VIOLATING THE BODY’S ENVELOPE:
THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE AND MUTILATION
IN FOUR POEMS OF PRUDENTIUS’ PERISTEPHANON

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Abstract

This thesis examines the violent punishments undergone by various martyrs in Prudentius’ *Peristephanon*. In particular, it explores how the poet’s depiction of this violence and suffering might affect readers of the collection. Four poems (poems II, III, IX and XI) are studied from the point of view of the emotions they are likely to evoke in the reader.

The question of whether different types of readers might undergo different emotional experiences while reading these poems arises as a result of the proposed study. The first chapter of this thesis thus examines the nature of emotions, focusing on their sources and composition. This examination suggests that an individual’s emotional experience can be influenced both by biological factors and by social and cultural environment. With this in mind, an examination follows of various aspects of Roman society and culture which were likely to influence the ways in which its citizens, in particular, reacted to the violent scenes in the poems. We will also consider how our own specific cultural milieu may influence modern readers to sometimes react differently to Roman readers.

In particular, it is proposed that most readers of the *Peristephanon* will react with varying shades of disgust and horror. These two emotions are thus used as a framework for discussing reader reactions to the poems. Disgust and horror are understood in a very broad sense, allowing for different varieties of these emotions, which at times even give rise to contradiction and paradox.

The remaining chapters of the thesis are devoted to examinations of the four chosen poems which explore the various ways in which they might evoke horror and disgust among both Roman and modern readers. Often, there is considerable overlap between these two groups. These examinations provide a way of understanding why these poems are so striking, and have impacted so strongly on readers through the ages.
Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis being made available for photocopying and loan.

SIGNED: ____________________________ DATE: _________________
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