas* his prayers have created,<sup>186</sup> eventually longs for his eyes so that he might scoop them out again.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. e.g., *Bellum Civile* 2.166-68, 170, 184-85; 6.214-19; 224; 7.575; *Thebaid* 7.645-46; 8.541; 9.751-56; 12.30.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. *Thebaid* 7.468-69: *procul ille penatibus imis | excites implorat Furias oculosque reposcit* – he, down in his underground dwelling, aroused | makes an appeal to the Furies, insists *he wants his eyes back*.

<sup>187</sup> *Thebaid* 11.614-15: *o si fodienda redirent | lumina et in uultus saeuire ex more potestas* – Oh! if my eyes would grow | back, so I could gouge them out, savage them into wounds | once more.

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