

Reviving the Epic Corpse in Heliodorus

While Heliodorus's engagement with the Homeric epics, particularly the *Odyssey*, has been well-observed in scholarship (Elmer 2008, Kim 2022), his interaction with later epics has not received much attention. In this paper I aim to give Heliodorus' engagement with post-Homeric epics its due by focusing on the *Aethiopica*'s relationship to two Latin epics of the later first century CE: Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and Statius's *Thebaid*. In so doing, I build on David Elmer's insights into the *Aethiopica*'s tripartite intertextual structure. Elmer proposes that Heliodorus divided the *Aethiopica* into three distinct parts (plus the Ethiopian epilogue of Book 10) where each part corresponds to a narrative framework of another genre: tragedy with Knemon's story, epic with Kalasiris's story, and historiography with the Persian/Ethiopian saga. Elmer claims that, even though each of these sections has a specific example of the genre as its major intertext (i.e. Euripides's *Hippolytus* for tragedy and Homer's *Odyssey* for epic), each should only be seen as emblematic and that Heliodorus is deliberately crafting a narrative which transitions from one genre to the next.

Drawing on Elmer's framework, I show that Heliodorus's engagement with epic in the middle third of the novel extends to Lucan and Statius, most especially through the necromancy scene in *Aethiopica* VI. In the scene, an Egyptian woman wanders a battlefield filled with dead bodies, looking for her son's corpse. After she finds him, she raises her son from the dead and asks him questions about the future. Heliodorus clearly models the scene in part on the *nekylia* of the *Odyssey*, pointed out by the explicit reference to the episode as a νέκυνια (*Hld.* 7.1.1; Setaioli 2015). However, the scene goes far beyond Odysseus's summoning of the shades since the

woman follows through and actively raises the corpse from the dead. In fact, it more resembles Lucan's depiction of the witch Erichtho in *Bellum Civile*.

The closing of Elmer's 'epic segment' is the battle between Kalasiris's sons. While the Homeric intertexts in this scene have been discussed in detail elsewhere, I draw attention to its engagement with Statius' *Thebaid* as well, for the confrontation of Kalasiris' sons seems to recall the conflict between Polyneices and Eteocles in the *Thebaid*. But while the *Thebaid* ends with both brothers dead, and a city torn apart by a fraternal feud, the *Aethiopica* ends this section with a resolution between the brothers. Kalasiris is able to stop the battle and avert this tragic ending – the possibility of which he had been foretold by the revived corpse.

These allusions to later epics come at the end of Elmer's 'epic segment' of the text and specifically come in via necromancy which Lucan and Statius have both used as references to earlier epic precedents (e.g. *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*) and to show the transgression of normal boundaries. Heliodorus includes these allusions to revive the epic genre in his work, which makes it particularly interesting that he has chosen to do so through scenes of necromancy. Heliodorus's revived corpse makes it unequivocally clear that this repeated revival of a corpse goes too far beyond what should be done. Heliodorus then concludes his epic segment by implying that no further revivals of epic should be done (and he himself should move on to a new genre) as he has then taken the 'corpse' (of epic convention) as far as it will go.

Works Cited

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DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198792543.003.0007

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