

Sulla's Consuming Gaze: Marius Gratidianus in Lucan and Valerius Maximus

Following Sulla's capture of Rome in 82, Marius Gratidianus, the nephew of Gaius Marius, was apprehended by Sulla's supporters and tortured, dismembered, mutilated, and finally decapitated. References to Gratidianus' death are found in the works of several authors, beginning with Cicero (*Tog. Cand.* 84.8-9), and later accounts show that this death became a historical and literary *topos* used to explore themes of extreme brutality and transgressive violence (e.g. Sallust *Hist. fr.* 1.36 McGushin; Livy *Per.* 88; Plut. *Sull.* 32.2; Florus 2.9.26; Sen. *De Ira* 3.18.1-2; Oros. 5.21.7-8). The most extensive accounts of this episode are from Valerius Maximus, for whom Gratidianus' death was an example of *crudelitas* (9.2.1), and Lucan, who shows elderly citizens reacting to Caesar's march toward Rome by recalling the city's suffering under Marius and Sulla (2.173-193; Fantham 1992, McGushin 1992, Dreyling 1999). The dismemberment of Gratidianus, a senator who had served as praetor and tribune of the plebs, symbolizes the disassembly of Roman society more broadly; in their accounts of Gratidianus' death, Lucan and Valerius Maximus explore the relationship between the mutilated corpse of the victim and the consuming gaze of the victor, Sulla, to highlight the gross violation of social order inherent in civil war.

Both Lucan and Valerius Maximus emphasize sight and vision throughout their presentations of the murder. Both describe the gouging out of Gratidianus' eyes, which Lucan says was the final mutilation so that the victim could watch the preceding torments (*ultimaque effodit spectatis lumina membris*, Lucan 2.185). In both accounts, too, the murder takes place before an audience, as Valerius Maximus mentions a crowd (*per ora vulgi ad sepulcrum... pertractum*) while Lucan relates the story through an elderly eyewitness (cf. *vidimus* in line 178). Franzen (2011) has argued that Lucan uses sight to establish a relationship between the blinded

victim and the crime's onlookers, particularly Sulla himself; Valerius Maximus also draws attention to the audience when he describes Sulla killing M. Plaetorius for fainting at the brutality of the execution, forcing him to share in Gratidianus' punishment because he could not observe it with equanimity (*iniquo animo scelus intueri scelus admittere fuit*).

Earlier in Valerius Maximus' narrative, Sulla is shown viewing the severed heads of his victims *ut oculis illa, quia ore nefas erat, manderet*, a sign of insatiable savageness (*inexplebilis feritatis indicium*). This description invites comparison to other Roman narratives of civil conflict in which a victor revels in the brutality of an enemy's death by viewing dismembered parts of his corpse. For example, Otho views the head of Piso with insatiable eyes (*insatiabilibus oculis perlustrasse*, Tac. *Hist.* 1.44), and Cicero describes Dolabella feeding his eyes on the mutilated corpse of Trebonius (*in eius corpore... oculos paverit suos*, *Phil.* XI.8, cf. App. *BC* 3.26, Dio 47.29). In Cicero's horror that Dolabella could torture a fellow citizen and Tacitus' speculation that Otho took particular pleasure from the death of his rival (*aemulus*), we see a pronounced emphasis on the status and identities of both victor and victim, as their ostensible equality is negated by the victor's consuming gaze and the victim's inability to return it.

AbstractFormattingGuidelines.pdfGratidianus' torture, too, is so thorough that his identity is erased. His features are mutilated beyond recognition, and without his hands or tongue he is incapable of communicating (cf. Most 1992). His status as human or animal is also confused, as his slaughter evokes ritual sacrifice (Dinter 2012), and his dismembered but still living body even challenges his categorization as alive or dead. But unlike Dolabella and Otho, Sulla is not able to consume the corpse of his victim with his gaze. In Lucan's narrative, Sulla's gaze is thwarted by Gratidianus' unrecognizable features, since he will take no pleasure in the sight of his victim's face (2.190-193). This thorough erasure of Gratidianus' identity represents

the destruction of the community through factional politics and civic violence; although Sulla is the victor, his victory has left him with nothing to consume.

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