

REVIEW

THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF HORROR

Aline Estèves, *Poétique de l'horreur dans l'épopée et l'historiographie latines*. Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2020. Pp. 470. Paperback, €30. ISBN 978-2-35613-330-4.

Study of the proximity (so Quint. 10.1.31) of Latin epic and historiography has flourished over the last thirty to forty years, with scholarly work concentrating especially on allusions and networks of allusions among texts in the two genres. Estèves' (hereafter 'E.') monograph takes a novel and fruitful approach to the matter, eyeing the intersection of the genres through the prism of horror, with a focus on passages in epic and historiography that describe characters' experiences of this extraordinary and overwhelming fear, as well as the scenes and objects that commonly generate that fear. With horror as her touchstone, E. charts a new path of 'decompartmentalisation' (*décloisonnement*, 17) of the genres. This makes for a refreshing and often eye-opening study, packed with incisive close readings and productive ideas for future work on Latin literature.

In articulating the impetus for the study (11–26), E. follows the lead of none other than bestselling horror novelist Stephen King, who put forward a sort of typology of horror in his 1981 collection of essays *Danse Macabre* (a French version *Anatomie de l'horreur* was published in 1995). King had emphasised horror's inescapability, a point that E. picks up in stressing the need to confront horror and grapple with the paradoxical mix of revulsion and pleasure that it has long provided. In this way E. pointedly diverges from the staid critical tradition of regarding such material as 'in poor taste' (think, for example, of the scholarly dismissiveness during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the excessive violence in Lucan's *Pharsalia*). Noting that studies of horror in Latin literature have largely been limited to Roman tragedy, E. states the need to extend such work to epic and historiography, genres that are just as packed with extraordinary violence and its attendant horrors. This motivation dovetails with the related need for more scholarly work on battle-scenes in these two genres. As E. examines throughout the book, battlefields, both during and after war, are frequent *loci* for the experience of horror; and so her study stands as an important contribution to this insufficiently studied area, complementing, for example, the analysis of generic intersections on the battlefield in Andreola Rossi's *Contexts of War: Manipulations of Genre in Virgilian Battle Narrative* (Ann Arbor, 2004). A corollary

objective that E. introduces early on and then revisits especially towards the end of the book is the aim to raise the axiological/ethical concerns and ‘questions of conscience’ (439) that arise from the study of horror in Latin epic and historiography.

E. examines images of horror in historical works by four different authors (Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* and *Bellum Civile*; Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum* and *Bellum Catilinae*; Livy, Books 21–30 of *Ab Urbe Condita*; and Tacitus, *Agricola*, *Germania*, *Historiae*, and *Annales*) and in epics by four different poets (Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Statius’s *Thebaid*, and Silius Italicus’s *Punica*). The choice allows E. to look diachronically across a period of about 150 years and to track developments in the uses of horror both within and across the genres, and also to read each work within the context of the violent Roman civil wars and societal upheaval of that period. Scholars of historiography will be especially pleased to find so many careful and novel readings of battle-scenes in Caesar and Livy that have been largely overlooked; one must jump around a bit for these analyses, though E.’s *index locorum* is helpful here.

The study advances in four hefty chapters. Chapter 1 (29–115) grounds the work in consideration of ancient discussions of fear and detailed lexical analysis of Latin diction for ‘fear’ in the works under consideration. Building on the analyses by Jean-François Thomas, E. concludes that *horrere* and its family of words mark a more extraordinary, more overwhelming, and more unsustainable fear than the families of *formido*, *pauere*, and *terrere* (the consideration at 86–7 of Tacitus’s use of a range of different words for ‘fear’ in *Hist.* 1.50 is instructive). A compelling argument E. pursues is that *horror*, uniquely, is immanent in the object causing the fear and thus irreversible and long-lasting—even eternal—in its effects on the subject experiencing that object (103–4; to this end, see also the important parsing at 21 of *horror* as denoting both the subject’s trembling and fear and, by metonymy, the object of that fear). A highlight here is E.’s reading of the family of *horrere* in Ennius: for example, at *Ann.* 248 Skutsch (*spernitur orator bonus, horridus miles amatur*) the adjective *horridus* marks the work of the soldier as *inherently* and thus irreversibly a cause for trembling and fear (102–3; see also the wonderful reading at 104 and 110 of Aeneas’s horror (*horret, Aen.* 2.12) at describing his experiences in Troy as reflective of the enduring dread that he carries with him). E.’s reading of Ennius as foundational is fitting, given the broader point in this chapter that the family of *horrere*, while always used to mark something out of the ordinary, is much more ‘at home’ in epic than in historiography (the table on 68 is helpful). Though this is generally the case, E.’s diachronic approach reveals that the usage in historiography is not static. Caesar and Sallust use the family of words very sparingly, a fact that gives each appearance a conspicuousness and consequent potency (see, e.g., the description of Britons at *BG* 5.14.2 as *horridiores*, a passage E. visits often). In

AUC 21–30 Livy incorporates the language of *horror* more frequently than Caesar and Sallust, a trend that E. reads as reflective of Livy's leading contribution to the *décloisonnement* of the two genres (70–1; see too 114 and 245–8). Tacitus' embrace of the family of *horrere* then matches that of Livy (86–90; see too 248–9 and 257–8 on the ways in which the horrible in Tacitus surpasses what Livy had done).

From the lexical level covered in Chapter 1, E. moves in Chapter 2 (119–202) to consider *phantasiae* or 'visions' of horror found in the two genres, with a focus on passages depicting the *loci horrendi* of forests, mountains, caves, and the Underworld, as well as the accompanying motifs of darkness, excess, and ugliness. In these common haunts, their qualities, and characters' emotional responses to them, E. locates a 'certain intertextuality' (133) between epic and historiography, with the proviso that such *phantasiae* are much more common in epic. A consequence of this disparity is again that the passages in historiography stand out all the more, and especially effective here is E.'s treatment (at 181–5) of the Carthaginians' approach of the Alps at Livy 21.29–32. Livy describes the challenge of crossing these mountains as 'by reputation, a horrible thing' (*rem fama ... horrendam*, 21.29.7), suggesting that the horror of the Alps—and horror generally—is made more astounding and more terrifying by what is said and written about it. This reading of the interplay between *horror* and *fama* (which could also be well applied to the appearance of *fama* at Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.41.3, a passage whose excessive violence E. addresses at several points) speaks to the author's *personal* involvement in the crafting of any *locus* of horror, an issue that E. addresses at the end of this chapter (201–2) and in the following two chapters.

The final two chapters expand beyond the lexical and thematic elements of horror to look at the rhetorical methods that authors put to use in crafting the horrible (Chapter 3, 205–303) and then at the ways of reading that may have contributed to the experience of horror (Chapter 4, 307–432). In this way these chapters—which draw on theoretical writing especially by Cicero, the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Quintilian—push the study past its focus on horror towards more of an exercise in applied ancient literary theory. What results is at times unwieldy but nonetheless rewarding in a variety of ways. Across Chapter 3 E. examines the conveyance of horror through the methods of *emphasis* (the suggestion of more than what is stated, 219–33), *evidentia* (visual depiction through detail, 235–68), and *tumor* (excessive demonstration, 'swelling' beyond conventional decorum, 269–99). And so, E. artfully argues, horror operates like Medusa: it requires readers to divert their eyes (*emphasis*), or fixes their gaze (*evidentia*), or paralyses them so that the act of horror lives on eternally (*tumor*). A conclusion of this chapter is that Lucan and Tacitus (the former to a degree far beyond the latter) represent the highpoints in the depiction of the abnormal and the excessively

macabre in their respective genres (302–3); and again we observe in historiography the diachronic movement towards a greater influx of the horrible.

The fundamental argument of Chapter 4 is that scenes of horror, though terrifying and often repulsive, can lead the reader to both pleasure (explored at 313–67) and utility or benefit (369–96). Here again we are moving well beyond the particular case of horror—ancient sources discuss these as the aims of all literature. As a result E.’s discussion of the pleasure readers may draw from identifying authors’ *aemulatio* broadly conceived (the artistic rivalry with not just other literature but also the plastic arts, nature, and the theatre) points towards wonderful new directions for the study of intertextuality. I note, for example, E.’s discussion of Lucan’s portrait of Cato (with its ‘horrific head of hair’, *Ph.* 2.372–3) alongside similarly arresting Roman busts (338–9) and Statius’ frightening Sphinx (*Theb.* 2.505–15) in conversation with the famed sculpture (340–3). In her discussion of the utility that may come from encounters with the horrible, E. stresses its capacity to generate both awe and admiration (*horror ad venerationem*) and disgust (*horror ad odium*), and frequently both at once, a point that ties in with the book’s earlier emphasis on horror as boundary-crossing and transgressive, something that both repels and allures. Given this fundamental insight, it is surprising to encounter some simplifications of characterisation in epic, such as the reading of the *horror* at Aeneas as inherently one of admiration and reflective of a pro-Augustan position from Virgil (see especially 314, 371, 375, and 380–2; E. addresses Virgil’s heroes with more nuance at 384–5). The reading of the historians’ uses of *horror ad odium* and a variegated language of slaughter to mark enemies of Rome as ‘barbaric’ (413–30) is thorough and persuasive.

By closing the final chapter with a focus on the *utilitas* that scenes of horror may offer, E. gives pride of place to the study’s ethical considerations. A conclusion she reaches is that explorations of horror serve to shock and ‘shake the conscience’ (429) of the reader (she notes, e.g., the brutal exposition of war’s horrors at Sallust, *Jug.* 99 and 101), thus serving as counterpoint to the celebration of violent (and horrible) successes found in both genres (430). In her conclusion (435–42) E. returns to her key point about the ‘capacity for generic mutation’ (440), with historiography over time taking on more and more elements of the horror that had been present in epic all along. She also emphasises the importance of the Roman historical context as a shared backdrop for these authors and shared inspiration for their material, with the civil wars of 49–48 BCE and 69 CE looming particularly large for the imaginary of horror. The events of history also offer a sort of intertext—ripe for not just mimesis but emulation by and among poets and historians (cf. Cynthia Damon, ‘*Déjà vu* or *déjà lu*? History as Intertext’, *PLLS* 14 (2010) 375–88). This is a fitting final note in a study that not only leads us to confront the

horror that lives on—and grows—in Latin epic and historiography but also successfully expands our notions of intertextuality, both between these two genres and beyond.

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