

Dr. Martin Dinter
lecturer
Department of Classics
King's College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
phone: 0044-(0)20-7848-2075
martin.dinter@kcl.ac.uk

Preferred panel: Language of the Body or Greek and Roman Epic

Lucan Dismembered – Corporeality in the *Bellum Civile*

Lucan's epic of civil war has been accused of headlessness and interpreted as a truncated torso – a disorganised epic which mirrors the chaos of war on all imaginable levels. To be sure, a veritable deluge of horrid gore and bloodshed stains Lucan's epic; but I shall highlight the importance and function of depictions of mutilation and the body. My principal aim is to show how Lucan binds together his epic corpus by employing and stressing the concept of the body. It will become clear that the *Bellum Civile* is organised not in terms of standard means of definition such as linearity, teleology or causality, but in terms of imagery, which unifies the work even as it mirrors and enacts fragmentation.

Lucan eagerly exploits the traditional repertoire of body metaphors from Rome's topography with a recurrent and large-scale double entendre on Rome's role as the *caput rerum*. Thanks to its versatility, the word *caput* serves as a master-trope of the *Bellum Civile*, used in connection with mountains, rivers, winds, heavenly bodies, sacrificial intestines, the Gorgon and her snakes, the city of Rome and, most frequently of all, Caesar and Pompey. This single term enables Lucan to create an image-repertoire that transcends immediate context, meaningful on more than one level. For in this civil war not only Pompey loses his head (*caput*): whilst Virgil's epic points towards the foundation of Rome and the bright future of Romans as *libera capita* (free citizens), Lucan's *Bellum Civile* reverses this process by giving a minute account of the undoing of Rome, which results in the citizen's deprivation of civil rights (*capitis deminutio*).

Finally, Lucan's avoidance of names at all costs is a marked feature of his writing: as there is no virtue in civil war no heroes can be named. Hence the predominance of the words *manus* and *dextra* among the body vocabulary of the *Bellum Civile*. For an army of countless and anonymous hands fights, murders and kills: independent body parts serve as substitute agents for epic heroes.