

*In Sua Viscera: Gore and the Body Politic in Lucan's Bellum Civile*

The *Bellum Civile* is undeniably a bloody poem. Lucan spares no detail in representing the gruesome, violent ways in which soldiers die in combat. Even off the battlefield, threats to the body are ever present. Lucan depicts events such as Pompey's beheading (Luc. 8.575-691) or the deaths of soldiers on march who were bitten by snakes (Luc. 9.761-838) with agonizing detail that meets, or even surpasses, his descriptions of combat (Malamud 2003). These scenes occur far from the front lines, yet they contain no shortage of that same gore, a thorough condemnation of Caesar's civil war at every stage.

Lucan's arguably excessive use of gore, though, does not merely serve to denounce the atrocities of warfare; instead, it represents the ways in which civil war is a self-perpetuated violation of Rome itself. This sentiment is conveyed in the first few lines of the poem, where Lucan proposes to sing about "a powerful people who turned their conquering hand against their own entrails" (*populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, Luc. 1.2-3). The Romans, this mighty force capable, in Lucan's eyes, of conquering the whole world, instead chose to turn their wrath inwards, literally gutting themselves in the process.

This connection between state and body — a common metaphor known as the body politic (Harvey 2021) — is a pervasive theme throughout the *Bellum Civile* (Mebane 2016). The poem contains an extreme abundance of body imagery and vocabulary which refers at various points both to actual corporeal bodies and to the government and its institutions (Dinter 2012). Rarely do these bodies — literal or political — remain sound for long; Lucan constantly describes the destruction of bodies, especially the amputations of limbs and heads, violations which mirror that of the Roman Republic as Caesar and Pompey tear it apart.

This paper thus analyzes the close relationship between Lucan's unrelenting use of gore and his implementation of the body politic. This examination utilizes an anatomical framework, beginning with the limbs, then moving inwards and upwards to the torso, then concluding with the head. Lucan's depictions of gore in each of these regions and their correlation to the body politic — both in a broad sense and in Lucan's own conception — then serve as the skeleton for discussion on the anti-war themes of the *Bellum Civile*, rooted in the connection between violations of the body and violations of the state.

#### Works Cited

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