

Spiritus Rupis: The Rape of Phemonoe and the Violation of the Universe
in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

That the character of Phemonoe, the oracle in book five, violated so thoroughly, she must remake the sacred boundaries of her self and body, but ultimately fails. The “spirit of the rock” of Apollo (*spiritus rupis*, 5.164-5) violently penetrates her chest, her head, and her entire body. I will attempt to examine how the Pythia resembles a soldier in her violation and experiences moral injury and PTSD similar to the soldiers of Rome in the BC and how she's representative of Rome as a whole.

Phemonoe, reluctant and seemingly false *vates*, whose body is impregnated and invaded by a remnant of Apollo, the “spirit of the rock” (164-5), and all of space and time become a microcosm of and battleground for *imperium* and Rome itself. Imagery of rape, violence, domination, and impregnation (*confugit*, 162; *concepit*, 163; *ingessit*, 165; *potitus*, 165; *inrupit*, 167) points to a violent spiritual battle, possession, and colonization at the site of her body by a Caesar-like Apollonian force (5.163-9). The borders or walls of her body, her neck (5.170), mind (5.167), breast (5.97, 116, 163, 169, 178), viscera (5.175), and womb (5.175) are breached by supernatural and imperial forces, and they cannot hold. The stress of civil war and the struggle to find or banish divinity ultimately kill her. This uncanny and unnatural impregnation and the heaping (*congeriem*, 5.178) of all space and time (175-8) break her open, and, like Rome, she cannot sustain the pressure of this tyrannizing and annihilating force. Ultimately the multiplicity of her identity — the housing of *numen*, all of space and time, and the spirit of the rock (*spiritus rupis*, 1.164.5), her own identity — creates an unsustainable chaos that mirrors the chaos that is

Rome at war with itself (Masters 1992 108-11). Outside becomes inside, inside becomes outside, and she collapses on herself.

The Pythia, after the “spirit of the rock” rapes and impregnates her with the universe as singularity, experiences symptoms of trauma and dissociation. Paeon “sinks Lethe into her viscera” (*inmisit Stygiam Paeon in uiscera Lethen*, 221), impregnating her again, but with the release of forgetfulness of what just happened to her. Rape victims and soldiers experience similar PTSD and moral injury symptoms, one of which is blacking out to cope with the trauma they experienced (Shay 1994). This act, however, is yet another violation, which impregnates Phemonoe with death itself. In this way she also embodies the death which Rome itself is experiencing and is (or was) an embodiment of Rome itself, which contained the entire universe in the form of imperial expansion and the influx of people from around the world into the city walls. Because her borders and boundaries are porous and unstable, she perishes. When Jupiter declares Rome an “empire without end” (*imperium sine fine*, Verg. *Aen.* 279), the boundaries of the body politic become permanently destabilized, just as the Pythia’s are. We see, as its natural conclusion, in Lucan’s world, those boundary markers and individual citizen bodies, become the loci of sites of violation, mass graves, and the collapse of the universe.

Bibliography

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