

## The Monsters of Colchis and Ovidian Poetics

<https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2021/abstracts/MonstersofColchis.pdf>

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A.

ecce adamanteis Vulcanum naribus efflant  
aeripedes tauri tactaeque uaporibus herbae  
ardent, utque solent pleni resonare camini  
aut ubi terrena silices fornace soluti  
concipiunt ignem liquidarum aspergine aquarum,  
pectora sic intus clausas uoluentia flammis  
gutturaque usta sonant.

(7.104-110)

Behold! bronze-footed bulls breathe fire from indestructible nostrils, and the grass touched by the vapors burns—just as full furnaces usually resound, or when flint precipitated from the clay oven catches fire when clear water is sprinkled, so their breasts resound, as they churn the flames pent up within, as do their charred throats.

B.

tamen illis Aesone natus  
obuius it; uertere truces uenientis ad ora  
terribiles uultus praefixaque cornua ferro,  
puluereumque solum pede pulsauere bisulco  
fumificisque locum mugitibus impleuerunt.

(7.110-14)

Still, Aeson's son goes to meet them. Grim, they've turned their terrifying visages, their iron-clad horns toward his face as he comes and they stomped the dusty earth with cloven hoof and filled the place with smoke-filled lowing.

C.

galea tum sumit aena  
uipereos dentes et aratos spargit in agros.  
semina mollit humus ualido praetincta ueneno  
et crescunt fiuntque sati noua corpora dentes;  
utque hominis speciem materna sumit in aluo  
perque suos intus numeros componitur infans  
nec nisi maturus communes exit in auras,  
sic ubi uisceribus grauidae telluris imago  
effecta est hominis, feto consurgit in aruo,  
quodque magis mirum est, simul edita concutit arma.

(7.121-30)

Then he takes the serpent's teeth from the bronze helm and sows them in the plowed fields. The earth softens the seeds imbued with strong poison, and the sown teeth grow and become new bodies. And just as a baby takes on the appearance of a human being in its mother's womb and is structured within according to its own proportions, thus, when in the innards of the pregnant earth the image of a human being has been produced, it rises up in the fertile field, and what is stranger, bangs together weapons born along with it.

D.

Cetera diuersis tellus animalia formis  
sponte sua peperit, postquam uetus umor ab igne  
percaluit solis caenumque udaeque paludes  
intumuere aestu fecundaque semina rerum,  
uiuaci nutrita solo ceu matris in aluo,  
creuerunt faciemque aliquam cepere morando.  
sic, ubi deseruit madidos septemfluis agros  
Nilus et antiquo sua flumina reddidit alueo  
aetherioque recens exarsit sidere limus,  
plurima cultores uersis animalia glaebis  
inueniunt; et in his quaedam perfecta per ipsum  
nascendi spatium, quaedam modo coepta suisque  
trunca uident numeris, et eodem in corpore saepe  
altera pars uiuit, rudis est pars altera tellus.  
quippe ubi temperiem sumpsere umorque calorque,  
conciunt et ab his oriuntur cuncta duobus;  
cumque sit ignis aquae pugnax, uapor umidus omnes  
res creat et discors concordia fetibus apta est.  
ergo ubi diluuio tellus lutulenta recenti  
solibus aetheriis altoque recanduit aestu,  
edidit innumeras species partimque figuras  
rettulit antiquas, partim noua monstra creauit.

(1.416-37)

The earth bore the remaining animals with their different forms of its own accord, after the former moisture evaporated from the sun's flame and mud and wet swamps swelled with heat and the fertile seeds of things, nurtured by life-giving soil grew as in a mother's womb, and in time took on a different look. Thus, when Nile of the sevenfold flood has deserted the damp fields and returned its own stream to its old basin, and the fresh mud has burned under the celestial star, farmers find a great number of new animals when the clods are turned up—and among these they see some finished through the very course of birth, others just begun bereft of their limbs; and in the same body often one part thrives, the rest is unformed earth. Of course, when moisture and heat have reached equilibrium and conceive, and from these two whole bodies arise; and since fire is hostile to water, moist air creates everything, and discordant harmony is fitted to offspring. Therefore, when the earth muddy from a recent flood has grown hot under the heavenly days and from the deep heat, it has produced countless species—in part bringing back old forms, in part creating new monsters.

E.

quos ubi uiderunt praeacutae cuspidis hastas  
in caput Aesonii iuuenis torquere parantes,  
demisere metu uultumque animumque Pelasgi.  
ipsa quoque extimuit quae tutum fecerat illum,  
utque peti uidit iuuenem tot ab hostibus unum,  
palluit et subito sine sanguine frigida sedit;  
neue parum ualeant a se data gramina, carmen  
auxiliare canit secretasque aduocat artes.  
ille grauem medios silicem iaculatus in hostes  
a se depulsum Martem conuertit in ipsos;  
terrigenae pereunt per mutua uulnera fratres  
ciuilique cadunt acie. gratantur Achiui  
uictoremque tenent audisque amplexibus haerent.  
(7.131-43)

When they saw them [the sown men] preparing to hurl the sharp-tipped spears against the head of the youth, son of Aeson, the Pelasgians dropped both face and spirit in fear. She too grew frightened, the one who made him safe, and when she saw the youth—one man—attacked by so many foes, she grew pale and, suddenly bloodless and cold, she sat down. And so that the herbs supplied by her not have too little strength, she chants an assisting spell and calls upon secret arts. He, once he had thrown a heavy rock into the foes' midst, turned onto them the battle that he had deflected from himself. The earthborn brothers perish through reciprocal wounds, and they fall in a battleline of civil war. The Achaeans rejoice and hold the victor, clinging to him with greedy embraces.

F.

Peruigilem superest herbis sopire draconem,  
qui crista linguisque tribus praesignis et uncis  
dentibus horrendus custos erat arboris aureae.  
hunc postquam sparsit Lethaei gramine suci  
uerbaque ter dixit placidos facientia somnos,  
quae mare turbatum, quae concita flumina sistunt,  
somnia in ignotos oculos tibi uenit et auro  
heros Aesonius . . .  
(7.149-58)

It remains to put to sleep the wakeful dragon. Recognizable by its crest and triple tongue and curving teeth, it was a dreadful guard of that golden tree. After she had sprinkled it with the grass of Lethe's juice and three times said the words that bring on restful sleep—words that quell storm-tossed seas and frothing rivers—[when?] sleep came into the eyes unaccustomed to it, and the Aesonian hero takes possession of the gold ...

G.

(on Hannibal)

nullo labore aut corpus fatigari aut animus uinci poterat. caloris ac frigoris patientia par; cibi potionisque desiderio naturali, non uoluptate modus finitus; uigiliarum somnique nec die nec nocte discriminata tempora; id quod gerendis rebus superesset quieti datum; ea neque molli strato neque silentio accersita; multi saepe militari sagulo opertum humi iacentem inter custodias stationesque militum conspexerunt.

(Livy 21.4.5-7)

By no effort could his body be exhausted or his mind overcome. His tolerance for heat and cold were equal. His limitations were defined by natural want of food and drink—not by their pleasing effect. Neither by day nor night were time of wakefulness and sleep differentiated. What there was left for getting things done was dedicated to rest; this was sought neither in soft bedding or in silence: many often saw him lying on the ground, covered in a soldier's cloak amid the guards and pickets.

## H.

### on Catiline

ad huius uitae studium meditati illi sunt qui feruntur labores tui, iacere humi non solum ad obsidendum stuprum uerum etiam ad facinus obeundum, uigilare non solum insidiantem somno maritorum uerum etiam bonis otiosorum. habes ubi ostentes tuam illam praeclaram patientiam famis, frigoris, inopiae rerum omnium quibus te breui tempore confectum esse senties.

(Cicero, *In Cat.* I 26)

The one whom your efforts support have practiced for that avocation of this life: they have lain on the ground not only for ensnaring debauchery but also for engaging in criminality, stayed awake not only setting traps for the sleep of married men but also for the property of those at rest. You have a place to show that very famous endurance of yours for hunger, cold, want of all things by which you will soon realize you have been done in!

iam ad certas res conficiendas certos homines delectos ac descriptos habebat. neque uero, cum aliquid mandarat, confectum putabat: nihil erat quod non ipse obiret, occurreret, uigilaret, laboraret; frigus, sitim, famem ferre poterat. [17] hunc ego hominem tam acrem, tam audacem, tam paratum, tam callidum, tam in scelere uigilantem, tam in perditis rebus diligentem nisi ex domesticis insidiis in castrense latrocinium compulissem — dicam id quod sentio, Quirites — non facile hanc tantam molem mali a ceruicibus uestris depulissem.

(Cicero, *In Cat.* III 16-17)

By this point he had selected and enlisted certain men for doing certain things. Nor indeed once he had given some order did he think it had been carried out; there was nothing he himself would not show up to do, hasten to, be wakeful for, work for: he was able to endure cold, thirst, hunger. 17. This man—so fierce, so bold, so ready, so clever, so watchful in crime, so scrupulous in desperate circumstances—if I hadn't forced him from ambush against home territory into his camp of bandits—I'll tell you what I think, fellow citizens!—I would not easily have driven this mountain of evil, so vast, from your necks.

L. Catilina, nobili genere natus, fuit magna vi et animi et corporis, sed ingenio malo prauoque. huic ab adulescentia bella intestina caedes rapinae discordia ciuilibus grata fuere, ibique iuentutem suam exercuit. corpus patiens inediae algoris uigiliae supra quam quouquam credibile est.

(Sallust *BC* 5)

Lucius Catiline, born of a noble lineage, was a man of great strength of both mind and body, but of a wicked and perverse character. From youth on, internecine war, slaughter, plunder, civil unrest pleased him—and in that direction did he exercise his youth. His body was tolerant of lack of food, pain, sleeplessness more than is believable for anyone.

interea Romae multa simul moliri: consulibus insidias tendere, parare incendia, oportuna loca armatis hominibus obsidere; ipse cum telo esse, item alios iubere, hortari uti semper intenti paratique essent; dies noctisque festinare, uigilare, neque insomniis neque labore fatigari.

(Sallust *BC* 27)

Meanwhile in Rome many things were being contrived at once: he laid traps for the consuls, readied fires, besieged advantageous spots with armed men. he himself had a spear, and at the same time he commanded others, urged them always to be ready. He made haste day and night, kept watch, was tired neither by sleeplessness or work.

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