

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, focussing 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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INTRODUCTION

Any text discussing the persecutions of the early Christians must, at some point, address the issue of violence. This is necessary not only to reflect historical fact (convicted Christians were routinely sentenced to violent forms of the death penalty), but also because discussions of violence have an important role to play in achieving the aims of the martyr-text. Once the Christian community had been firmly established, the early martyrs were considered ‘the champions who won for the Church its victory on earth’ (Palmer 1989, p. 209), and the age in which they lived seemed ‘a heroic age, of figures larger than life’ (Roberts 1993, p. 41). Elaborating on the terrible punishments these early martyrs suffered was one way for writers to emphasise their heroism (Palmer 1989, p. 209). In addition, those who underwent such violent ordeals received great spiritual benefits in return, hence increasing their esteem in the eyes of the Christian community. Emphasis on violence and suffering was thus also a way to enhance the martyr’s prestige.

Thus, the violence suffered by the early martyrs was certainly not considered solely in negative terms. Nor did it evoke the kind of pain and anguish amongst believers that made it necessary for it to be avoided or glossed over. Rather, this physical suffering was celebrated as an integral part of the martyrs’ triumph over their persecutors, and indeed, over the world of the flesh. This attitude is evident in Prudentius’ collection of martyr poems, the *Peristephanon*. Not only does it relate in detail the violent fates of its various martyrs, but it is clear from the first poem that the loss of this information about their physical ordeals is considered a great tragedy:

O vetustatis silentis obsoleta oblivio!
invidetur ista nobis fama et ipsa extinguitur.
chartulas blasphemus olim nam satelles abstulit...

(*Peristephanon* I, vv. 73–75)¹

¹ The text of the *Peristephanon* used in this thesis is that edited by Thomson (Loeb Classical Library).

As this passage suggests, Prudentius places great importance on the precise recollection and description of the agonies suffered by the martyrs he writes about. But while the linking of their suffering with their triumphs ultimately serves to redeem this violence, the reader must first experience some very graphic and disturbing descriptions of the martyrs' suffering. The following passage, from poem IX of the collection, is one such example. It describes the proposed punishment of the schoolteacher Cassian:

*"donetur ipsis verberator parvulis.
ut libet inludant, lacerent inpune manusque
tinguant magistri feriatas sanguine."*

(*Peristephanon IX*, vv. 38–40)

A similarly graphic passage, taken from *Peristephanon XI*, is this description of the martyr Hippolytus being dragged to death by wild horses:

*scissa minutatim labefacto corpore frusta
carpit spinigeris stirpibus hirtus ager.
pars summis pendet scopulis, pars sentibus haeret,
parte rubent frondes, parte madescit humus.*

(*Peristephanon XI*, vv. 119–122)

These scenes, and others like them in the collection, are forceful and striking due to their vivid, unrestrained depictions of violence. Unsurprisingly, critics have generally found such scenes excessive and distasteful, resulting in descriptions such as 'repugnant realism' (Henderson 1983, p. 84) and 'too realistic, over-explicit and excessive [in] detail, leaving little to the imagination' (Henderson 1983, p. 84). However, despite such strong reactions, it is surprising to

note that no studies have been devoted to examining how and why these scenes are capable of leaving such an impression on their readers. Instead, studies of the *Peristephanon* have mostly subordinated the issue of violence by discussing it only insofar as it relates to the broader themes and issues of the collection.

This thesis seeks to redress this imbalance by examining the depiction of the martyrs' physical suffering in the *Peristephanon*, and the kind of effects this depiction is likely to have on the collection's readers. In doing so, it will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the overall impact that these poems have had on readers throughout the ages, which is surely part of the reason they continue to be read and studied today. In order to determine the scope of this thesis, we must first survey Prudentian scholarship, and in particular those aspects of it which deal with violence in the *Peristephanon*. Following this, it will be possible to formulate a proposal for this study. Lastly, the outline and parameters of the thesis will be discussed.

Previous work on the *Peristephanon*

Prudentius' autobiographical and religious writings reveal that he was a sophisticated, highly educated man. As a writer who belonged to later antiquity, he had a large and varied Latin literary corpus at his disposal. Hence, it is not surprising that many critics of the *Peristephanon* have focussed on the poet's relationship with his literary heritage of pagan Latin texts (Ross 1995, p. 328). In particular, many critics have attempted to find echoes of earlier Latin writers in Prudentius' use of language, imagery and allusion. This *quellenforschung* has been a particularly fertile area of research, with critics arguing for the influence of a wide variety of earlier Latin writers, and identifying a huge number of instances in Prudentius' poetry in which a classical influence is discernable.

Other critics have focused on how Prudentius, as a Christian poet, related to a literary heritage that was overwhelmingly pagan, and hence at odds with his own religious beliefs. In the past, some critics took a superficial view of this issue by stating that as a result of his contrasting influences and beliefs, he produced poetry with pagan form and Christian subject matter (Cunningham 1976, p. 61). This judgement is oversimplified, firstly because the poet's pagan influences inspired far more than just his use of form, and secondly because it fails to take into account the tensions and difficulties that Prudentius might have encountered in reconciling his pagan and Christian influences. As a result, some critics have more recently argued that the weight of Latin literary traditions was a 'burden and stress on the creative imagination' (Baker 1993, p. 12) of the early Christian writers, while other critics have downplayed such possible tensions by arguing that a synthesis of pagan and Christian elements was achieved harmoniously.

In addition to trying to identify the poet's pagan influences, critics have attempted to trace the poet's Christian literary sources. Among those they argue for are material from the Bible such as the Pentateuch and Psalms, and other early Christian authors such as the prose writers Tertullian, Cyprian and Ambrose, and the poetry of Juvencus and Hilary (Bastiaensen 1993, p. 120). The question of Christian literary sources is also relevant to the *Peristephanon* due to the existence of earlier *Acta* for some of the martyrs featured in the collection. Critics have tried to assess how much use Prudentius made of these *Acta*, and have focussed especially on his departures from them, eg: in the Agnes poem (Palmer 1989, p. 250 ff). The existence of such departures has led some critics to claim that Prudentius was more concerned with creating engaging stories for his readers than with historical accuracy (Palmer 1989, p. 234).

In addition to criticism devoted to the task of *quellenforschung*, there is also a strain of criticism which speculates upon the extent and nature of the poet's use of his sources, and the kind of poetry

he produced as a result. In particular, some critics have disagreed about whether Prudentius' poetry can be said to be original. The answer to this question seems to lie not in the number of allusions to classical texts in his work, but rather in the way in which the poet makes use of his sources. Earlier scholars generally argued that Prudentius' use of source material was fairly uncritical, and hence, that his poetry amounted to a simple imitation of the giants of classical literature such as Virgil and Horace, and, as a result, lacked originality. Modern critics argue instead that his use of the sources is often intelligent and nuanced, and that his audience, being made up of educated readers, would have been well-equipped to identify these subtle allusions to classical literature. This, they, argue, has resulted in original and complex poetry. Thus, Bastiaensen states that '[t]he Prudentian technique exploits all the achievements of the Latin poetic tradition, Virgil's and Ovid's epic, Lucretius' didactic, Horace's lyrical, Seneca's dramatical and Juvenal's satirical poetry' (1993, p. 120).

Another focus of the criticism has been theology, both the poet's own and the collection's relation to early Christian thought in general. Here, critics have tried to extract Prudentius' own standpoint on various religious issues from the poems of the *Peristephanon*, for example attempting to establish what the collection tells us about Prudentius' beliefs about the relationship between the soul and the body, and faith and reason (Bastiaensen 1993, p. 14). Other critics question whether the *Peristephanon* reveals any coherent theology at all (Bastiaensen 1993, p. 14). An example of the relation of the *Peristephanon* to beliefs and attitudes of the early Christian community is Robert's book *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, which examines the relationship between the collection and the cult of the martyrs which developed in early Christianity.

Violence in previous work on the *Peristephanon*

So far, we have assessed the extant scholarship dealing with Prudentius' influences and theological position. In addition, it is important to look at how critics have dealt with the subject matter of the poems in the *Peristephanon*, especially since their storylines tend to be similar. Here, we should note that the martyrs featured in the collection all went to their deaths some time before Prudentius wrote about them. They were already historical characters in the poet's lifetime. Thus, the poems tend to open with an introductory section, in which Prudentius names the martyr concerned and talks about how he came to know of him or her, and the relevance the martyr has for his own generation of Christians. Here, he may talk about the special relationship between the martyr and his or her place of birth or martyrdom, or how Christians of his own time celebrate the martyr's feast day. He may also argue that the martyr deserves special recognition for some reason, or that contemporary Christians should take care to remember his or her story.

Following this, the poems generally describe how contact first occurs between the martyr and the Roman judicial apparatus. The martyr is charged with being a Christian, and is urged by the presiding magistrate to give up his or her faith. The martyr refuses to, and this gives rise to a verbal contest with the judge, in which the martyr is victorious, and the judge is 'baffled even in ways that he does not realize' (MacMullen 1975, p. 92). The result of this contest is that the judge becomes frustrated and orders that the martyr be tortured, in order to force a recantation, and to impress upon the intransigent Christian the might of pagan Rome. Further verbal contests may follow, as well as further torture, and eventually the magistrate orders the martyr's execution.

The scenes describing the dreadful tortures inflicted upon the martyrs generally form the most striking and memorable sections of these poems. Prudentius often devotes a substantial number of

lines to them,² both because the process of torture and execution tends to be agonisingly drawn-out, and in order to accommodate vivid and detailed descriptions of the various tortures, and the effect they have on the body of the martyr. The fact that these scenes are carefully crafted, and occupy such substantial portions of the poems, must mean that they are of considerable importance to the poet. He must have laboured upon them so much for a reason. Perhaps it was merely that he derived personal satisfaction from doing so. However, if we accept that most poets wish to convey meaning to their readers and evoke an emotional response within them, it follows that Prudentius must have intended these scenes to have an impact on his readers.

It is thus surprising to find that none of the extant scholarship addresses how these scenes of violence and suffering might affect the reader. On the contrary, the critics generally consider these scenes only insofar as they relate to issues like the poet's use of form, his technique, his use of sources, or the religious meaning of the poetry. For example, in his book *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, Roberts examines how these scenes serve to advance the narrative of the poems. Similarly, while Cunningham devotes a section of his article 'Contexts of Prudentius' Poems' to the presentation of scenes involving pain and suffering, his aim here is to show that the poet's 'characteristic modes of thought and expression' (1976, p. 62) mark a departure from those of classical Latin literature.

Paradox and Religious Truth

The way in which the religious meaning of the poems is linked with the suffering of the martyrs has also been well examined, but is worth exploring again due to its importance for a collection intended

² In the Lawrence poem (*Peristephanon* II), a combined total of approximately 68 out of 584 lines are devoted to the martyr's punishment, and to descriptions of men who have suffered disfigurement through violence, injury or disease. In the Eulalia poem (*Peristephanon* III), about 32 lines out of 215 are devoted to her torture and execution. In the Cassian poem (*Peristephanon* IX), about 39 lines out of 106 are devoted to torture. In the Hippolytus poem (*Peristephanon* XI), about 73 lines out of 246 are devoted to the torture of the martyr and other Christians. It must be kept in mind that although the proportions of lines devoted to violence seem low, the poems also include a reasonable amount of information about the events occurring before and after the violent scenes, as well as homilies to the martyrs. These things add to their length.

for Christian readers³. The horror of the martyrs' suffering gives rise to a series of paradoxes which convey religious truth by challenging the norms and assumptions of the pagan world. Some of these paradoxes occurred during the arena games, whose ostensible purpose was to humiliate and humble their victims. The spectators at the games "[were] there to witness the final display of violent power over subject bodies" (Shaw 1996, p. 278), and might reasonably expect, if not a recantation or confession, then at least evidence of remorse or pain. In addition, the spectators readily perceived the arena victims as "mere *ludibria*, ridiculous, weak and humiliated" (Barton 1994, p. 57). As we will discuss later, this perception resulted from their status as outsiders and others, and the degrading nature of the punishments they faced.

However, Christians could subvert these expectations and perceptions in various ways, to try to establish themselves as honourable, powerful and in control of their situations. They might achieve this through certain behaviours or bodily gestures. Typical of these were "the laughing, joyous submission to the rigmarole of the arena, [and] the tranquil accommodation to brutality" (Barton 1994, p. 57). Another way of subverting perceptions was to invert the meanings usually associated with bodily mutilation, as Eulalia does in *Peristephanon* III. The marks that the executioners leave on her body immediately bring to mind tattoos or brands, which the arena audience are likely to associate with servility, since both were traditionally inflicted on slaves as a sign of the master's ownership. However, Eulalia interprets the marks the executioners leave on her body in a positive way (Shaw 1996, p. 306), by seeing them as the victories of God written upon her. These sorts of strategies at least made it possible for the martyrs to establish their own agency, and hence persuade the spectators at the games that martyrdom was a path they had chosen, instead of a fate forced upon them. By doing this, these lowly and dishonoured people could reclaim the kind of honour discussed by Barton as being all that was available to them (1994).

³ See Palmer (1989)

Overall, it is the separation between the physical and the spiritual that gives rise to some of the most striking paradoxes in the arena. For example, the martyr's helpless physical suffering is instead interpreted as an evenly-matched spiritual contest with the forces of darkness (as between two great athletes). Physical suffering is also interpreted as spiritually beneficial, since it hastens the soul's exit from the physical body and return to God, and because physical death is really spiritual rebirth. In this way, suffering can be a joyous occasion.

The inversion of pagan norms and values could also happen without the stimulus of the arena. Paradox was thus also the vehicle for a radical move away from certain values which had long been entrenched in the pagan world. Action and assertiveness, for example, were considered important manly virtues, and conversely, those who exhibited submissiveness or passivity were considered to bring dishonour and shame upon themselves. Aristotle, in particular, believed that these behaviours resulted from effeminacy or cowardice (Shaw 1996, p. 285). However, Christianity inverted these value judgments because it considered passivity to be an appropriate moral response to an enemy who sought to hurt or cast one down: the behaviour of Jesus, who turned the other cheek, was a model for this. This was a "revolution in values connected with valuing the inferior, the humble, the womanly, that which merely accepts and endures (from a prone position)" (Shaw 1996, p. 303). Christianity even made humility and servility desirable by comparing followers to slaves of a divine master, God.

These ways in which Christian suffering gave rise to certain paradoxes expressing Christian truth, and challenging pagan norms, have been well connected with the poems in the *Peristephanon*. The scholarship which focuses on violence in the collection tends to explore it from this angle rather than tackling the issue of the reader's possible emotional response to the violence.

This is the case even in one article which suggests, by its title, that it might examine the nature and effect of the violent episodes in the collection. This is "Violence in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*" by Henderson. However, this article instead concerns itself firstly with justifying the presence of these violent episodes, and secondly with explaining how they contribute to the religious message of the collection. The conclusion the author reaches is one which is already familiar to us from other scholarship: 'the greater the mortification of the flesh in all its terrifying details, the greater the triumph of the spirit' (1983, p. 91).

My Proposal

The lack of detailed examination of the violent episodes in the *Peristephanon* thus offers scope for new work on the collection. With this in mind, I propose to examine the rich detail and imagery found in these scenes from a literary and language point of view, in order to assess what kind of effects they might have on Prudentius' readers. While these scenes may naturally provoke a wide range of reactions, I will argue that the most prevalent of these are likely to be disgust and horror. These terms, however, should not be understood as describing one-dimensional or monochromatic emotions. Rather, I will argue that the collection is a fertile breeding ground for differing shades of disgust and horror which are sometimes similar and reinforcing, but at other times widely divergent in meaning, and even contradictory.

The *Peristephanon* contains many violent episodes which may be selected for study. However, as it is beyond the scope of this thesis to treat all comprehensively, a process of selection is necessary. Some poems can be excluded because their use of imagery or their descriptions of torture and the martyr's reactions are very similar to those of other poems. Others can be excluded because their torture scenes are so brief that they would yield little of interest. For example, in *Peristephanon I*, only four lines out of 120 are devoted to the torture of the martyrs. Following these, Prudentius

laments that the destruction of records prevents him from elaborating on their suffering (vv. 69–78). Likewise, in *Peristephanon* IV, which is mostly devoted to listing martyrs from different towns, while the sufferings of Encratis take up about eight lines, this merely represents a catalogue of the different tortures she has undergone, and does not contain any examination of their effects. *Peristephanon* V at first seems a suitable candidate, as it is a long poem about the martyr Vincent, and contains several scenes describing the different tortures he undergoes. However, although the torture sections are rich in detail and ideas, most have strong similarities with other poems. For example, Vincent's torture with the claws parallels Eulalia's (*Peristephanon* III, vv. 131–135). His cheerfulness in the face of dreadful suffering is also mirrored by Eulalia's reaction (*Peristephanon* III, vv. 142). In addition, his torture on the spiked grid over a bed of fire is very similar to Lawrence's fate (*Peristephanon* II, vv. 341–356). Finally, while Vincent's torture contains an element of novelty in the form of the broken pots he is made to lie upon, novelty also features very strongly in the punishments of Lawrence, Cassian and Hippolytus. The Vincent poem has thus been excluded from our analysis. In addition, *Peristephanon* X, by far the longest piece in the collection, is also omitted, firstly as it has been argued that it was written as a stand-alone piece, and was thus never intended by the poet to form part of the collection (Palmer 1989, pp. 5 & 248), and secondly because it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give adequate treatment to such a lengthy and complex piece.

This thesis will thus focus on four poems. The first is *Peristephanon* II, which tells the story of the martyr Lawrence who, while being tortured on the gridiron over a slow-burning fire, makes his famous, grotesque joke. The second is *Peristephanon* III, which focuses on the girl-martyr Eulalia, whose flesh is hacked away with the claw before she is burned on the pyre. The third poem, *Peristephanon* IX, deals with the schoolteacher Cassian, who is martyred at the hands of his own pupils. The final poem is *Peristephanon* XI. This poem focuses on the martyr Hippolytus, whose name decides his fate. These four poems contain scenes of violence and torture which are

substantial enough to permit analysis. In addition, each poem describes a unique scenario of torture and reaction which will allow us to propose that each could affect the reader in different ways.

However, before we examine our chosen poems, we must resolve several issues, and hence establish the parameters of the thesis. First, if we are to explore readers' reactions to our four chosen poems, we must rebut arguments that it is impossible to make general claims about reader responses to a text. Next, we must ensure that our claim that most readers will react with disgust and horror is, in fact, a plausible one. This claim assumes that even very different groups of readers, such as ancient and modern readers, would have shared some similar emotional responses to our poems. To assess to what extent this is true, we will consider theories concerning the nature of emotions. These examine whether emotions are universal, culturally constructed, or some combination of the two. Our enquiry will suggest that a combined understanding of the nature of emotions is preferable. The implication of this for our claim is that while it is possible that all readers, regardless of cultural or religious background, could respond in broadly similar ways to our poems, these factors will most likely, in practice, influence them to respond in different ways. Part of our task will thus be to explicate how this happens. Cultural difference, in particular, has the potential to yield much material, because the cultural landscape of ancient Rome was so different from our own. To this end, we will examine aspects of Roman life and culture which influenced the emotional landscape of its citizens. Here, we will note that the Romans were less likely to be moved to sympathy when those people they considered lesser, 'other' or outsiders were the victims of violence, and hence were less likely to experience horror, and perhaps disgust, when witnessing their fates. To reinforce this point, we will look at Roman attitudes towards those who had suffered disfigurement or disability through violence, and Roman attitudes towards the mastery of physical pain. We will conclude that while the ancient Romans had the capacity to feel disgust and horror in

their full, deep sense, they were unlikely to do so when witnessing the violence to others that commonly occurred in everyday life.

It should be noted at this point that while the ways in which readers respond to a text are partly determined by authorial intention, this is not the sole contributing factor, and will not form a large part of our discussion. As the Romans were not commonly moved to horror and disgust by the everyday violence they witnessed, it is plausible that Prudentius may have had to work rather hard, and create particularly gruesome and striking scenes of violence, if he wished to evoke these emotions in his contemporaries. However, it is also possible that some of the disgust and horror felt by readers was, and is, unintentional. Our speculations will thus focus far more on reader reaction than authorial intention.

Once we have resolved the questions of reader reactions and the nature of emotions, we will be in a position to explore our two chosen emotions: disgust and horror. We will look at their nature, and aesthetic issues concerning their depiction in ancient literature. Following this, we will examine the literary trend towards graphic depictions of violence in late antiquity, and hence show the context in which Prudentius wrote, and some possible influences for the violent scenes in his work. This will complete our exploration of background issues and enable us to proceed with studies of the individual poems.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Disgust and Horror

It goes without saying that depictions of violence and suffering in a text can have a profound emotional impact on the reader. For our four chosen poems, we will argue that this impact results in the reader experiencing feelings of disgust and horror. It may be objected from the outset that there is no way of knowing whether all readers of these poems will be moved to feel these particular emotions. However, I do not claim that readers will necessarily react in these ways, only that it is highly likely that disgust and horror will be prominent amongst the emotions elicited. A *prima facie* argument in support of this claim might be that fundamental aspects of the human condition, which layers of culture can alter but not eradicate, might cause us to react to these poems with these similar, primal emotions. Such aspects could include certain experiences which are common to all, such as the unpleasantness of pain, the difficulty in enduring suffering, and the capacity for empathy and pity. This argument will be explored in more detail later, when we consider the nature of emotions.

My reason for arguing for the likelihood of reactions of horror and disgust has, in part, to do with authorial intention. I believe it is quite likely that Prudentius wanted his readers to be disgusted and horrified by certain passages in his poems, and structured them in order to elicit such reactions. This belief will prove unacceptable to those who claim that there is no way to determine authorial intention, and thus that we should not take it into account when trying to establish the meaning of a text. To such critics, I would argue along with Woodman and Powell that just as authors are aware of the likely effects of their work on their readers (1992, p. 208), it is perfectly possible for readers to make good guesses about what the author is trying to convey. Woodman and Powell argue that trying to establish authorial intention 'is in principle not very different from our attempts in everyday life to interpret what other people say and do. We can never fully enter into the mind of another

person, but we can and must constantly form reasonable assumptions about other peoples' meanings and motives' (1992, p. 209). Thus, although it was noted in the introduction that some instances of disgust and horror in our poems might arise independently of Prudentius' desire to create them, it is simply not possible for them all to do so. These emotions would not be elicited so frequently unless the poet had intended them to be.

1.2 How did the Romans Experience Disgust and Horror? Was their Experience of these Emotions Different to our Own?

Let us now consider the question of whether different groups of readers, e.g. Roman and modern readers, might experience different emotions when reading the poems. To understand how this is possible, it is useful to consider the different accounts of the nature of emotions that have been advanced by psychologists, philosophers and anthropologists. The problem posed by emotions is whether to account for them in terms of nature or culture. On the one hand, we can argue that emotions are a product of a 'universally identical' (Leavitt 1996, p. 515) human biology. If this is so, it would tend to suggest that all human beings, regardless of their particular cultural milieu, experience, or at least have the capacity to experience, the same set of emotions. On the other hand, a cultural interpretation of emotions suggests that they are socially and culturally constructed, and thus that their nature can vary considerably between individuals living in different societies. Scholars who advance this view would tend to view with scepticism the idea that there are 'common values and dispositions that bind individuals cross-culturally' (Svasek 2005, p. 11).

A third possibility is to provide an account which bridges the nature/ culture divide and affords both a place in the structure of emotions. This approach has been taken by anthropologists such as Leavitt, and by philosophers such as Perkins, and is also implicit in the work of Elias (Milton 2005, p. 27). These types of theories have several advantages over the either-or approaches. To demonstrate

this, let us examine the role of 'feelings' in emotions. These 'feelings' can either be experienced emotionally, for example as a 'mood' or 'mindset' that a person typically experiences as going hand-in-hand with a particular emotion. Alternatively, they can consist of bodily feelings (e.g. goose bumps) that we become aware of through our sensory receptors (Perkins 1966, p. 144). These 'feelings' are so characteristic of what we experience when we are subject to a particular emotion that we find it hard to conceive of a theory of emotions that downplays or excludes them. But this is exactly what culturalist approaches to emotion do, and this demonstrates quite simply how combined approaches have the advantage over cultural approaches.

Now, to illustrate how combined approaches are superior to biological approaches, let us consider an example of 'feelings' involved in an emotion. Let us imagine that I am experiencing a sick or tight feeling in my stomach, along with a sense of unease. These feelings might indicate that I am experiencing anxiety, but they do not alone constitute this emotion. Indeed, they could merely indicate that I ate something disagreeable for lunch. To say that I am experiencing anxiety, something additional must be present: I must hold a belief that some object or situation in my environment is a cause for fear and dread.⁴ Thus, to qualify as anxiety, my feelings must go hand-in-hand with a belief or judgement about my situation. This suggests that in addition to raw feelings, a cognitive component is an essential part of any emotion. Naturally this cognitive component may vary considerably between individuals and cultures, giving rise to different emotional colourings and differing assessments of the nature of the emotion in question. Biological accounts thus overemphasize the 'feeling' component of emotions and underemphasize the cognitive component, making it difficult for them to explain how emotions can vary across cultures. Here again, a combined approach has obvious advantages.

⁴ This example is adapted from Leavitt (1996, p. 515).

One anthropological interpretation of this combined theory of emotions is given by Myers, who, in reference to the earlier writings of Geertz, states that 'the range and quality of emotional experience is potentially the same for all human beings, although socialization selects, elaborates and emphasizes certain qualitative aspects from within this range' (1979, p. 343). Miller (1997) elaborates on how this relates to the concept of disgust when he mentions that although there are some objects that are perceived as disgusting in all cultures, 'societies have considerable latitude in shaping the extension of disgust from primary objects to other objects' (Nussbaum 2004, p. 83). No doubt similar claims could be made about horror.

Combined approaches to the theory of the nature of emotions thus demonstrate how a person's social and cultural background can significantly influence their emotional experiences. With this in mind, it is obvious that ancient and modern readers would not have experienced identical reactions to our poems.⁵ However, it is also apparent that the differences between ancient and modern readers are potentially far greater than the differences between other groups such as Christian and pagan readers in antiquity. This is due to the fact that Christians and pagans, despite their different religious beliefs, shared the same distinctly Roman cultural heritage. This would have ensured that they had much emotional common ground, and hence had a much more similar reaction to our poems. As Roberts argues, pagans and Christians shared 'aesthetic values that can only be attributed to the mental world of late antiquity' (Roberts 1988, p. 181) – a world in which 'classical and Christian elements, at least by the end of the fourth century, are thoroughly interwoven' (Roberts 1988, p. 181).

⁵ It should also be noted at this point that when discussing the reactions of different types of readers, it is only possible to identify very broad tendencies. In all groups of readers, there will inevitably be some who behave uncharacteristically. For example, particularly sensitive individuals might be far more affected by the poems than most readers. The reverse is also quite possible.

Thus, while the *Peristephanon* was intended for a Christian audience⁶, we do not have to assume that the Christian Roman audience's response differed very much from that of any pagan Roman who might have read the collection.

1.3 The Intensity of Disgust and Horror

Horror and disgust, as we know them, are strong emotions. They are commonly experienced as images or scenes which brand themselves onto the mind and, once there, resist our attempts to dislodge them. There is evidence to suggest that the Romans, too, were capable of experiencing these emotions in this way. Shaw has demonstrated this by exploring the connection between the punishments handed down in Roman courts and the vivid and disturbing dreams that some writers experienced as a result of being caught up in the judicial process (2003). He argues that the ever-present threat of legal coercion, and hence corporal punishment, 'was deeply embedded in the conscience of the ordinary people of the time' (2003, p. 538), so much so that not only do we have records of specific trial and punishment dreams, but these dreams seem to have been so prevalent that various *summa supplicia* even feature among the common dream scenarios discussed in dream interpretation manuals of the time (Shaw 2003, p. 538). We can thus see the intense feeling of horror that could be aroused in those facing chastisement.

More sensitive individuals may have equally felt a deep sense of horror, and also disgust, when they witnessed the agonies experienced by others, most notably arena *noxii*. Thus, it was perhaps a spectator of the games, who, having been deeply impressed by what he saw, sketched the graffito near the amphitheatre at Puteoli described by archaeologist Fasola.⁷ It depicts a transfixed and dying man.

⁶ Palmer (1989) holds that the collection was written for Christians to use in their private devotions.

⁷ Fasola's example is mentioned in Segal (1983, p. 187).

The above indicates that the Romans certainly could experience disgust and horror in what we understand to be their full, deep sense. Our task now is to look for evidence to establish to what extent they did, and furthermore, what these emotions meant to them. When thinking about areas of Roman life that may have influenced how ancient readers reacted to the violent scenes in the *Peristephanon*, our attention naturally falls on the level of violence in Roman society, which was so much higher than that seen in most modern societies.

1.4 Violence in Roman Society: General Remarks

When examining violence in Roman culture, we must firstly be aware that the word itself has certain cultural meanings (Riches 1986, p. 1) which reflect the values and standards of our own society (Brown 1992, p. 181), but which may not have been applicable to Roman society. In particular, the word carries with it implications of a judgement of illegitimacy. It will thus be helpful to bear in mind that what we are examining in Roman culture are wilful acts of harm to others which may or may not have been considered illegitimate by those who performed them, or were subject to them. We will use the word 'violence' merely as a convenient term to refer to these acts of harm.

Violence was a common feature of many areas of Roman life. Lintott has succinctly listed how this was already the case in Republican Rome: 'Let us ... consider the activities which would form part of the indictment if a man were able to charge the Romans of the Republic with cruelty. Apart from violence in domestic politics and civil disputes, they would compromise the atrocities of provincial governors from L. Flaminius onwards, barbarous survivals in the fields of law and religion, cruelty in war and the bloodshed at the games' (1999, p. 36). In addition to these, Barton mentions 'the practice of decimation, in which the brave and guiltless were executed indiscriminately along with the cowardly and guilty; mass executions of prisoners of war, deserters and rebels; public and private executions and chastisements of all sorts (especially of slaves); torture of witnesses ...; the liability of

all the slaves of a household when one has committed a serious crime against the master; the pitiless vendetta' (1989, p. 9).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine all areas of Roman life in which violence was commonplace. Instead, we will focus on those areas in which this violence reflected an imbalance of power or status between the perpetrators and the victims. In addition to highlighting the pervasiveness of violence in everyday Roman life, this focus on unequal relationships will also allow us to suggest reasons for a proposal we will make: that the Romans were less susceptible to feelings of disgust and horror when viewing violence aimed at victims who were considered inferior, outsiders or 'other'.

1.5 Slaves

Violence featured commonly in the relationship between master and slave. This was a reflection of the power inequalities inherent in the relationship, and was also a consequence of the highly stratified nature of Roman society, in which access to privilege and power, and even the enjoyment of what would today be considered the most basic human rights, were restricted to those who belonged to the appropriate class. This resulted in the existence of a privileged few, whose physical integrity was respected by others and who could protect themselves from injury, and a disproportionately huge lower-class whose bodily integrity was simply not considered important enough to warrant protection.

This correlation between low social status and liability to physical violence is not unique to the ancient world. The sociologist Goffman recognised the converse of this phenomenon in modern society and tried to account for it. He argues that in situations where one person behaves with deference towards another, the other's personal space is respected and not breached. Thus, the

'relative status of two parties ... is asserted by the differential liberties they take in invading each other's private sphere, the party of higher status deserving a greater distance' (Saller 1991, pp. 152-153). It follows that those of lower status are naturally less deserving of respect regarding personal space. Thus, for slaves, personal space, and, by extension, bodily integrity, were easily breachable.

The slave's vulnerability to violence also stemmed from his status as a means to an end. A slave was a living *instrumentum*, like livestock or beasts of burden. As such, his needs merited meeting only insofar as they kept him alive and in a fit condition to do work. While this did not necessarily entail a vulnerability to violence, this was almost always the outcome. The idea that a person can be an instrument allowed the slave-owner to use whatever means he deemed appropriate to induce an unwilling slave to fulfil his function and do his work. The natural choice here is violence and cruelty, since slaves usually had nothing else of value of which they could be deprived besides their bodily integrity. As Bradley notes, 'slaves ... could pay in no other way, [and were] answerable to [their] owners with ... body alone' (2000, p. 115). Slaves were thus considered as not only liable to cruel treatment, but as a class to which such treatment was proper when it would drive them to fulfil their function, or to punish them when they failed to fulfil it. In fact, the perception that slaves were prone to be intractable, greedy and idle (Bradley 1984, p. 28) could make such treatment seem absolutely necessary in order to ensure that they didn't shirk their jobs. In this way, violence and cruel treatment were made permissible, and indeed they flourished.

Beatings were a common form of chastisement for slaves. Seneca mentions how slaves could be beaten for the smallest error or perceived slight. For instance, he notes that *virga murmur omne conpescitur, et ne fortuita quidem verberibus excepta sunt, tussis, sternumenta, singultus* (*Epistulae Morales* 47.3). He also hints at this tendency while discussing the virtue of forbearance: *Quid est*

quare ego servi mei clarius responsum et contumaciorem vultum et non pervenientem usque ad me murmurationem flagellis et conpedibus expiem? (De Ira III. XXIV. 2)

The prevalence of beating slaves was also reflected in Roman comedy, where it is characteristic of the slave to be 'constantly preoccupied with corporal punishment through repeated references to past beatings and to the anticipation of future beatings' (Saller 1991, p. 153). In addition, slaves are 'humorously' addressed 'by variations on the word *verber*' (Saller 1991, p. 154), or even, as in our first example below, identify themselves as such:

Sosia: Sum vero verna verbero

(Plautus, *Amphitruo* 180)

Leonida: tu, verbero, imperium meum contempsisti?

(Plautus, *Asinaria* 416)

Euclio: verberabilissime, etiam rogitas, non fur, sed trifur?

(Plautus: *Aulularia* 633)⁸

However, chastisement of slaves could take far more serious forms than a simple beating now and again. For instance, it was even legal to beat a slave to death, provided this occurred 'in the course of just punishment' (Parker 1989, p. 239). This was due to the fact that, in contrast to the punishment that could be meted out to the free, there were hardly any legal limits to the manner in which slaves could be punished. When such limits were introduced in the Christian era, they served only to rule out certain very specific punishments, such as the sale of slaves for beast fighting (Parker 1989, p. 239). The result of this was that 'there was no real restraint on the slave-owner, other than his own

⁸ These examples are due to Saller (1991, p. 154)

temperament or conscience, to prevent outrage or extremity' (Bradley 1984, p. 122). In addition, slave owners had recourse to many standard forms of punishment. Crucifixion was a popular means of punishment, and indeed, its earliest application was to slaves (Parker 1989, p. 239). Even more moderate members of society could, and did, inflict brutal punishments on their slaves. Suetonius, for example, claims that the emperor Augustus (*Aug.* 67.2), hardly an example of depraved ingenuity, had the legs of his secretary Thallus broken for revealing the contents of a confidential letter (Garland 1995, p. 51).

Not only the slave's body, but even his life, had little intrinsic worth. Indeed, his very survival was considered 'a favour granted initially by whoever had decided to let him live in the first place (whether the soldier who might have killed him in battle or the owner of his mother when he was born, who might have ordered him to be exposed)' (Wiedemann 1992, p. 104). Therefore, the slave's owner might withdraw that favour at any moment, should the slave incur his wrath. Thus, a slave's punishment for displeasing his master in any way could extend from a beating, through to more serious and agonising chastisement, all the way to execution.

1.6 Interrogation under Torture

Similarly, slaves, and from the 2nd and 3rd centuries the humble free (Garnsey 1970, p. 104), were also vulnerable to torture in the course of legal proceedings. Here, too, liability to bodily invasion is closely linked to low social status – *honestiores* were never subject to torture under such circumstances. This particular use of torture occurred either because it had the force of an established custom, or due to a belief that slaves and the humble free could not be trusted to tell the truth uncoerced, whereas *honestiores* could be.

The most common forms of torture used during interrogation were the rack, on which the victim was stretched until the joints and muscles were pulled apart, 'so that the body was broken up inside the envelope of the skin' (DuBois 1991, p. 2), the *lignum*, which also distended the joints and muscles, and the *ungulae*, 'hooks that lacerated the flesh' (Peters 1985, p. 35). Additionally, those held for questioning might suffer burning with heated metal and the *mala mansio*, which tightly compressed the body (Peters 1985, p. 35). The jurist Callistratus adds to this list by mentioning *admonitio flagellorum, ... vinculorum verberatio* (*Digest*, 48.19.7). Surprisingly, interrogation under torture continued despite its unreliability, which is twofold. Firstly, those tortured for information are likely to produce 'whatever reports or fabrications [they] think their torturers wish to hear' (Collins 1974, p. 420), simply in order to bring an end to their physical suffering. However, there is also a considerable risk that the examinee might die in the process, and hence take any desired information to the grave with them.

1.7 Condemned Criminals

We have thus seen how and why slaves were subject to violence according to their master's whim, and how slaves and the humble free were vulnerable to torture if caught up in legal proceedings. In both cases, we noted that such violent treatment was considered appropriate to these groups due to their social standing. Condemned criminals belonging to the lower classes were viewed in the same way, although for slightly different reasons. A criminal of low social status was an appropriate target for violence due to a fundamental Roman belief. This is that a person's social class revealed essential facts about their character. Those of the lower classes were believed to possess inferior moral standards, and hence were more likely to become criminals in the first place. On the other hand, '*boni mores* ... were nothing less than the virtues of the higher orders' (Garnsey 1970, p. 210). Quintilian (Garnsey 1970, p. 210) confirms this view:

similes parentibus ac maioribus suis plerumque creduntur, et nonnumquam ad honeste turpiterque vivendum inde causae fluunt

(*Institutio Oratoria*, 5.10.24)

Thus, we see that a large class of people (*humiliores*) were considered fundamentally bad due to their station in life. In addition, on a more practical level, *humiliores* were considered to contribute very little to state and society (Kyle 1998, p. 101), and thus to be worth little, and merit little concern. Only the fortunate few belonging to the upper classes escaped such stereotyping. This thinking quite naturally influenced Roman penal codes, and a two-tier system of punishment developed which allowed convicted criminals of the upper classes to escape with far lighter penalties. Callistratus explains, crediting the early Romans with having begun this practice:

maiores nostri in omne supplicio severius servos quam liberos, famosos quam integrae famae homines punierunt.

(*Digest*, 48.19.28.16)

In practice, this meant that while lower-class criminals were often subjected to violent and degrading punishments, upper-class criminals, even those convicted of the same crimes, mostly escaped with body, or at the very least, dignity intact. *Honestiores* who were convicted of crimes carrying harsh penalties initially escaped them because they had the means to go into voluntary exile. Later, exile itself replaced harsher punishments as the sentence for guilty *honestiores*.

Certain crimes, however, carried the death penalty even for *honestiores* (e.g., *maiestas*). Conviction of one of these crimes would usually result in being sentenced to *damnatio ad gladium*, execution via decapitation. This had the advantage of being 'quick and unaggravated' (Kyle 1998, p. 53), and could be done discreetly, thus preserving the *dignitas* of the victim. Considerations of *dignitas* were

important to Romans of the upper classes. The loss of *dignitas* which accompanied less discreet means of execution could be considered just as fearful a prospect as the physical suffering accompanying execution (Baumann 1996, p. 36). For this reason, another punishment available only to *honestiores* was considered a boon. This was the *liberum mortis arbitrium* (free choice of the manner of one's death). The element of choice allowed the condemned to preserve his *dignitas* (Baumann 1996, p. 36).

For *humiliores* convicted of a serious crime, the outlook was considerably bleaker. They were usually subject to the *summa supplicia* (ultimate punishments). These were aggravated forms of the death penalty (Garnsey 1970, p. 104) – brutal, degrading and drawn-out, so that 'death would often come as a merciful release' (Shaskolsky Sheleff 1987, p. 54). *Summa supplicia* included *bestiis dari* (exposure to the beasts), *crux* (crucifixion) and *crematio* (burning alive) (Garnsey 1970, p. 104).

1.8 The Arena Games

These brutal punishments were, in addition, mostly carried out in the highly public forum of the arena games. The amazing longevity of this bloodthirsty form of entertainment, as well as the huge number of people from all levels of society who flocked to the games as spectators, have been well documented. Thus, for our purposes, we need only observe that the games were an important contributing factor to the levels of violence in Roman society. This is firstly because they ensured that Romans of all classes had an abundant supply of violence, which could be enjoyed on a regular basis. Secondly, the presence of the games ensured that the bloodshed and slaughter which featured so strongly in Rome's militaristic heyday continued to be 'central elements in Roman culture' (Hopkins 1983, p. 2) long after the establishment of the *pax Romana*.

As well as illustrating the pervasiveness of violence in Roman society, the rituals of the games give us an insight into the status of the convicted criminal and the sort of esteem in which he was held. Once convicted, it is significant that the criminal acquired the status of a slave (Potter 1993, p. 65). Rather than belonging to another human being, however, he was a slave of the punishment itself. Thus, once found guilty, the criminal was considered to exist only as a blank canvas for the infliction of the violent punishment which was his due. This punishment itself fulfilled several functions. Firstly, it could serve as a useful deterrent. While the audience may have been amused and entertained by the spectacle of his humiliation and death, they also consciously or subconsciously absorbed the message that if they transgressed, they might find themselves in the place of the arena *noxius*.

An equally important and rather more spectacular function fulfilled by the *noxius* was that of entertainment. It is this function that especially highlights to what extent *noxii* were stripped of their status as autonomous human beings and reduced simply to means to an end. The convicted criminal became a '*ludibrium*, an object of sport' (Barton 1994, p. 43). His function as a means of entertainment could even assume more importance than the carrying out of his sentence. Although supposedly in the arena to suffer the death penalty, the fact that his agony was valuable for entertainment purposes could mean that death was drawn-out or even not achieved. For example, at the famed games at Lyons, none of the martyrs condemned to exposure to the beasts actually died of their wounds. All had to be taken aside and 'finished off later' (Auguet 1972, p. 95).

However, it is perhaps the 'fatal charades' that best illustrate attitudes towards arena *noxii*. This is the term used by Coleman (1990) to describe the practice of forcing condemned criminals to enact scenes from mythology, as an actor would on stage, so that the condemned would die in character. Tertullian gives examples of the forms the fatal charades could take:

vidimus saepe castratum Attin deum a Pessinunte et qui vivus cremabatur, Herculem induerat, risimus et meridiani ludi de deis lusum.

(*Ad Nationes*. 1.10.47)⁹

The fatal charades indicate how thoroughly the condemned criminal was viewed as an object to be used for entertainment. By forcing the criminal into such a charade, the Romans showed that even en route to his death, considerations of dignity and autonomy counted for nothing. Instead, the criminal was thoroughly debased and humiliated even while suffering an agonising death.

1.9 The Work of Elias and Dunning

By examining slavery, the judicial system and the arena games, we have demonstrated that Roman society was much more violent than our own, and that much of this violence was inflicted by stronger groups upon those who were weaker and considered inferior. The sociological theories of Elias can give us insight into how both the prevalence and nature of this violence could have influenced the Romans' emotional responses. To understand the effect of high levels of violence in a society, we can turn to Elias' idea of the 'civilizing process', which he uses to describe the changes occurring in European societies during the late Middle Ages. Most important of these changes is the decrease in levels of violence. As Elias points out, this was the result of an 'increased monopolization of physical violence by an emergent system of nation-states' (White 2006, p. 449), which resulted in fewer opportunities for individuals to commit acts of violence.¹⁰ At the same time, 'controlled, peaceful and refined forms of interpersonal behaviour' (Smith 1999, p. 80) began to develop in these societies, which would also have served to lower the levels of violence. Elias' choice of terminology should not be understood as suggesting that Rome was uncivilized by comparison to these newly-formed,

⁹ Quoted in Coleman (1990, p. 55).

¹⁰ Hopkins (1983, p. 28) points out that Rome 'did not establish an early monopoly of legitimate violence, and only in the second century AD did it acquire a legal monopoly of capital punishment'.

newly-pacified nation states. By 'civilizing process', he is merely referring to the increase in social stability, both at national and interpersonal levels, which occurred during the time period he examines.

In addition, Elias argues that certain changes in individual psychology occurred during the 'civilizing process'. He states that individuals began to internalise the newly-developed 'social prohibition against violence' (Elias 1986, p. 163), resulting in important changes in the way they managed their feelings (Smith 1999, p. 81). Thus, we witness a 'conscience-formation' (Elias 1986, p. 163) and 'the inculcation of self-restraint, shame and repugnance' (Smith 1999, p. 80). The result was 'a conditioned psychology of abhorrence of excess violence' (Kyle 1998, p. 5) – especially of killing. According to this analysis, ancient Rome was clearly a society in which the 'civilizing process' had yet to commence on a broad scale. This is suggested by the absence of any evidence indicating that most Romans considered the violence they were accustomed to viewing as problematic or distressing.

When examining the nature of Roman violence, we can turn to Elias and Dunning's discussion of sport, which is relevant to that abundant source of violence, the arena games. The idea of the games is repugnant to most moderns not only because of the level of violence involved, but because most of the participants were forced into taking part and denied adequate means of defending themselves. This makes the games seem cruel, coercive and unsporting to us. However, these aspects of the games were mostly unproblematic for the Romans. The witnessing of violence, even violence of this type, actually represented an increase in sensitivity when compared to earlier periods in history. Elias and Dunning use the example of English fox-hunting, which is now poorly regarded for similar reasons to the arena games, but during its heyday represented a raising of 'the threshold of revulsion against violence' (Elias 1986, p. 163). Earlier forms of hunting typically involved the hunter

making the kill, and thus inflicting violence, himself. However, by the time of fox-hunting's establishment, 'killing and the use of physical violence generally, even physical violence in relation to animals, had become hedged in more elaborately by taboos and restraints' (Elias 1986, p. 164). This indicates that some of the feelings of shame, guilt or repulsion regarding violence, feelings which are characteristic of the 'civilizing process', had begun to take hold. However, killing foxes was still acceptable under certain circumstances, and this task could thus be delegated to the hounds. This resulted in a change in the kind of enjoyment derived from hunting. Formerly, the hunter enjoyed both the chase and the kill, whereas, in fox-hunting, the hunters instead enjoyed a more prolonged (and hence more exciting) chase and took pleasure in observing the kill.

Elias and Dunning note that this principle also applied to other spectator pastimes of pre-industrial Britain, such as 'cock-fighting, bull- and bear-baiting, ... prize-fighting [and] watching public executions' (Dunning 1986, p. 229). In addition, it neatly explains the Roman people's relationship to the violence they witnessed at the arena games. Just as the delegation of killing to the hounds allowed fox-hunters to 'enjoy "a pleasure without any regret attending it"' (Elias 1986, p. 164), so too could the spectators at the games absolve themselves from moral culpability. Thus, this violence, coercive and unsporting as it was, was acceptable and enjoyable to the spectators at the games because they themselves were not guilty of its infliction.

However, even though the Romans could enjoy the games despite the high levels of violence involved, the coercive nature of this violence could, when very apparent, make their viewing experience unpleasant. Some criminals who were sentenced to appear in the arena actively participated in their fate and displayed a fighting spirit. However, there were many others who did not, and had to be forced to take part in the games or a fatal charade, for instance by being threatened with a worse fate. Such displays of unwillingness could make the spectators feel angry or

uncomfortable. Seneca indicates in his letters that while subordination of the victim's will to that of his punishers' was admirable and 'ennobled both participant and spectator' (Barton 1989, p. 8), the absence of collaboration, and thus the exposure of the games as pure victimisation, could have the opposite effect. Watching the participants 'cringe or despair was a debilitating and shameful experience' (Barton 1989, p. 8). Thus, to preserve the enjoyability of the games, it was important that the spectators could believe that the arena victims approached their fate in the correct spirit.

1.10 The Arena Games: Enjoyment of Violence and Reactions of the Spectators

Apart from considerations of the *animus* of the arena *noxius*, there is abundant evidence that most members of society did not feel any horror, regret or revulsion towards the violence they witnessed at the games, nor did they experience pangs of conscience. On the contrary, they flocked to the games because the violent spectacles they witnessed there provided them with a great deal of enjoyment¹¹. For proof of the spellbound intensity with which the Romans watched the games, we need only recall Augustine's example of the Christian Alypius, who, despite being strongly opposed to the games, finds himself utterly seduced by the sights and sounds he encounters in the arena:

Ut enim vidit illum sanguinem, inmanitatem simul ebibit; et non se avertit, sed fixit aspectum, et hauriebat furias et nesciebat, et delectabatur scelere certaminis, et cruenta voluptate inebriabatur.

(*Confessiones*, VI.8)

There were several factors which forestalled horror and disgust in the spectators, and hence allowed them to enjoy the games as much as they did. For example, as has been well documented, the games were designed to evoke a certain kind of emotional reaction in the spectators. They provided

¹¹ Coleman (1990, p. 57–58) states, '[t]hat they did enjoy it is attested not merely by the longevity of this type of spectacle, but by the graphic representations of amphitheatre scenes on their floors ... , on their walls, their statuary, reliefs, artefacts, and decorative objects of all types; and by a wealth of literary evidence ranging from anecdote to criticism by pagan philosophers and early church fathers.'

a space in which the power and moral authority of Rome's government were confirmed through the savage punishment of transgressors. Thus, the audience 'expected to see penitence and terror in the condemned, they expected to hear them scream, and they expected to see the terror in their faces' (Potter 1993, p. 53). By witnessing this show of force, the audience could feel relieved and reassured that justice had been carried out.¹² This relief and reassurance probably had the effect of counteracting any potential feelings of horror or disgust.

Social attitudes towards the viewing of violent acts also played a role. Wiedemann argues that it was considered 'part of the Roman character to be able to watch the bloodshed of the arena' (1992, p. 138). Hence, 'an inability to look at executions was considered childish, to be outgrown with experience' (Salisbury 1997, p. 126). The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* note that as a child, Caracalla disliked watching violence in the arena: *si quando feris obiectos damnatos vidit, flevit aut oculos avertit* (3). For adults, an inability to watch the games was even less excusable, for 'it was considered moral weakness to turn away from the sight of a criminal's blood' (Salisbury 1997, pp. 126–127).

In addition, the sheer number of games that the Romans had the opportunity to attend probably increased their enjoyment of these spectacles. It is likely that as spectators at the games witnessed more and more violence, they became desensitized to it and learned to enjoy it. Salisbury argues that the same phenomenon may be witnessed at bull-fights today: 'newcomers turn away at the sight of the bull's blood; experienced watchers cheer the skill of the matador' (1997, p. 126). But there is, in addition, a further progression which occurs here. After one has become desensitized to violence, one's palate can become jaded with respect to 'ordinary' forms of it, leading to a craving for stronger doses in new and novel forms. Scholars argue that this was the reason for the development of the

¹² Wiedemann (1992, p. 72) notes here that while effective police forces and prison systems can provide such reassurance in the modern world, Rome lacked both of these.

fatal charades: 'artifices had to be found to vary and give intensity to the spectacle' (Auguet 1972, p. 96). In this way, one could even become a connoisseur of violence, suffering and death (Barton 1993, p. 56). Indeed, the Roman interest in the spectacle provided by dying mullets confirms this (Barton 1993, p. 56). Seneca notes how the fish were placed in glass decanters so that the spectacular colour changes that they underwent while dying could provide entertainment at *convivia*:

"Nihil est," inquis, "mullo expirante formosius; ipsa colluctatione animae deficientis rubor primum, deinde pallor suffunditur, squamaeque variantur et in incertas facies inter vitam ac mortem colori est vagatio."

(*Naturales Quaestiones*, 3.18.1)

1.11 The Gulf of Sympathy

However, the main reason that the Romans were able to feel such unalloyed pleasure when watching the arena games, as Coleman rightly points out, was that a number of things served to alienate the condemned criminal from the spectators, and thus create a huge gulf of sympathy between the two parties (1990, p. 49). The result of this was that the spectators were neither able to identify with those suffering, nor feel pity for them.

This gulf of feeling was possible firstly because of the status of the condemned. They were overwhelmingly lower-class (and therefore, as we have already seen, liable to brutal punishment), and more importantly, they had been through the judicial process. It mattered not whether they had been rightly or wrongly convicted, only that their fate had legal sanction (Kyle 1998, p. 101). The presence of this legal sanction meant that criminals could be blamed and held accountable for their own gruesome fates, which helped to relieve those who organised or watched the games of any sense of moral culpability. In addition, their class status and criminal convictions designated the arena *noxii* as outsiders and others, who had no claim to membership of the dominant social group.

And since moral boundaries were co-extensive with group boundaries, they thus had no claim to moral treatment: '[i]t is the group boundaries that determine the extent of human sympathy; within those boundaries, humanity prevails; outside them, torture is inflicted without a qualm' (Collins 1974, p. 417).

So wide was the gulf of sympathy thus created that the audience were more likely to feel sorry for animals who suffered in the arena than criminals (Cicero *Ad Familiares*, 7.1.3: *miser cordia quaedam*). They could also react with callousness to even the cruellest suffering. For example, the *Passio Perpetuae* relates how, when the martyr Saturus was mauled by a leopard, '[he] was so drenched with blood that as he came away, the mob roared in witness to his second baptism: "Well washed!"'¹³

1.12 Lack of Sympathy and Blaming the Victim: Roman Attitudes Towards Those Disfigured or Disabled Through Violence.

We have just seen how any feelings of sympathy, horror, or pity that the Romans might have felt for arena *noxii* were effectively forestalled by a variety of factors. Prominent amongst these was the fact that *noxii* were considered low-status outsiders who could be said to have brought their suffering upon themselves. Another low-status, marginalised group were those who had survived violence, but were disabled or disfigured as a result of it. They could also, on occasion, be blamed for their own suffering (eg: if their disfigurement was thought to result from debauchery or divine punishment), and they also endured unsympathetic treatment in Roman society. Attitudes towards this group have significant parallels to attitudes towards arena *noxii*.

When considering this group, we must take into account that injuries and deformities would have been far more prevalent in the ancient world than they are today. We know that the Romans (even

¹³ Quoted in Salisbury (1997, p. 144).

those who lived under the empire and were therefore unlikely to suffer injury on the battlefield) 'lived in an environment which did little or nothing to protect them against illness, disease and deformity' (Gwyn Morgan 1974, p. 141). Indeed, the frequency with which the Romans encountered disfigurement and mutilation in their everyday lives is reflected in their *cognomina*, many of which refer to physical shortcomings (Gwyn Morgan 1974, p. 141).

However, the frequent sight of injuries and deformities did not serve to make the Romans more tolerant and accepting of those who suffered from them. Garland argues that the opposite was, in fact, true. As he points out, one need only look at the unfailingly perfect physical specimens depicted in their major visual arts, which clearly illustrate the 'cult of bodily perfection' (Garland 1995, p. viii) upheld by the Romans, to understand that their 'response toward [their] real-life opposite is on a *priori* grounds ... likely to have been less than sympathetic' (Garland 1995, p. viii). Thus, it is highly likely that a socially constructed disgust or distaste for deformity and disability existed in Roman culture. In addition, as Nussbaum points out, we must allow for the possibility of an underlying, universal disgust for disability amongst human beings: 'some primary disgust attaching to the sight of a person with a stump instead of a limb...' (2004, p. 93). Whatever the cause, evidence from Roman culture (including the existence of vocabulary items such as *dehabilitus* and *infirmus*) 'signifies an awareness of a *de facto* social group whose numbers arouse unease or revulsion and connote a lesser state' (Vlahoginnis 1998, p. 16).

Even those who were disfigured as the result of a brave act were not necessarily esteemed in Roman society. While the Greeks had the example of Cynegeirus, who lost his hand before being killed at Marathon, and who was celebrated for his courage and self-sacrifice (Vlahoginnis 1998, p. 17), Cicero relates the example of Spurius Carvilius, a veteran, who, despite having sustained his injuries in battle, had to be encouraged to go out in public by his mother due to his embarrassment

(*De Oratore*, 2.249).¹⁴ Garland notes that 'what is revealing is that even in a militaristic state like Rome the disabled veteran was not universally esteemed. Veterans may well have been as ready a target of derision as any other category of the disabled' (1995, p. 78).

If this was the situation for veterans, one can only imagine the stress likely to have been experienced by those disabled through chance or disease, and who did not have noble self-sacrifice to fall back on. The story of Thelyphron in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* is relevant here. He suffers horrible mutilation (his nose and ears are cut off) completely by chance: his name is the same as the man for whom this disfigurement was intended. Subsequently, he attempts to hide his mutilated face and remains in the background at social occasions, but is urged to tell the story of his mutilation for the amusement of some fellow guests at a banquet, despite his obvious discomfort and resentment at being treated as a means of entertainment. Indeed, the mere mention of his horrible plight provokes hearty laughter from his fellow dinner-guests (II.20: *Inter haec convivium totum in licentiosos cachinnos effunditur*), which greatly distresses him and prompts him to try to leave (II.20). His humiliation and embarrassment are acute, and he feels, as he puts it, *debilis ac sic ridiculus* (II.30).

1.13 *Fortitudo*, Stoicism and Pain

First-hand experience of pain would have also influenced how the Romans reacted to the physical suffering of others. When discussing the place of pain in the ancient world, it must be remembered that their lack of anaesthetics and other pain relief drugs meant that the Romans needed to resign themselves to much higher levels of pain in their lives than most moderns endure unassisted (Wiedemann 1992, p. 70). This affected how they coped with, and expected others to cope with pain. Roman society placed a high value on enduring pain bravely, stoically, and without expressing or giving way to one's suffering. These qualities were encapsulated in the Roman value of *fortitudo*, which not only encompassed endurance of pain and suffering, but also bravery, patience and

¹⁴ Contra: See Leigh (1995, p. 199), who argues that this story 'derives from the Alexander tradition'.

'indifferen[ce] to external circumstances' (Carlson 1948, p. 94). *Fortitudo* enabled the legendary defenders of Rome to endure even the most extreme pain and suffering. Prominent examples of such men include Mucius Scaevola, who thrust his right hand into the fire of Porsenna's altar and allowed it to burn, and Regulus, who returned to Carthage even though he knew he would be tortured there. The high value placed on *fortitudo* may thus have made it difficult for the Romans to feel horror or sympathy for those victims of violence who failed to master their pain, but instead gave in to suffering. Indeed, as Seneca notes, in the arena games, displays of courage and indifference to pain by *noxii* were applauded, and their opposite met with anger, irritation and disapproval:

"Occide, verbera, ure! Quare tam timide incurrit in ferrum? Quare parum audacter occidit?"

(Epistulae Morales, VII.5)

Stoicism also placed a high value on rising above the effects of physical pain, and this ability was considered one that the good Stoic needed to possess if he was to attain happiness and virtue. Marcus Aurelius, the first ancient philosopher to discuss pain in any depth, saw the body, 'with its diseases and passions, as continuously seeking to enslave us to its needs' (Morris 1991, p. 162). Because of this, 'the individual should attain an absolute willed conquest over [it]' (Morris 1991, p. 162). Thus, the Stoic, who has, through force of will, attained mastery over pain, has achieved 'an absolute victory over mind and body' (Morris 1991, p. 162). Having achieved this, Epictetus could say to a student who expressed concern that someone might attack and murder him, 'Fool, not murder you, but your paltry body' (*Epictetus*, 3.13.17).

1.14 Summary: Aspects of Roman Life which Influenced how Ancient Readers Experienced Disgust and Horror.

Our examination of various aspects of Roman life and society has suggested ways in which the Romans were likely to experience disgust and horror. We have seen, from literary and archaeological evidence, that they were certainly capable of experiencing these emotions very intensely, and of being deeply affected by them. However, we have also seen that the violence to others most commonly witnessed in day-to-day life, even though it often reflected an imbalance of power between perpetrator and victim, was unlikely to move the Romans to sympathy, horror, and perhaps disgust. We noted several areas of Roman life in which such violence was commonplace. The arena games, in particular, were a major source of this kind of violence, and illustrated how the Romans were not only unlikely to be moved to horror and disgust by it, but could greatly enjoy it. The work of Elias and Dunning, including their examination of sport, provided support for our assertions regarding these Roman attitudes towards violence.

In addition to this, we noted that other emotional and social issues were associated with the games, and that these, too, contributed to the forestalling of sympathy and horror, and hence the enjoyment of the violence they offered spectators. In particular, issues of desensitisation towards violence are associated with frequent exposure to it, and are likely to necessitate a need for increased novelty in order to elicit an emotional response, much like other forms of addiction. Finally, we examined the reasons for the gulf of sympathy which allowed the Romans to react to arena *noxii* with what, to us, may appear to be callousness. These included the low status of the victims, their exclusion from the social, and hence the moral community, and the shifting of blame for their cruel fates away from society and the executioners and onto the victims of violence themselves. The similarly unsympathetic reaction to those who had suffered disfigurement through violence was also examined. Lastly, we noted that the necessity of coping with pain in everyday life, and the moral

values associated with successfully enduring pain would have made the Romans less disposed to react with horror or pity to those who suffered violence.

1.15 Violence in Roman Literature: Prudentius' Heritage

Having discussed how violence in everyday Roman life could influence the emotional landscape of its citizens, we may now move on to discuss how this violence was reflected in the literature of the times. We will observe that, beginning in the 1st century AD, a trend towards the graphic depiction of violence emerged in Roman literature. This provided Prudentius both with a literary tradition within which to work, and inspiration for his own poetry. Thus, it is important to note that although the violent scenes in the *Peristephanon* are very striking, they are far from unique or unprecedented in the literature of the time. In this section, we will examine the relationship between violence in everyday life and violence in literature. Following this, we will examine violent passages from declamation speeches, Ovid, Seneca and Lucan, in order to illustrate how this trend developed.

1.16 Violence in Life and Violence in Art

The availability of violence in Roman society must have strongly influenced the manner in which writers handled violent themes in their work. For example, the increased levels of violence seen in postclassical literature are often correlated with an increase in the number of savage judicial punishments which were then taking place in the arena (Kyle 1998). In addition to influencing the quantity of violence in literary works, the arena games probably also influenced the quality of its depiction. Spectators at the games were not shielded from the violence carried out there, no matter how bloody or brutal the punishments. Hence, they did not need to use their imaginations to picture these violent deaths, as they did while viewing theatre plays, for example (Williams 1978, p. 185). This acclimatisation to watching particularly brutal punishments probably contributed to the Roman people's increasing desire to read more graphic and intense depictions of suffering. This resulted in

a 'preoccupation with lengthy and lurid descriptions' (Palmer 1989, p. 55) of violence in works of literature, which encouraged readers to form a mental picture of the scene described (Auerbach 1953, p. 58), and thus paralleled the experience of watching violence at the games. In addition, literature could create even more gruesome images than those available at the games, and hence offer what real life could not. In this way, literary excesses could make the games seem pedestrian by comparison (Most 1992, p. 402). It is little wonder that critics of an earlier age dismissed such violent literary scenes as 'grotesque, formless, or tasteless' (Segal 1984, p. 1).

Although they could enjoy the violent punishments of criminals at the games, Romans of all classes were also themselves vulnerable to violence at the hands of the imperial bureaucracy. This created a climate of fear which may have also influenced the depiction of violence and bloodshed in postclassical literature. This feeling of vulnerability existed because the sanctity of the body and autonomy over one's own body were not considered absolute in Roman society. They could be legitimately suspended in order to achieve certain aims, for example, when *utilitas publica* seemed to demand it. As we have already seen, an example of this is the lower classes' susceptibility to interrogation under torture when legal proceedings demanded that evidence and testimony be gathered. However, the upper classes were also vulnerable during the period extending from the accession of Tiberius to the death of Domitian. During this time, incurring the emperor's displeasure, whether through a political act, expression of an opinion, or even because of the way one looked or dressed, was likely to lead to punishment or execution. Thus, Seneca speaks of the need his contemporaries felt to be constantly on their guard, to the extent that drinking alcohol was considered risky due to the possibility that one might say something indiscreet while drunk (*De Ira*, 3.13.5)¹⁵. Thus, Segal states that '[i]n Seneca, as in Lucan, Petronius, Tacitus, Juvenal and other Silver Age writers, the proximity of violent death, torture and helpless subjection to physical violation produces a corresponding extremism of violence in style' (1983, p. 187).

¹⁵ Quoted in Williams (1978, p. 170).

1.17 Declamations

Violence in everyday life was reflected not only in works of literature, but also in the subject matter chosen for declamations by instructors in the schools of rhetoric. Declamations were oral exercises that formed part of rhetorical training, and, as such, were an important part of the education of the Roman upper classes (Roller 1997, p. 110). The subject matter of the declamations was often exaggerated and unrealistic, and thus, when they dealt with violent themes, mutilation or cruelty, the descriptions involved tended towards the extreme, the detailed and the very graphic. Although declamations were not considered to be of literary merit, they influenced the levels of violence in literature, especially from the time of Ovid onwards (Woodman & Powell 1992, p. 206). To illustrate the nature of the violent scenes that they often contained, some examples from Seneca's *Controversiae* will suffice.

The first example is a description of a woman being tortured by a tyrant:

Nullum tormenti genus omisit; omnia membra laniata, omnes artus convolsi sunt.

(Controversiae, II.5.5)

Instabat tyrannus: torque: illa pars etiam potest; subice ignes: in illa parte iam exaruit cruor; seca, verbera, oculos lancina, fac iam ne viro placeat matrix.

(Controversiae, II.5.6)

The following extract describes children who are mutilated so that their master may put them to work as beggars:

Huic convulsi pedum articuli sunt et extorti tali, huic elisa crura; illius inviolatis pedibus cruribusque femina contudit; aliter in quemque saeviens ossifragus iste alterius brachia amputat, alterius enervat, alium distorquet, alium delumbat; alterius diminutas scapulas in deforme tuber extundit et risum in crudelitate captat.

(*Controversiae*, X. 4.2)

1.18 Ovid: Flaying of Marsyas

The influence of the declamation schools can be seen in the major silver age writers. For example, a similar sense of excess and unreality is evident in the story of the flaying of Marsyas from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Williams credits this work as being the first to exhibit the early Empire literary trend of the 'exploitation of cruelty and physical suffering as a sort of fantasy theme' (1978, p. 188). He argues that unlike Virgilian epic, in which the reader is encouraged to sympathise with the victims in battle scenes, the violent scenes in Ovidian fantasy encourage the reader to react with fascination rather than pity (1978, p. 189).

This fascination is encouraged by the poet's morbid 'concentration on realistic precision' (Williams 1978, p. 189), and the way he 'piles up details and adjectives to make the greatest possible impact' (Williams 1978, p. 189). The resulting experience for the reader is a highly visual one. This is heightened by the invitation to count Marsyas' organs, which forces the reader to observe the results of the punishment intently (Niżyńska 2001, p. 155). The overall effect is thus not one of sorrow or pity, but of 'delicious revulsion' (Williams 1978, p. 189):

*Clamanti cutis est summos direpta per artus,
nec quidquam nisi vulnus erat; cruor undique manat,
detectique patent nervi, trepidaeque sine ulla*

*pelle micant venae; salientia viscera possis
et perlucentes numerare in pectore fibras.*

(*Metamorphoses* 6, 387–391)

1.19 Seneca: Death of Hippolytus

Following Ovid, the tragedies of Seneca displayed high levels of graphic violence. Glenn Most goes so far as to say that ‘there is not a single tragedy in the Senecan *corpus* in which the mutilation and amputation of human bodies does not play a significant role, appearing even at moments where neither the literary tradition would seem to require it nor common sense to tolerate it’ (1992, p 396). His point about literary tradition is a useful one. Although the myths that formed the basis of his tragedies already contained violent scenes as part of their stories, Seneca makes these scenes even more violent than any earlier retelling. Scenes often cited include Atreus’ murder, dismemberment and cooking of his brother’s children (e.g. *Thyestes*, 761–63: *ipse divisum secat/ in membra corpus, amputat trunco tenus/ umeros patentes et lacertorum moras,/ denudat artus durus atque ossa amputat*) and Oedipus’ scraping out of his eyes with his bare hands (e.g. *Oedipus*, 965–67: *scrutatur avidus manibus uncis lumina,/ radice ab ima funditus vulsos simul/ evolvit orbis*). The death scene of Hippolytus and its aftermath, in particular, are typical of this kind of excessive violence.

Following a lengthy build-up during which Hippolytus races along the shore in his chariot and the sea-monster appears¹⁶, we are presented with a lengthy description of the agonising death which ensues when he falls from the chariot and becomes entangled in the reins:

*Late cruentat arva et inlimum caput
scopulis resultat; auferunt dum comas,
et ora durus pulchra populatur lapis*

¹⁶ This build-up is longer than that found in an earlier retelling of the myth, Euripides’ *Hippolytus*.

*peritque multo vulnere infelix decor.
 moribunda celeres membra pervoluunt rotae:
 tandemque raptum truncus ambusta sude
 medium per inguen stipite eiecto tenet;
 paulumque domino currus affixo stetit,
 haesere biiuges vulnere – et pariter moram
 dominumque rumpunt. Inde semianimem secant
 virgulta, acutis asperi vepres rubis,
 omnisque truncus corporis partem tulit.
 errant per agros funebris famuli manus,
 [per illa qua distractus Hippolytus loca
 longum cruenta tramitem signat nota]
 maestaeque domini membra vestigant canes.
 necdum dolentum sedulus potuit labor
 explere corpus.*

(*Phaedra*, 1093–1110)

Most notes that in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, Hippolytus' servant gives a line and a half long, 'poignantly brief and unspecific' (1992, p. 410) account of his death, suggesting that his use of the word φίλον (*Hippolytus*, 1238) indicates a love for his master that makes him unwilling to divulge the gory details of his death. The servant in Seneca's play has no such scruples, instead giving us 18 lines of graphic detail. Even Ovid's six line account (*Metamorphoses*, 15. 524–29), detailing as it does dragging flesh, breaking apart of limbs and resulting unrecognisability, cannot compare.

Unlike his predecessors, Seneca does not end there. Throughout what is left of the play, he repeatedly reminds the reader of Hippolytus' dismemberment (Most 1992, p. 393). After the fatal accident, the Chorus tell Theseus to

*"nunc iusta nato solve et acsconde ocius
dispersa foede membra laniatu effero."*

(*Phaedra*, 1245–1246)

Theseus' grief as he confronts his son's remains give rise to a passage which modern critics find particularly excessive:

*"... hoc quid est forma carens
et turpe, multo vulnere abruptum undique?
quae pars tui sit dubito; sed pars est tui.
hic, hic repone, non suo, at vacuo loco."*

(*Phaedra*, 1265–1268)

1.20 Lucan: Naval Battle of Massilia

Book III of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* culminates in the particularly gruesome naval battle off Massilia. The battle is presented as a series of vignettes (Rowland 1969, p. 207) describing individual scenes of slaughter. It is interesting to note that Lucan's only source material for this battle is Caesar *Bellum Civile*. 1.36–37 – a scanty supply of information indeed (Green 1994, p. 224). Thus, these extended and often horrifying battle vignettes are testament to the author's creative fascination and fixation with gore and violence. As Saylor notes, much of the battle imagery is concerned with the opening up of the human body (2003, p. 384). This is sometimes carried to ridiculous lengths. In one instance (*Bellum Civile*, vv. 585–591), a Roman soldier is hit by two javelins thrown from opposite directions, with the result that his blood is uncertain which of the two wounds it should exit by, and so does not immediately gush forth. After a time, it 'drives out the spears... thus opening the body for blood and life to pass out together' (Saylor 2003, p. 385).

Despite the horror of these battle vignettes, Leigh argues that the reader is steered to react not with pity, as is the case with the battle scenes of the *Aeneid*, but with the same wonder and enjoyment of the bloodshed which is typical of the arena games. One way in which Lucan achieves this is to ignore 'the mental suffering of the victim' (Leigh 1997, p. 247) in his gory descriptions of their fates. In addition, the lines

*Multaque ponto
praebuit ille dies varii miracula fati*

(*Bellum Civile* III, 633–4)

suggest that the reader look at the terrible losses of the sea-battle in terms of their freakishness, rather than being moved by pity (Leigh 1997, p. 249).

In the following passage, a Greek soldier places his hand on a Roman ship and has it cut off. He tries to lean forward with his other arm in order to retrieve the missing hand, only to have his left arm cut off as well. He finally dies when arrows pierce his chest.

*Quorum alter, mixtis obliquo pectine remis,
ausus Romanae Graia de puppe carinae
iniectare manum: sed eam gravis insuper ictus
amputat: illa tamen nisu, quo prenderat, haesit,
deriguitque tenens strictis immortalis nervis.
crevit in adversis virtus: plus nobilis irae
truncus habet, fortique instaurat proelia laeva,
rapturusque suam procumbit in aequora dextram.
haec quoque cum toto manus est abscisa lacerto.
iam clipeo telisque carens, non conditus ima
puppe, sed expositus, fraterna pectore nudo
arma tegens, crebra confixus cuspide perstat:*

*telaque multorum leto casura suorum
emerita iam morte tenet.*

(*Bellum Civile* III, 609–622)

In the following passage, another Greek soldier, Lycidas, finds his body pierced by a grappling hook. The horror does not end there, however. His friends grab hold of his legs in an attempt to save him, with the result that his body is ripped in two. The poet then dwells on the huge outrush of blood that this occasions, and the way in which it causes the soldier to die.

*Ferrea dum puppi rapidos manus inserit uncas,
adfixit Lycidan. Mersus foret ille profundo,
sed prohibent socii, suspensaque crura retentant.
scinditur avolsus, nec, sicut volnere, sanguis
emicuit lentus: ruptis cadit undique venis,
discursusque animae diversa in membra meantis
interceptus aquis. Nullius vita perempti
est tanta dimissa via: pars ultima trunci
tradidit in letum vacuos vitalibus artus;
at tumidus qua pulmo iacet, qua viscera fervent,
haeserunt ibi fata diu: luctataque multum
hac cum parte viri vix omnia membra tulerunt.*

(*Bellum Civile* III, 635–646)

1.21 The Effect of Violent Scenes in the *Peristephanon*: Disgust and Horror

The above examination of passages from Seneca, Ovid and Lucan has amply illustrated the trend towards violence in literature that was already well established by the time Prudentius composed the *Peristephanon*. These examples from the literature allow us an understanding of the sort of material which forms the basis for the reactions of disgust and horror for which we will argue. Thus, we are now in a position to narrow our focus and examine these two emotions. We will first examine the

nature and causes of disgust and horror. Following this, we will explore issues relating to their depiction in ancient literature.

We begin with disgust, an emotion which has so far merited very little research. Miller attributes this to the indecorous material that the disgust scholar must involve himself with, namely, 'the grotesque body and the sensory offences that life itself thrusts upon us' (Miller 1997, p. 5). We can, however, sketch the basic outlines of disgust. Firstly, it is fairly obvious that disgust must have an object – it is 'a feeling *about* something and in response to something, not just lone unattached feeling' (Miller 1997, p. 8). The feelings towards this object are characteristically those of repulsion, aversion and loathing, and often involve 'intrusive and unridable thoughts' (Miller 1997, p. 8) about the object, which can be very troubling and stressful. The origins of these feelings are mysterious. They seem to spring up unbidden, and can be difficult to control or suppress. They are 'something independent of [our] will and choice ... the [disgust] response does not proceed from any sort of conscious deliberation – it is visceral and seemingly reflexive' (Kaster 2001, p. 149). Similarly, the physical reactions we experience to feelings of disgust are visceral: 'we are nauseated, our guts heave, we tremble, our hearts race, we both sweat and shiver' (Kekes 1992, p. 433).

1.22 Disgust Elicitors: Assaults on the Senses

Feelings of disgust can arise in different ways, most commonly via sensory perception. Pliny offers the following list of objects which cause disgust by offending the senses: 'Olives grown in a damp climate, excessively sweet substances, potions made of goat's urine, the smell of asses' urine in a cure for thinning hair' (Kaster 2001, p. 155). In addition to Pliny's list, we may also consult the list of disgust items drawn up by Haidt, Rozin et al, from which the following are taken:

You are about to drink a glass of milk when you smell that it is spoiled.

You see maggots on a piece of meat in an outdoor garbage pail.

You are walking barefoot on concrete, and you step on an earthworm.
It bothers me to hear someone clear a throat full of mucous.
You see a bowel movement left unflushed in a public toilet.

(1994, p. 707)

From these lists, we can reasonably assume that disgust related to sensory perception is common to ancient and modern cultures. Pliny's olives and excessively sweet substances presumably cause disgust because of their awful taste, and the potions involving animal urine presumably due to their smell (although they may have tinged the potions yellow and hence made them disgusting to look at). The modern list of disgust elicitors offends, in order, the senses of smell, sight, touch, hearing and sight again.

This 'most intimate involvement of the senses' (Kaster 2001, p. 154) can result in strong feelings of disgust, which are difficult to overcome. It is easy to understand Kaster's idea of reflexive disgust ('absolute and autonomic' (2001, p. 149)) in this context – when our senses are offended, the disgust that arises seems totally beyond our control. However, here, we must also consider that although this kind of disgust seems to arise spontaneously, our threshold for feeling it may be culturally determined. For example, people living in the Middle Ages were perhaps not as susceptible to sensory disgust as moderns or ancient Romans, living, as they did, in a world characterised by 'bad smells, loathsome sights, disease and deformity' (Miller 1997, p. 143) in which 'only the wealthy owned more than one set of clothes [and] disinfectants were unknown' (Miller 1997, p. 143). On the contrary, the Romans probably had a lower threshold for experiencing sensory disgust due to their comparatively advanced sanitary practices and resultant high levels of bodily cleanliness (Nussbaum 2004).

1.23 Contagion and Contamination

Characteristic of all cases of disgust caused by sensory offence is a strong desire to be rid of the object or situation which has elicited the feeling of disgust (Miller 1986, p. 298). Many theorists have attributed this desire for riddance to a fear that proximity to, or contact with, the disgusting object or situation will contaminate us. Miller speaks of the 'dreadful feeling that something awful could get so close to oneself that it could not be got rid of' (1986, p. 305), and the fantasy that the disgusting substance will somehow invade the body or self, whether through the mouth, skin or another unspecified route (1986, p. 300). Disgust is thus 'a defensive emotion, guarding the purity of the body, and perhaps of the self or soul residing within the body' (Haidt et al 1994, p. 704).

It can be difficult to pinpoint what it is about a disgusting object or situation that may contaminate one. Material substances such as viruses or microbes are not the only things that may be transferred in the contamination process. Undesirable properties and dispositions may also be transferred. Thus, Rozin and Nemeroff list four possible consequences of contagion: 'acquisition of negative physical or personality characteristics, ... moral degradation, ... "bad luck" ... or ... illness or death' (1990, p. 216). It is significant that only the last consequence is the result of contagion via material substance. An example of the transferral of more intangible qualities is offered by the convicted criminal in Roman society. He had to be avoided due to the possibility of *contagio sceleris*, 'an event of sacral-magical character' (Thome 1992, p. 77) in which another is infected by the *scelus* of the criminal through touch (Thome 1992, p. 77). Avoiding contact and thus contagion may thus have been one motivation behind the use of hooks to drag the bodies of criminals from the arena.

1.24 Non-sensory Disgust

Not all disgust can be explained as sense-perception of something revolting that we fear will contaminate us. Abstract ideas, such as incest, can also elicit disgust. In Roman society, the idea of

cowardice was also one that could give rise to powerful feelings of disgust (Kaster 2001, p. 160). Cowardice combines with another disgust elicitor, defecation, in an example from Valerius Maximus: a shameful episode in which a man asks permission to relieve himself in order to delay his execution (Kaster 2001, p. 159):

Cn. quoque Carbo magnae verecundiae est Latinis annalibus. Tertio in consulatu suo iussu Pompeii in Sicilia ad supplicium ductus petiit a militibus demisse et flebiliter ut sibi alvum levare prius quam exspiraret liceret, quo miserrimae lucis usu diutius frueretur, eo usque moram trahens, donec caput eius sordido in loco sedentis abscideretur.

(9.13.2)

Cannibalism, too, is a concept which can invoke disgust in both ways. We imagine that human flesh would be repulsive to eat due to its taste, texture, and especially the knowledge of its origin. But another part of what makes cannibalism such a disgusting idea is its ethical repulsiveness (Kaster 2001, p. 159). Cannibalism was a long-standing taboo in the Greek and Roman worlds. As far back as the writings of Herodotus, it was characterised only as ‘an appropriate activity [for] those who live away from the ‘civilized’ world as well as ... those who exist on the margins of human life itself’ (McGowan 1994, p. 426). The practice was considered to be not only a hallmark of uncivilised peoples, but a source of contamination. Both the Greeks and the Romans ‘made a clear distinction between animal flesh as highly desired food and human flesh as potentially miasmatic’ (Kyle 1998, p. 184). Garnsey, in discussing what the ancients considered ‘last resort’ sources of food, ranks human flesh as the very least desirable, even below ‘natural products or non-foods such as roots, twigs, leaves, bark [and] leather’ (1988, p. 28). The disgust evoked by the idea of cannibalism is aptly illustrated in the following scene from the *Satyricon*:

"Omnes, qui in testamento meo legata habent, praeter libertos meos hac condicione percipient, quae dedi, si corpus meum in partes conciderint et astante populo comederint" ...

"De stomachi tui recusatione non habeo quod timeam. Sequetur imperium, si promiseris illi pro unius horae fastidio multorum bonorum pensationem. ... Quod si exemplis quoque vis probari consilium, Saguntini oppressi ab Hannibale humanas edere carnes, nec hereditatem exspectabant. Petelini idem fecerunt in ultima fame, nec quicquam aliud in hac epulatione captabant, nisi tantum ne esurirent. Cum esset Numantia a Scipione capta, inventae sunt matres, quae liberorum suorum tenerent semesa in sinu corpora".

(*Satyricon*, 141.2)

1.25 Divisibility of the Human Body as a Major Cause of Disgust

The destruction of the body can evoke disgust in many other contexts besides cannibalism. One example is attacks on the human body, whether they are in the form of a violation of the 'bodily envelope' (Miller 1997, p. 5), or a severing or excision of a body part. One need only think of 'the horror motif of severed hands, ears, heads, [and] gouged eyes' (Miller 1997, p. 27), which appears most notably in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. The violated body evokes disgust not only because it offends our senses, but also because it unnerves and horrifies us by forcing us to consider our own divisibility (Miller 1997, p. 27). There is, in addition, a certain inappropriateness in 'destroying the integrity of the body's seal' (Miller 1997, p. 58), and of viewing parts or regions of the body that are usually concealed from sight. This may have influenced the prohibition on dissection in medical schools which Clark argues existed in antiquity (1998, p. 99).

In addition, the part of the body that has been excised or separated from the whole can become, in itself, a source of disgust (Miller 1986, p. 305) - one need only imagine the effect of a severed hand

or head. Even sloughings-off of the body such as 'dead skin, mucous, hair and blood' (Miller 1986, p. 305) can evoke disgust, even though their removal involves no major trauma. Such items all fall under Kristeva's definition of the abject, 'a bodily part or product that both is and is not identifiable with the self, a thing that is ambiguously positioned between self and other because it has been severed or separated from its origin' (Bartsch 1997, p. 19). The abject is disgusting and disturbing because its status is uncertain – it cannot be conclusively categorised as subject (part of myself) or object (part of the outside world), human or non-human (Bartsch 1997, p. 19).

A further cause of disgust relating to our own divisibility is that it reminds us of our inescapable animality, and the bodily needs and functions we all share – eating, excreting, bleeding when cut, the inevitability of death (Haidt et al. 1994, p. 712). This, in turn, forces us to confront the uncomfortable possibility that we are entirely reducible to our own flesh nature – no more than 'guts in a skin bag'.

1.26 The Allure of the Disgusting

Thus, one of the basic characteristics of disgust elicitors is their repulsiveness. We shudder at, and recoil from, disgusting objects and ideas. Yet, at the same time, disgust elicitors can attract and fascinate us. This is 'one of the most troubling aspects of so much of the disgusting [It] has an allure, it exerts a fascination which manifests itself in the difficulty of averting our eyes at a gory accident ... or in the attraction of horror films' (Miller 1997, p.22). This gives rise to a confusing and paradoxical state: a wish to be rid of the disgusting object to avoid the threat of contamination, but at the same time, 'a wish to take in, with the eyes' (Miller 1986, p. 302). For the Romans, this was the compulsion to look at things which were beyond the boundaries of *quae spectanda* (Lewis 1974, p. 104).

This paradox is neatly illustrated in a story told by Socrates at the end of book IV of the *Republic*. Here, he recounts how Leontius reacts when he catches sight of the corpses of some executed criminals. Although Allen (2000) points out that Athenians would normally approve of such a sight (proving, as it does, that justice has been carried out), Leontius' reaction shows how a disgusting sight can simultaneously attract and repel:

‘I once heard a story which I believe, that Leontius the son of Aglaion, on his way up from the Peiraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution, at the same time felt a desire to see them, and a repugnance and aversion, and that for a time he resisted and veiled his head, but overpowered in despite of all by his desire, with wide staring eyes, he rushed up to the corpses and cried, “There, ye wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle!”

(Plato, *Republic* 439e–440a)

1.27 Horror

Having examined disgust, we may now move onto horror. Most scholarship on the horror genre takes as its subject popular horror movies, and horror fiction by the likes of Stephen King. In these works, as Carroll (1990) points out, the source of the horror is usually a repulsive and terrifying monster, which has preternatural powers and poses a threat to the community or even to the entire human race. The horror plot usually revolves around the protagonists' discovery of, and struggle to defeat, the monster.

It is unclear how the horror generated by these monster stories may be applied to the subject matter of Prudentius' poems. However, there is another strand of the horror genre which is far easier to relate to the *Peristephanon*. This strand encompasses, amongst other things, slasher movies (Gaut 1993, p. 334). Here, there is no mysterious, uncategorisable force to contend with. The antagonists are human, and we are often able to classify them as deranged, psychopathic or simply

extremely evil, which provides some explanation for their behaviour patterns. The horror in this sub-genre stems from the violent and shocking acts that the antagonists perpetrate. On screen, the results of this violence are often depicted in the graphic detail that advances in special effects have made possible: '[t]hus we see a head being stepped on so that the eyes pop out, a face being flayed, a decapitation, a hypodermic needle penetrating an eyeball in close-up, and so on' (Clover 1987, p. 205). This closely parallels the graphic depiction of violence and mutilation in the *Peristephanon*.

1.28 Characteristics of Horror

Carroll notes that works of horror, whatever their subject matter, are designed to elicit certain emotional responses from their readers (1990, p. 17). The first of these is anticipation. Horror texts usually feature a step-by-step revelation of information about the terrible events which are their focus. This piques the audience's curiosity, and makes them eager to discover what will happen or be revealed next (Carroll 1990, pp. 181–182). In addition, horror texts which focus on attacks upon the body, mutilation and murder, often tap into, and play upon, our deepest fears. This results in emotional responses ranging from mild dread to abject terror, as well as feelings of helplessness and despair, disgust and revulsion, and perhaps incredulity. The fear elicited is particularly important, and can be argued to be a defining characteristic. Indeed, Miller classifies horror as 'fear-imbued disgust' (1997, p. 26). In addition to these emotions, the horror genre also tends to elicit physical symptoms such as an elevated heart rate, a rush of adrenaline, a sense of agitation or a feeling of queasiness.

1.29 The Paradox of Horror

Just as disgust elicitors are characteristically unpleasant, so too is the subject matter of the horror genre. Furthermore, just as disgust is an uncomfortable and disagreeable emotional state, so too are the emotional states which horror fictions tend to produce. However, just as disgusting spectacles, or even ideas, can fascinate and enthrall us, so too can horror exercise a powerful attraction. The huge

and enduring appeal of horror fictions and movies is testament to this. The attraction of horror is paradoxical, because in other areas of life, most people actively shun what they know will provoke unpleasant and distressing emotional responses (Carroll 1990, p. 158). This has led Carroll and others to label this phenomenon the paradox of horror. It is, briefly stated, 'How can horror audiences find pleasure in what by nature is distressful and unpleasant?' (Carroll 1990, p. 159).

1.30 The Enjoyment of Horror

Critics have tried to solve the paradox of horror in numerous ways. Carroll, for example, makes a strong distinction between the pleasure one obtains from reading horror fictions, and the unpleasant emotions (jointly termed 'horror') that one suffers at the same time. He argues that the pleasure and the horror result from completely different causes. Thus, they are separate and exist side-by-side rather than being interconnected in some way. The feelings of horror are the price we must pay to obtain the feelings of pleasure (Carroll 1990, p. 185).

Several critics have pointed out that this account fails because it artificially separates the feelings of horror from those of pleasure, when, in reality, neither could exist without the other. However difficult to explain, it seems obvious to us that 'a major source of the enjoyment of horror [fictions] is *having* the feelings of fear and disgust which horror fiction has as its function to evoke' [my italics] (Feagin 1992, p. 80). That is, 'the pleasure of horror ... is largely the pleasure of being horrified' (Neill 1992, p. 59). Not everyone enjoys horror films, but those who do would agree that in order to do this, 'one of the things you need is a taste for blood and gore; you need to enjoy the revulsion, and *want* to experience the fear and disgust' (Feagin 1992, pp 80–81).

Thus, at least for some readers, horror fictions may be an unpleasant experience to be avoided at all costs. But equally, they strongly appeal to many of us, and we enjoy their sights and sounds, and the

feelings they evoke in us, even though we may not enjoy these things when they present themselves in other areas of our lives.

1.31 The Paradox of Horror and the Effect of Violence on Ancient and Modern Readers of the *Peristephanon*.

The paradox of horror is another useful tool to explore how modern and ancient readers probably reacted in different ways to the violent scenes in the *Peristephanon* and other literature. Indeed, paradoxes of horror which might arise for a modern reader of our poems are unlikely to be co-extensive with those experienced by ancient readers. Some overlap no doubt existed. For example, for modern, as well as for ancient readers, unpleasant emotions associated with horror (eg: fear, disgust, helplessness, despair, revulsion and dread) could be aroused by the gruesome treatment of the martyrs' bodies. Thus, at this level, both groups could experience a paradox of horror in their reading. Both could enjoy the gory sights of human bodies being tortured and mutilated, the smells of roasting flesh and burning hair, the sounds such as the crackling pyre, and the creaking and groaning of the metal hooks and other instruments of torture.

On the other hand, modern readers might additionally experience a type of horror characterised by certain unpleasant emotions that pagan readers, in particular, would have been less likely to experience. For a modern reader, ethical problems posed by the martyrs' treatment are likely to contribute to the horror, as we would tend to perceive such treatment as excessive, cruel, barbaric, a violation of rights, and perhaps a violation of a taboo against killing or capital punishment. In addition, we may more readily sympathise with the victim. All of these things may serve to increase our sense of horror. However, as discussed above, it is quite likely that pagan readers would be unmoved by all of these considerations. They were thus culturally equipped to enjoy certain aspects of horror without any paradox arising from that enjoyment, whereas for modern readers, this is far less likely to occur.

1.32 Disgust and Horror in Roman Literature

Now that we have examined the nature of disgust and horror, we can move on to explore issues pertaining to the depiction of people, objects or situations which evoke these emotions in Roman literature. Precedents for the depiction of the ugly and unpleasant, and by extension, the disgusting and horrific, were well-established by the time Prudentius wrote, as were certain aesthetic and philosophical understandings concerning this depiction.

Extended vignettes of physical ugliness are found as early as Homer's description of Thersites (*Iliad* II, 216-219 in Ziolkowski 1984, p. 2), and in addition, paradigmatic examples of ugliness, such as Socrates, existed early (Ziolkowski 1984, p. 2). Such descriptions occurred often enough to serve as the basis for certain conventions and formulae for describing ugliness which were developed in the Middle Ages.

Discussion of the artistic depiction of ugliness, as well as of unpleasant objects and situations occurred as early as Aristotle, who claims in the *Poetics* that it is natural for human beings to enjoy mimetic objects, regardless of their nature (1448b). In order to convince his reader that this assertion is true, he uses the following example:

ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὄρωμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἠκριβωμένους
χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφῶν τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν.

This is an extreme example to show that the pleasure we obtain from mimetic objects comes not from the nature of the thing, person or situation depicted, but rather from the interpretation we engage in, and hence the new knowledge we gain, when viewing the object. Aristotle thus understands the pleasure we take in looking at mimetic objects in an intellectual, cognitive way

(defining it in 1448b as the pleasure which comes from making a correct inference from the image to the thing portrayed). Even if we disagree with his analysis of the nature of the pleasure we obtain from mimetic objects, we must nevertheless concede that he has identified an important phenomenon: we can and do take pleasure in mimetic images (whether they are part of poetry, a play, a painting etc) of things that would disgust or horrify us if we saw them in real life.

Aristotle reinforces this point in *Rhetoric* 1371b 23, in which he states again that skilful examples of mimesis are pleasant even if the objects they represent are not pleasant. Again, he gives the reason for this as the intellectual pleasure we experience when interpreting mimetic objects:

οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ τούτῳ χαίρει, ἀλλὰ συλλογισμὸς ἔστιν ὅτι τοῦτο ἐκείνο, ὥστε
μανθάνειν τι συμβαίνει.

Thus, through the writings of Aristotle, Prudentius and his educated audience would have been familiar with the idea that a work of art, such as a poem, can produce feelings of pleasure in its readers even if its subject matter is disgusting or horrifying. We can understand how this is possible when we consider the nature of the artistic enterprise. As Plato noted in his criticism of poetry, mimetic objects are representations of, and therefore one degree removed from the reality of, the objects or situations we encounter in our everyday existence. That is, artistic depictions, by their nature, can never be immediate. As Davie states, “nothing comes to us through art except as *mediated* through art” (Davie 1992, p. 334) – specifically though the individual medium specific to each art, whether that be words, colours or notes produced by a musical instrument (Davie 1992, p. 335). Thus, there will always be something intervening between the horrible or disgusting object, and its artistic representation, and this something can prevent us from experiencing the full horror or disgust of the object. Speaking of the emotional effects that a representation of a horrifying subject

such as the crucifixion can have on readers and viewers, Davie states that the attitude of both our ancestors and modern aesthetic theory is that “the atrociousness of such a subject ... is always, *and must be*, dissolved away entirely into the delicious felicities of the medium – into Annibale Carracci’s colours and contours and brush-strokes, into Watts’s choice diction, his cadences, his rhymes” (Davie 1992, p. 335). We can accept this as a possibility without agreeing that the atrociousness of the subject is *always* dissolved away. If we do so, we can conclude that in addition to Aristotle’s idea that mimetic objects, even when they represent something terrible, still give us the pleasure of understanding, they can also give us an aesthetic pleasure arising from skilful use of the medium.

This artistic distance between the subject and its representation can also be accompanied by a certain emotional distance, as Davie notes by indicating that composure and composition share a common etymological root (Davie 1992, p. 335). Indeed, he asserts that some level of composure is necessary to make a satisfactory artwork from a horrible or disgusting situation. While he is here talking about the attitude of the artist, and not the reader, this sense of composure can surely be transmitted through the artwork itself, to be detected by sensitive readers and hence to form a basis of their own response. Indeed, if one is willing to depart a little from Aristotle’s theory of mimesis, it could be argued that this emotional distance could contribute to a depiction of a disgusting or horrifying situation being, itself, beautiful.

This aesthetic paradox is much like the paradox of horror we discussed: it shows that we can truly enjoy a work of art even when its subject matter is horrible. Prudentius makes use of this aesthetic paradox to convey his Christian message in a subversive way. For outsiders, it must have been very difficult to understand how the Christian community could exalt in the suffering of the martyrs, yet this is precisely what poems such as those in the *Peristephanon* enable them to do. However, it is not simply a matter of art triumphing over the cruelty and brutality of its subject matter. Rather, it is the

inversion of the martyrs' sufferings by means of art, during which Prudentius plays with and subverts the conventional meanings attached to disgust, horror and suffering.

One aspect of this inversion relates to the appearance of the suffering martyrs. A literary tradition existed in which a character's moral shortcomings are reflected in physical defects or the visible results of illness or injury, such as skin eruptions, open sores or wounds, or the presence of parasites such as flies or worms. An early example of this is Homer's description of Thersites, however, Ziolkowski states that the tradition only became truly established due to the influence of epideictic oratory, a practice which rose during late antiquity. He argues that as a result of this influence, "[d]escription of physical appearance was pushed to two extremes: those men regarded favourably had to be good and handsome, while those criticized had to be bad and unattractive" (Ziolkowski 1984, p. 7). Physical appearance was thus "regarded as a mirror of the soul" (Ziolkowski 1984, p. 7), and this is confirmed by Ambrose's statement that *Imago quaedam animi loquitur in vultu* (Ziolkowski 1984, p. 7). However, part of the inversion of the martyrs' suffering is that those who suffer physically repulsive diseases or are horribly injured during their martyrdom are valued positively and celebrated, rather than attracting the strong derision and aversion that they usually do in literature.

1.33 *Enargeia* and *Ekphrasis*

A prominent characteristic of the horrific and disgusting scenes in the poems is their high level of pictorial vividness. While the purpose of this thesis is to examine how such pictorial vividness serves to evoke various emotional responses in the reader, we must also note that a sophisticated poet like Prudentius was surely aware of the ancient discourses on the stylistic effects of *enargeia* and *ekphrasis*, and their place in ancient literary criticism. The ancient critics argued that *enargeia*,

particularly, played its most important role in the domain of poetry (Zanker 1981, p. 302). Prudentius would thus probably have considered himself to be writing within a certain aesthetic tradition.

Dionysius considers *enargeia* to be an appeal to the senses of the listener, and this effect can be extended to the reader (*Lys.* 7; I.14, 17 in Zanker 1981, p. 297). Zanker argues that Dionysius is here most concerned with the sense of sight, so that the use of *enargeia* has the effect of making the listener feel as if he has been turned into an eyewitness (Zanker 1981, p. 297). This idea is also expressed by Latin authors, for example, in the treatise *ad Herennium*, which uses the term *demonstratio* to express the concept of *enargeia*:

Demonstratio est cum ita verbis res exprimitur ut geri negotium et res ante oculos esse videatur.

(*ad Herenn.* 4.55.68 in Zanker 1981, p. 298)

Cicero, too, when describing certain aspects of rhetoric which we recognise as contributing to a sense of *enargeia*, argues that the sense of sight is targeted primarily:

Est enim haec pars orationis, quae rem constituat paene ante oculos; is enim maxime sensus attingitur...

(*Part. Or.* 6.20 in Zanker 1981, p. 299)

Prudentius also accords primacy to the sense of sight in his descriptive passages by appealing more often to this sense than any other. This will become evident in our discussions of the poems, especially the two poems which prominently feature paintings of the martyrs concerned.

Apart from appeals to the senses, a high level of detail in descriptive passages also contributes towards *enargeia*, as Ps.- Demetrius argues (*Eloc.* 209 in Zanker 1981, p. 297). This is reflected in the level of detail which Prudentius offers when describing the paintings of the martyrs Hippolytus and Cassian. Overall, the vivid descriptions resulting from these appeals to the senses and highly detailed descriptive passages can be said to “break down the barriers between the [readers] and the characters and [encourage] the former to share the viewpoint of, and hence to empathise with, the latter” (Levene 1997, p. 131).

CHAPTER 2: PERISTEPHANON II

2.1 Hinting at Horror

Peristephanon II tells the story of the martyr Lawrence, who was burned on the gridiron for tricking the prefect of Rome into believing that he would hand over the material wealth of his church.

In this poem, Prudentius devotes a great many lines to the lead-up to Lawrence's torture and execution. This contrasts strongly with the relatively few lines he devotes to the events themselves. This long lead-up gives him ample space to create anticipation in his readers, and he achieves this in several ways. For instance, while discussing Rome's illustrious history and its conversion to Christianity, Prudentius hints several times at the horror and bloodshed that will follow in his story. This arouses curiosity and interest in the reader, and equally, an enjoyable sense of dread. In addition, the fact that these allusions to the coming violence are vague, scattered and seemingly disconnected creates a sense of unease, which could also be savoured. The result of these vague hints is that the reader is aware that something horrible will happen, but does not know exactly what this will consist of, or when it will occur.¹⁷ Prudentius adds to the uncertainty by presenting some of these allusions to violence in contexts which make them difficult to connect to Lawrence's fate. The reader will thus only make the association retrospectively. For example, bloodshed is alluded to in lines 16 (*non incruento*) and 17 (*cruoris*), but the cause of this bloodshed is described as a battle like the ones fought by heroes of old, in which Rome conquered foreign nations. Similarly, sacrifice and death are mentioned in line 19 (... *morte mortem diruit*), but it is the personified faith who suffers, not any one individual.

¹⁷ It is possible that Lawrence's story was already generally known before the composition of this poem. If this is so, Prudentius' retelling would have functioned in the same way as Greek tragedy. Here, although the audience already knows the story behind the play, and is aware of the hero's fate, they may still experience anticipation and horror when watching a performance of the play.

Following this are more explicit references to Lawrence's fate. First, we are presented with the gruesome image of the priest Xystus nailed to the cross (21: *adfixus cruci*). In the midst of his suffering, he speaks, and hints that Lawrence does not have long to live, but will soon follow him (27–28: *... tu quoque / post hoc sequeris triduum*). In addition, an approaching martyrdom is specifically hinted at with the use of the terms *mortis ordinem* (34) and *passionem* (35). Persecution is hinted at with the description of the city prefect as *exactor ... sanguinis* (48). Lawrence's fate of being burned on the gridiron is also hinted at by various references to fire, light and heat, for example, in his speech to the prefect concerning the value of his poor, disabled flock (Conybeare 2002, p. 187).¹⁸

2.2 Interior and Exterior

Contrasts between interior and exterior, and imagery concerning the hidden and concealed abound in this poem. The prefect, for example, views Christianity as a cult of concealment, and thus describes Lawrence as the head of secret rites (349: *ipse ex omnibus / mysteriarches*). He believes that the Christians have hidden stockpiles of cash (50–51: *... operta existimans / talenta; 52: cumulosque congestos*), and insists that Lawrence open up and reveal their hiding-places (85: *deprome thesauros*). The prefect thus functions as a force opposing this concealment, and one which works for the opening up and dragging out of what is hidden. This parallels a function he assumes later in the poem: when he orders Lawrence to be placed on a slow-burning fire which eats away at his flesh, he becomes an opener of the martyr's body, and an exposer of its interior. Lawrence, on the other hand, uses words and phrases denoting openness and honesty, such as *nec recuso prodere* (120), *vulgabo* (122) and *proferam* (122). He thus seems to contradict the prefect's idea that Christianity is a secretive cult. While this impression of honesty is later shown to be false

¹⁸ eg: *flammis necesse est decoqui* (196), *lux est* (204), *alumni luminis* (205), *sanguis in culpam calens* (213), *fervor* (215).

when he tricks the prefect, he is willing throughout the whole poem to undergo the opening up of his body in martyrdom, and later even encourages this as he lies on the gridiron.

2.3 Lawrence's Group of Disabled Beggars

When the prefect of Rome insists that Lawrence hand over the wealth of the church, the martyr does not hesitate in agreeing to do so. However, instead of assembling money and precious objects, Lawrence assembles a group of disabled beggars¹⁹ who are supported by the church, and whom he will argue are its true riches, because they live according to Christian values. The poet's description of this group is some 20 lines long, and features aspects of their appearance and actions which are very likely to elicit disgust and horror. The visual impact of this group is immense. All of these men either lack an important body part or suffer from a repulsive affliction. But although their physical appearance is loathsome, the plight of these men is highly likely to evoke feelings of pity in their fellow Christians, and specifically feelings of Christian mercy, which Augustine defines as *alienae miseriae quaedam in nostro corde compassio qua utique si possumus subvenire compellimur* (*De Civitate Dei* IX.5). Even those Christians who were not moved to pity would still feel bound to offer compassion to such men in accordance with the teachings of their faith. In addition, they would have considered these men as their brethren, and hence felt some concern for them and responsibility towards them. However, for pagan readers, these men would have most likely been objects of disgust, scorn, and possibly ridicule due to their appearance. They would have been considered as other, lesser, or as a drain on society rather than contributors to it.

Their status as non-contributors is emphasised by the overwhelming physical weakness and incapacity of these beggars. Even before they are described individually, the poet presents them as *infirma agmina* (142). In the following line, they are described as *qui poscunt stipem* (143), showing

¹⁹ Some of the disabilities discussed here are the same as those featured in biblical stories of Christ's miracles, e.g.: blindness (Matthew 9:27–31), lameness (Luke 13:10–7) and a man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:10–13; Mark 3:1–5, Luke 6: 6–11).

that their afflictions have left them unable to support themselves. The impression of neediness is further strengthened when they cry out together upon seeing the prefect (181: *fragor rogantum tollitur*). For pagan readers, such descriptions would merely serve to increase feelings of disapproval or irritation. However, as we will see, Prudentius subverts this viewpoint.

The reader is first confronted with the disturbing sight of an eyeless man. He is described as *orbis cavatos praefereus* (146), indicating that hollow eye sockets remain where his eyes once were. This suggests that his eyes have been removed, or their tissue has been eroded by disease. Left behind is the inverse shape of the socket, which emphasises this man's terrible lack, and creates a disturbing sense of incompleteness and loss. This would have the power to make passers-by recoil. Indeed, *praefereus* (146) indicates how prominent and striking this man's disfigurement is to those around him. This man may have been less horrifying to look at had scar tissue been present to cover over the empty cavities left behind by the eyes. The horror of empty eye cavities has a precedent in Tacitus *Historiae*, IV. 62, where Claudius Sanctus is described as *effoso oculo dirus ore*, and in Lucan's description of a soldier whose eyes are knocked out by a catapult (*Bellum Civile* III, 709 ff.). Apart from a sense of horror, the man without eyes can arouse strong disgust, distaste and loathing. As Watson (1982) notes, even *lusci*, who were usually only partially deprived of sight, were frequently objects of ridicule in Martial's epigrams.

Also horrifying is the fact that this man still seems to possess a perverted, ghostly sense of sight. His hollow cavities seem to see and yet not see, as indicated by the poet's use of the word *obtutibus*. This is reflected in the way he moves: in a stumbling, uncertain manner. This wavering movement also indicates the feebleness and vulnerability of the man who lacks eyes. Such a man was diminished as a human being, and could no longer live independently and assert himself in the world. For these reasons, the idea of losing one's vision was most likely just as horrifying to the

Romans as it is to us. We can infer from phrases like *per oculos iurare* that they placed a very high value on sight (Nutting 1922, p. 315). Indeed, it has been argued that the eyes were a 'favourite point of attack' in private Roman disputes (Nutting 1922, p. 314). The value attached to the sense of sight is not surprising considering that blindness was one of the most serious disabilities that could befall a Roman, affecting almost all aspects of his life, and resulting in 'exclusion, the inability to gather visual information, helplessness, social isolation and a dependence on others to mediate relations with the physical and social environment' (Vlahoginnis 1998, p. 29). This is reflected in the story of Gallus Cerinius, who committed suicide rather than face life without vision (Vlahoginnis 1998, p. 29).

Directly after the blind man who has difficulty walking, Prudentius focuses on a group of men with injuries or deformities of the legs and feet. First we see a cripple with a broken knee (149: *et claudus infracto genu*), who could evoke feelings of horror due to the suggestion that he has suffered violence and pain. *Infracto* specifically suggests that the knee has been bashed in. This also has repercussions for this man's appearance. Disgust is likely to be evoked, because in the place where we expect to see the familiar shape of a knee, there remains most likely only a shapeless mass. Following this man, a one-legged man with his other leg cut short (150: ... *crure trunco semipes*) is given little more than a mention, but again there is the suggestion that he has suffered violence. The past participle *trunco* can have the effect of making the reader wince, as it suggests that the leg has been painfully severed. Again, as with the eyeless man, there is a dreadful sense of lacking. This is repeated in the image of the man with one leg shorter than the other (151: *breviorve planta ex altera*), which immediately follows. In addition to the horror and disgust evoked by these men's physical appearance, these same emotions are evoked by their difficult motion (eg: 152: *gressum trahebat inparem*), as occurred with the halting, uncertain locomotion of the blind man.

In this passage, we see an accumulation of adjectives and phrases suggesting crippling or disabilities of the lower limbs. The effect is one of excess and over-emphasis, and the result is a strong appeal to the culturally constructed disgust for deformity which we have argued existed in Roman society. This section of the poem would be likely to raise all those negative reactions mentioned above in a pagan reader. This serves to create irony, as, later on in the poem, Lawrence will argue that these men are as beautiful and valuable as gold.

Following the crippled men, we are presented with a man covered in sores (153–154: *est ulcerosis artubus/ qui tabe corrupta fluat*). The overwhelming visual impact of his affliction is such that the poet does not even afford this man a descriptive noun. He is defined entirely in terms of his affliction. Unlike the pleasure and attraction which healthy and youthful skin can evoke, this man's weeping sores and decaying skin evoke the deep revulsion that results from the perversion of what is natural and healthy. Unlike the men before him, this man evokes more than merely visual disgust. In addition, his oozing sores elicit fear of bodily contact, both because we imagine that contact with him would be a revolting experience, and because his highly visible illness can give rise to fears of contagion and contamination.

Following this, a man with a withered hand is mentioned almost as an afterthought. His condition (155–156: *est cuius arens dextera/ nervos in ulnam contrahat*) is not nearly as serious and debilitating as those of the other men, and does not suggest he has been the victim of violence. Rather, it seems to be the result of a congenital defect or of a wasting disease. Nevertheless, this man's affliction has the potential to evoke disgust. The dryness, shrivelling and contraction of his hand give the impression that although this man is alive, one part of his body has already succumbed to death, and has begun to take on the characteristics of a corpse. The hand is thus

disgusting because it is abject: by being suspended between life and death, its status is ambiguous. It is both part and not part of this man.

2.4 The Spiritual Benefits of Suffering Attacks on the Body

Despite the strong sense of disgust and horror that is evoked by this crowd of disabled beggars, Lawrence goes on to talk about debilitating injuries to the body in enthusiastic, almost masochistic tones. His enthusiasm stems from the belief that such injuries provide a means of achieving spiritual development, and he cites his group of beggars as proof of this, saying that their horrible physical mutilation has made them spiritually beautiful. To Lawrence, brutal and painful attacks on the body, resulting in excision or truncation of its members, are not evils to be feared, but opportunities to be sought out and embraced. For Christian readers of the time, who were familiar with arguments for the benefits of martyrdom even though its practice had, by then, died out, this reasoning would have been relatively easy to accept. Even so, these words still touch upon the deep and primal human fear of pain and injury. Prudentius plays upon this in the following passages, in which Lawrence explains this point of view:

*"cum membra morbus dissicit,
animus viget robustior,
membris vicissim fortibus
vis sauciatur sensuum"*

(vv. 209–212)

Here we see that although life without bodily strength is inconceivable for most, and although its loss (and the accompanying loss of freedom, status and dignity) is usually greatly feared, Lawrence in fact views bodily strength in negative terms. Such strength is inversely proportional to strength of the spirit, and one must thus attack the physical body to achieve spiritual growth. This idea is further

developed when Lawrence describes gold's humble and dirty origins in mines or rivers, and how it must be refined with fire in order to reveal its true beauty. Here, one cannot help but feel he is also talking about the human body:

*"quod terrulentum ac sordidum
flammis necesse est decoqui."*

(vv. 195–196)

Decoqui is used later in the poem to describe the burning away of Lawrence's flesh (398: *decoxit exustum latus*). By use of the same verb, the sense of necessity associated with refining gold is later associated with the injuring of the human body, and specifically with Lawrence's burning on the gridiron.

Following this, Lawrence explains why physical injury is spiritually beneficial:

*"nam sanguis in culpam calens
minus ministrant virium
si fervor effetus malis
elumbe virus contrahat"*

(vv. 213–216).

Lawrence thus believes that the healthy body has a natural inclination towards sin (he is perhaps thinking particularly of sins of the flesh), and that the bodily heat must be dissipated to avoid sin. This dissipation is achieved through weakening by bodily evils (*malis*) in general, and by infection by a weakening poison in particular. Here, Lawrence is most likely thinking of various illnesses and diseases which weaken the body. Thus, in addition to viewing attacks on the body (which usually

provoke disgust and horror) as favourable, he also views contraction of disease, and hence the contaminated body, as something to strive for.

2.5 Diseases of Eminent Romans

In the above section of the poem, Prudentius played upon the feelings of disgust and horror that typically arise from contemplating attacks on the body and contaminating bodily diseases. He subverted our expectations by characterising these things as positive and desirable. Yet he goes on to create tension and ambiguity by also characterising disease in terms of disgust and loathsomeness. He does this in Lawrence's condemnation of the sins and moral shortcomings of pagan Romans. Those Lawrence targets specifically are false religious beliefs, self-deception, pride, greed, lust, envy and malice. For the Christian community, these sins evoke moral disgust, just as taboos such as incest and cannibalism evoke moral disgust in the wider community. Prudentius expresses this moral disgust in terms of sensory disgust, by describing these sins in terms of disgusting physical afflictions. However, it is also clear that Prudentius is aware of, and plays upon, the allure of these disgusting diseases. As we will see, his descriptions of them are lengthy and lavish, and are filled with appeals to the senses, making them very evocative.

The images of disgust used to describe the Romans' moral shortcomings are similar to those that have already been used to characterise Lawrence's crowd of disabled beggars. This suggests that these eminent Romans are just as disgusting in their moral failings as the beggars are in their physical afflictions. Lawrence himself gives voice to this sentiment when, before moving on to discuss individual moral shortcomings, he poses the following general question:

*"carnisne morbus foedior,
an mentis et morum ulcera?"*

(vv. 223–224)

Carnis morbus and *ulcera* suggest visible skin diseases of the type we have already seen in Lawrence's beggar who suffers open sores. However, the effects of such diseases do not have to be visible to evoke disgust. Lawrence also likens moral shortcomings to an inner leprosy (230: *interna corrumpit lepra*).²⁰ This image gives rise to a different form of disgust, as we are led to contemplate the idea of the body being eaten away from the inside. Furthermore, even an unseen leprosy carries with it a social stigma, and a perception of being dirty and contagious.

The moral faults of pagan Rome are also characterised in terms of blindness and lameness, which instantly recall the eyeless man and the crippled men in Lawrence's group of beggars, and the disgust and horror evoked by their conditions:

*"errorque mancum claudicat
et caeca fraus nihil videt."*

(vv. 231–232)

After this general discussion of moral failings, Lawrence goes on to talk about individual sins. He first discusses pride, which manifests in the sufferer as dropsy:

*"hunc, qui superbit serico,
quem currus inflatum vehit,
hydrops aquosus lucido
tendit veneno intrinsecus."*

(vv. 237–240)

²⁰ Biblical discussions of leprosy include the lepers healed by Christ at Matthew 8:1–4, Mark 1:40–44, Luke 5:12–14 and Luke 17:11–19.

This man, dressed as he is in silk, may be outwardly attractive, but knowledge of the internal condition of his body evokes the same kind of disgust as the inner leprosy mentioned above. Dropsy²¹, an accumulation of fluid in the tissues, makes the flesh puffy and swollen. While healthy skin and flesh can be attractive and alluring, this diseased, distended flesh is repulsive, especially because the cause of its puffiness is a poisonous liquid (*lucido veneno*) which suggests that the sufferer is contaminated.

Next Lawrence discusses the sin of greed, which manifests in the sufferer as arthritis:

*"ast hic avarus contrahit
manus recurvas et volam
plicans aduncis unguibus
laxare nervos non valet."*

(vv. 241–244)

As in the case of the crippled men, here we see an almost excessive number of words and phrases describing the terrible deformity of this man's hands. In addition, we are reminded of the man with the withered hand who was part of the group of beggars. In this particular case, the man's hands are bent back, the palms are folded and the nails are bent inwards, and thus so misshapen they have almost ceased to be human (the fingernails in particular suggest claws). Again, these images evoke disgust due to their otherness: this man's hands seem almost animal in nature. In addition, his deformity has robbed him of control over his hands, and has thus incapacitated him to a large extent, given the importance of being able to perform manual work in the ancient world. This may evoke horror in readers due to an understanding of the awfulness of his fate, but it may also evoke a disgust similar to that evoked by Lawrence's helpless beggars.

²¹ Dropsy is mentioned in Luke 14:1–4.

Following this, Lawrence describes the ambitious man, who suffers from fevers:

*"quid? Ille fervens ambitu
sitimque honoris aestuans
mersisne anhelat febribus
atque igne venarum furit?"*

(vv. 249–252)

The verbs and participles all reflect the painful and uncomfortable effects of extreme heat on the body, and thus provide a link with the terrible suffering that Lawrence will later experience while being burned on the gridiron. In addition, *sitimque* reflects the parching of the throat typically experienced by those burned on the pyre before they die. This passage thus serves as a prelude to the horrifying events at the end of the poem.

Next, Lawrence considers the lustful man, whom he sees as covered in dirt:

*"istum libido foetida
per scorta tractum publica
luto et cloacis inquinat,
dum spurca mendicat stupra."*

(vv. 245–248)

Here again there is an accumulation of words and phrases concerning this man's unsavoury desires and activities. Lawrence appeals to sensory disgust by characterising this man's lust as foul-smelling (*foetida*) and dirty (*spurca*), and showing how it befouls or stains him (*inquinat*) with mud and matter associated with sewers (*luto et cloacis*). Because these are impure, potentially contaminating substances, Lawrence here also appeals to the fear of contamination. These descriptions also evoke

the potentially disgusting elements of sexual activity itself: bad smells, bodily substances seen as impure or unclean, and contamination via contact with another's bodily secretions. In addition, like the greedy man, the lustful man evokes horror and disgust because he seems to have lost control over his body, and is instead controlled by his lust. *Mendicat* is a condition which seems forced upon him by his unmanageable impulses.

Next Lawrence discusses the sores of those who suffer from envy or malice:

*"quid invidorum pectorum
strumas retexam turgidas?
quid purulenta et livida
malignitatum vulnera?"*

(vv. 257–260)

Envy causes unsightly and disgusting swellings (*strumae*) in, or on, the breast of the sufferer. They may even form in the region of the neck, as *strumae* were associated with infections of the lymph nodes (Barlow 1980, p. 3). These swellings, especially if malignant, suggest that the flesh is rotten and corrupted. Ovid characterises envy in a similar way, specifically as 'a disease which causes the bodies of its victims to waste away through a process of liquefaction or putrefaction' (Dickie 1975, p. 379). Malice too, is associated with decay. It is here likened to infected, festering wounds (*purulenta et livida ... vulnera*). Here, the colour (*livida*) – bluish or lead-coloured – is especially evocative of disgust. The association of envy and malice with corrupted and decaying flesh reflects the nature of these emotions themselves: both are negative emotions which are often suppressed and harboured internally, and thus seem to fester within the psyche.

Despite their sins, pagan Romans have an outward appearance characterised by luxury and finery. However, Lawrence argues that this could be stripped away to reveal a true appearance which is highly disgusting:

*“... muculentis naribus,
mentum salivis uvidum,
lipposque palpebra putri.”*

(vv. 282–284)

Muculentis naribus is not only a disgusting image which would make us recoil at the prospect of contamination via this repulsive bodily secretion, but also indicates infection and sickness. In addition, apart from their noses which run and produce mucous, these men also dribble saliva from their mouths. Thus, their faces run with two distinct contaminating bodily fluids. In addition, these emissions indicate a lack of control over the body which, as we have seen, can be a further source of horror and disgust. These men are unable to keep out of sight those bodily fluids which all produce, yet which etiquette demands be dealt with in private and kept from sight. In addition, they are *lippos*: sufferers of ophthalmia or inflammation of the eyes. Scholars have pointed out the high incidence of these illnesses in antiquity (Horsfall 1995, p. 49). Their prevalence and impact on everyday life must have made them a source of dread and horror. However, not only are the eyes themselves inflamed, but the eyelids are putrid and decaying, adding to the sense of disgust.

Lawrence goes on to add two more disgust-inducing similes for sin:

*“peccante nil est taetrius,
nil tam leprosum aut putidum;
cruda est cicatrix criminum
oletque ut antrum Tartari”*

(vv. 285–288).

In this passage, the poet uses many disgusting images which offend both sight and smell. *Taeter* is usually translated as offensive, foul or hideous (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968. s.v.), and is thus useful for evoking disgust. *Leprosum* and *putidum* are adduced almost as synonyms to *taetrius*, and again pick up on the theme of bodily corruption and decay, hence adding to the sense of disgust. The description of the scar of the sins is also evocative. Scars are not necessarily disgusting *per se*, being, as they are, indicators of past wounds that have healed. However, this type of scar is *cruda*: it is running with fresh blood. This indicates that the wound is diseased and probably infected. It is not healing as wounds are supposed to do.

2.6 Lawrence's Punishment : The Horror of a Delayed Death

The prefect is so angered by Lawrence's trickery and harangue concerning the sins of pagan Romans that he sentences him to a capital punishment that will only kill him after prolonged agony. The prospect of enduring great pain may evoke horror for the reader, but would not have affected the martyr, who has earlier expressed willingness to suffer agony (eg: 218–220: *malim dolore asperrimo/ fragmenta membrorum pati/ et pulcher intus vivere*). The prospect of only dying after a long delay, however, may have been horrifying to Lawrence. For a Christian eager to escape the shackles of the physical body and be reunited with God, this extended delay would be a truly fearsome prospect, as it entails being trapped in the agonising process of a drawn-out execution, but unable to take any action to realise the goal of death. Lawrence can only wait – and endure - until the prefect at last grants an end to life. But the prefect places great emphasis on the fact that death will be delayed. First, he twice makes tantalising mention of a quick death (334–335), but only to emphasise that this will not be allowed to Lawrence. Then he emphasises that he will defer death and extend the martyr's life as long as he can (336–339).

2.7 The Paradox of Gentle Torture

The prefect delays Lawrence's death by burning him on a gridiron heated by only a moderate fire:

*"prunas tepentes sternite,
ne fervor ignitus nimis
os contumacis occupet
et cordis intret abdita."*

(vv. 341–344)

The suggestion here is that a hot fire will offer Lawrence a quick death by asphyxiation. In this case, he would probably die before he sustained tissue damage (and hence mutilation) through burning. Death via slow burning would offer no such benefits. Instead, there is a possibility that Lawrence would remain conscious while the fire burns and eats away at his flesh, exposing tissue to view. While Prudentius does not elaborate on the horrific effects a slow-burning fire can have on human flesh, Lactantius gives the following account:

Qui cum deligati fuissent, subdebatur primo pedibus lenis flamma tamdiu, donec callum solorum contractum igni ab ossibus revelleretur. Deinde incensae faces et extinctae admovebantur singulis membris, ita ut locus nullus in corpore relinqueretur intactus. Et inter haec suffundebatur facies aqua frigida et os umore abluebatur, ne crescentibus siccitate faucibus cito spiritus redderetur; quod postremo accedebat, cum per multum diem decocta omni cute vis ignis ad intima viscera penetrasset.

(*De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 21.7–11)

Paradoxically, then, the milder heat produces more horrifying results. This paradox is further explored in the following lines:

*"vapor senescens langueat,
 qui fusus adflatu levi
 tormenta sensim temperet
 semustulati corporis."*

(vv. 345–348)

Senescens and *langueat* both suggest weakness and lack of power. In addition, the fire is poured out *adflatu levi*, suggesting a gentle breath rather than a forceful blast. Unlike a hot fire, which would inflict extreme pain, but end the victim's misery rather quickly, this moderately burning fire produces a different kind of torture, resulting in the kind of injuries described above. This moderation and imposing of limits and boundaries on the process of burning gives Lawrence's torture an artful, refined quality. In addition, this particular variation on burning has a strong element of novelty. It would thus have been very appealing to a Roman audience who had become jaded by the more usual forms of violence.

2.8 The Smell of Burning Flesh

As Lawrence moves towards the pyre that awaits him, his appearance reflects beauty and glory:

*illi os decore splenduit
 fulgorque circumfusus est.*

(vv. 361–362)

Prudentius gives a lengthy explanation of 13 lines regarding how this beauty and glory signify the presence of God, which only the believers are able to see. The faithful thus have clear perception of a higher truth, while unbelievers are condemned to visual as well as spiritual darkness. To reinforce this point, the poet uses the disgusting and horrifying example of the smell of Lawrence's burning skin (386: *adiusta ... cutis*). These words, taking first and last positions in their line, throw this

horrible image into sharp relief. The pagans, unsurprisingly, perceive the smell of the martyr's roasting flesh as *nidor* (388), and for this reason, it is horrifying to them (390–391: ... *adficit / horrore nares vindice*). The source of the horror may be the difficulty in reconciling a smell which we would associate with the normal process of cooking animal flesh for food with the knowledge that the source of the smell is living, burning human flesh. Moreover, to the pagans, it is an avenging (*vindice*) horror, perhaps because Lawrence is a convicted criminal who is receiving deserved punishment.

On the other hand, to the Christian observers, the scent is that of *nectar* (388), the traditional drink of the immortals, and thus appropriate to a man who has embarked on the path of suffering which leads to immortality. The scent charms them with pleasure (392: *mulcet oblectamine*). This can evoke horror, as we know that both Christian and pagan observers smell the same odour of burning human flesh. Their differing reactions arise from the different meanings each group attributes to Lawrence's punishment rather than a difference in sensory perception. Hence, we are confronted with the uncomfortable possibility that the Christian observers are delighting in the smell of what they know to be burning flesh, just as Lawrence earlier seemed to delight in the idea of hurting and enfeebling a healthy body.

In addition to this horror, Lawrence jokes about his fate by inviting his tormentors to further dissect his flesh. He asks them to turn his body over to expose the side in contact with the gridiron, and eat of this cooked flesh: (401–404: *converte partem corporis / satis crematam igitur, / et fac periculum*). Then, speaking of this side of his body as if it is no longer a part of himself, he pronounces it cooked:

... *"coctum est. devora,
et experimentum cape
sit crudum an assum suavius."*

(vv. 406–408)

This invitation to commit cannibalism could evoke disgust and horror in pagan readers, both due to its status as a taboo act and due to the miasmatic contamination that would result. Lawrence is most likely aware of this, and this awareness enables him to make a joke which is also, at one level, horrifying. This joke also highlights the different status occupied by the human body in ancient Christianity. At one level, the physical body is merely that which is sloughed off when one is reunited with God. However, the body of the martyr can also achieve a highly charged status, which is reflected in the gathering of body parts for relics. In the *Peristephanon*, the faithful are thus depicted in several instances as eager for physical contact with the martyr's body, both in order to display their devotion and in order to receive certain benefits from that contact. Thus, some Christians even go so far as to lick the blood and gore from the martyr Vincent's wounds (*Peristephanon* V 339–340).

Lawrence's joke marks the climax of his torture. Thereafter, he offers up a lengthy prayer, and is finally released from his physical bonds. This brings his suffering to an end, and with it, the poem's focus on horror and disgust. Following Lawrence's death, Prudentius offers a closing meditation in which he describes how Lawrence's fate persuaded many more to convert to Christianity. This brings the poem to an end.

As we have seen, Lawrence's torturous execution features strong elements of disgust and horror. However, these emotions are also subverted by the description of the way in which the Christians perceive the smell of Lawrence's burning flesh, and by his joke on the gridiron. This reflects the pattern established earlier in the poem, where disgust and horror are first evoked by the group of crippled beggars. Following this, however, the meaning of these emotions is transformed, and then inverted once more. This play upon the meanings of horror and disgust throughout the poem creates a complex and unsettling emotional experience for the reader.

CHAPTER 3: PERISTEPHANON III

3.1 Hinting at Horror

This poem documents the martyrdom of Eulalia, a young Spanish girl who flees the confines of her parents' home in order to stand before the Roman magistrate and vigorously protest against the persecution of Christians. Her harsh speech and antisocial behaviour towards the magistrate lead him to order her torture with the hook, and execution on the pyre. These gruesome tortures contrast sharply with Eulalia's defiant attitude. As death approaches, however, she falls silent.

At the beginning of this poem, Prudentius introduces Eulalia by giving details about her place of origin and by noting that she comes from a family of good quality. However, as in the Lawrence poem, there is foreshadowing of suffering to come even at this early stage of Eulalia's story. Bones (5: *ossibus*) and death (2: *mortis*) are mentioned in the first 5 lines of the poem, and violence, injury and death are hinted at in line 9 with the mention of the blood of martyrdom (*sanguine martyrii*) and a maiden's tombstone (10: *virgineoque ... titulo*).

Following these vague allusions to violence, we are suddenly and unexpectedly presented with the image of the crackling pyre on which Eulalia is to be placed (13: *crepitante pyra*). Thus, the manner of her death is abruptly and dramatically revealed to the reader after a series of hints. The image of the pyre is powerful and evocative because the reader hears the crackling of the intensely hot fire. Readers who attended the games would be well aware of the terrible effects such searing heat could have on a victim's body.

3.2 Eulalia's Character

However, Eulalia's gruesome punishment is not the only source of horror in the poem. As we will now explore, her fierce religious faith, severe and single-minded nature, abrasive speeches and

reckless actions all contribute to creating a sense of horror. I will argue that this particular horror could be experienced by pagan and Christian readers alike. However, while pagan readers may experience this horror in a rather straightforward way, the emotional responses of Christian readers are likely to be more complex. Eulalia's harshness of character evokes horror largely because it enrages the Roman magistrate and thus leads to her horrible torture and burning on the pyre. However, this harshness is also directly related to her championing of the Christian faith. Thus, for Christian readers, it will inspire awe and admiration at the same time as horror. In addition, ancient Christians may have experienced a sense of fear and dread when contemplating whether they themselves could seek out, and show a similar disdain for physical suffering in defence of their faith. In this sense, Eulalia provides a rather problematic example of Christian heroism.

At the beginning of the poem, Prudentius focuses on Eulalia's gender, youth and physical frailty. Knowing only these things about her, we could not fail to feel great horror and pity at the mutilation and execution of this young, presumably very innocent, girl. Even the Roman magistrate expresses a desire to change her attitude, and thus enable her to avoid execution (101–103) – a unique occurrence in this collection of poems. However, the reader soon discovers that Eulalia is a very complex character. She is neither a typical twelve year old girl, nor a typical adherent of Christianity.

Eulalia is paradoxical because although she is young, she displays many of the characteristics of old age. She strongly rejects the toys and trinkets that would normally give pleasure to a girl of her age (19–22), and does not run free and play, but instead she is restrained (23: *modesta gradu*) and resists displays of emotion (23: *ore severa*). The extent of her adoption of the ways of old age is made clear when the poet describes her as a little girl who does not know how to play (20: *ludere nescia pusiola*) – she has lost this natural ability which is characteristic of all children. The literary topos of the *puer senex*, although not used extensively until the Middle Ages, does appear in Roman

literature (Carp 1980, p. 738), and was sufficiently well-established by late antiquity to suggest the existence in Roman culture of an unsympathetic attitude towards the immaturity of childhood. Hence, its use usually indicates a favourable assessment of the child, indicating that he or she has managed to overcome the limitations of intellect and character associated with youth. This is the case with Eulalia, who possesses great determination and maturity. These are qualities which could inspire admiration in pagan readers, and even more so in Christian readers, being connected, as they are, to her faith. There is, nevertheless, something rather horrifying in Eulalia's adoption of the mannerisms of an old woman. This horror stems firstly from the fervour of her rejection of the characteristics and qualities of youth, and secondly from the unnaturalness of her resultant state, which, in a way, makes her monstrous. She is like the newborn infant described by Malebranche whose facial features were exactly like those of the elderly St Pius (Huet 1983, p. 77) (the cause of this anomaly was that his mother had spent too long contemplating the saint's portrait while pregnant).

Thus, Eulalia behaves in a manner not befitting her age. Nor does her character conform to her society's expectations for a young girl, as she is neither passive, nor demure nor compliant. Instead, Eulalia is aggressive and almost militant in expressing her Christian beliefs. In her dealings with the Roman magistrate, she is presented as a destructive force. When the persecution begins, she prepares not just to resist, but to shatter the violent attack against her community (33: *turbida frangere bella parat*). When she stands before the magistrate, her bearing is proud (64: *superba*) and she addresses him stridently (66: *vociferans*). When railing against the pagan religion, she describes herself as one who tramples idols (74), and later, when the judge suggests that she go through the motions of sacrifice to avoid death, she does just that and more:

*infremit inque tyranni oculos
sputa iacit, simulacra dehinc*

*dissipat inpositamque molam
turibulis pede prosubigit.*

(vv. 127–130)

By behaving in such a hostile and anti-social manner, Eulalia alienates the Roman magistrate and completely undermines the earlier sympathy he has shown towards her on account of her youth and gender. In the same way, this presentation of what is a rather unlikeable side of Eulalia's character could also lessen any sympathy the reader already feels for her. However, this does not necessarily undermine the sense of horror created by her words and actions. One source of this horror is that although Eulalia's actions put her at risk of suffering and death, she actively scorns these things. Even the magistrate's dire warning of the fate that awaits her has no impact on her:

*"aut gladio feriere caput,
aut laniabere membra feris,
aut facibus data fumificis
...
In cineres resoluta flues."*

(vv. 116–120)

Thus, Eulalia knows that her actions will lead to her own destruction. But in addition to making no attempt to avoid this, she in fact shows strong tendencies *towards* self-destruction. As we will see, the same destructive energy that she directs against paganism and its adherents is also turned against her own body. This gives her inevitable torture and death the qualities of self-inflicted actions, which are 'as strong as suicide' (Barton 1994, p. 48). This is a very important difference between Eulalia and the martyrs in our other poems. As horrifying as their fates are, they do not seek them out as Eulalia does. This fact adds an extra dimension of horror to her story, and for Christian

readers, a sense of awe and wonder. Many would, no doubt, have questioned whether they were capable of emulating Eulalia's actions and her disdain for her own continued survival.

Eulalia's self-destructive urges become more apparent as the poem progresses. Firstly, Prudentius explains that her mother must keep her at home

*ne fera sanguinis in pretium
mortis amore puella ruat*

(vv. 39–40).

This love of death (a characteristic typically associated with martyrs) is indicative of her desire for self-destruction. This is further indicated by the explanation for her flight from home:

*illa perosa quietis opem
degeneri tolerare mora*

(vv. 41–42)

Perosa indicates the strong revulsion she feels towards remaining passive and not declaring her opposition to the persecutions, even though she is aware of the likely consequences of doing so. She finds the alternative of remaining silent so hateful that she is simply unable to accept it.

3.3 Reason vs Irrationality

Here, we must question whether Eulalia is irrationally bent on destroying her body, or whether this desire for self-destruction is the result of rationally held beliefs and attitudes. If her desire for self-destruction is irrational, it suggests that she lacks understanding and appreciation of the enormity of what she seeks – death and annihilation. This is quite possible, given her young age. If, however,

she has rational beliefs underpinning this desire, the idea that her torture and death are essentially self-inflicted receives further confirmation: she has made an assessment of her position on paganism, and has decided that her beliefs must be upheld, even though she knows they will cost her her life.

Throughout the poem, there is much to suggest that Eulalia's behaviour is irrational. From her reactions to news of the persecution and in her dealings with the magistrate, it seems that she is governed by passion. For example *infremuit ... spiritus* (31–32) is her initial reaction to news of the persecution. This suggests that her spirit has animal qualities, and lacks the restraint and measure associated with reason and civilization. In the following line, she is described as *ingeniique ferox* (32). The adjective *ferox* again likens her to a wild animal. The phrase *rude pectus* (34) follows, with *rude* suggesting that Eulalia's heart is young as well as wild. Furthermore, the adjective *anhela* is used in line 34 to describe how she pants for God, further suggesting animality as well as a lack of self-control. We are more likely to associate the longing implied by *anhela* with romantic love, and the feelings of madness and lack of self-control commonly felt by those in love.²² However, this adjective works well to convey both the strength of Eulalia's religious passion, and the wild aspect of her character. Furthermore, her abovementioned actions of spitting in the magistrate's face and kicking over the images of pagan gods are instinctive rather than rational expressions of anger and opposition.

However, in her speech to the magistrate, we see that Eulalia is perfectly rational. She presents sound arguments and reasoning to justify her opposition to paganism and the persecution of Christians. For example, she points out that the victims of persecution have committed no crime apart from worshipping the Christian god (87: *innocuo*). She also points out that pagan worship is sinful because it involves the worship of false gods and the denial of the true God, and hence

²² Baker (1993) argues that this poem is characterised by language usually associated with erotic elegy.

criticises the pagan magistrate for his adherence to incorrect beliefs (65–70). She also criticises paganism for its worship of idols created by the hands of men (76–80), making it a false religion.

Thus, although Eulalia's reaction to paganism seems wild and irrational, her hatred of it is based on rational beliefs and coherent arguments, which the young girl adheres to despite knowledge of the destruction they will bring her. She even logically connects her beliefs with her own destruction, as we see in the following lines. By the use of *ergo*, she argues that her denunciation of paganism is the basis for inviting and even encouraging the pagan magistrate to have her tortured:

*"ergo age, tortor, adure, seca,
divide membra coacta luto.
solvere rem fragilem facile est"*

(vv. 91–93)

3.4 The Horror and Awe evoked by Self-inflicted Suffering

This invitation to torture her further emphasises how Eulalia's suffering is essentially self-inflicted. This type of suffering can give rise to potent feelings of horror in an observer. This is due to the deep-seated aversion towards, and fear of, the idea of suffering pain, which was recognised by thinkers as early as the Stoics, Zeno and Chrysippus as being characteristic of all human beings (Black 2006, p. 191). Individuals will, in most cases, go to great lengths to avoid suffering, and will suppress thoughts about their own death (Goldenberg et al. 2000, p. 202) or the possibility of being attacked or seriously injured. Psychologists have pointed out that societies, too, have developed various strategies to manage the terrifying knowledge of our own divisibility and mortality, and that without such strategies, we could very well become paralysed by this terror (Goldenberg et al. 2000, p. 201). Thus, to inflict suffering upon oneself (or perhaps even to contemplate doing so) is horrifying because it completely contradicts the basic human instinct towards self-preservation and

our generally deep-seated fears of being hurt and dying. The horror of self-inflicted suffering was recognised by Seneca, who commented (*Epistulae Morales*, 24.5), *acerbum est uri; quanto acerbius, si id te faciente patiaris!*

Paradoxically, as well as horror, Eulalia's attitude to self-inflicted suffering could have inspired awe in pagan readers because it fits so well with the Roman concept of *fortitudo*. As a display of *fortitudo* in the arena games could elevate even a convicted criminal in the eyes of the audience, pagan readers, too, may have held Eulalia in relatively high esteem due to her display, even though she was a Christian. Christian readers could also feel admiration for such a great sacrifice in the name of their faith. Thus, while both groups of readers could feel horror at the nature of Eulalia's suffering they could, at the same time, be moved to admiration, even if only a culturally-conditioned admiration.

3.5 A Bloodthirsty God

Adding another layer of complexity to Eulalia's self-inflicted suffering is the fact that the Christian god depicted in the poem is one whose will coincides exactly with hers. When she slips out of her home at night, with the intention of presenting herself to the pagan magistrate, she receives divine help in the form of a column of light to guide her, and is accompanied by a choir of angels (48–50). God is thus assisting and encouraging her to destroy herself by literally guiding her towards her own destruction. Eulalia is described as worthy of having this light (57: *diem meruit*), which indicates that God highly approves of her desire for self-destruction.

Tertullian's *Scorpiace* also speaks in favour of the idea of a God who is pleased by the suffering and execution of his people:

Haec tu remedia, consilia, iudicia, spectacula etiam dei atrocitatem uocabis? Sanguinem hominis deus concupiscit? Et tamen ausim dicere, si et homo regnum dei, si et homo certam salutem, si et homo secundam regenerationem. Nulla compensatio inuidiosa est in qua aut gratiae aut iniuriae communis est ratio.

(6.11)

The idea of a god who requires suffering and self-sacrifice from his followers is a harsh and horrifying one. Pagan readers, who were accustomed to the milder principle of *do ut des*, might have found it especially horrifying. Christians, in addition, may have had the difficult task of reconciling the natural human fear of personal injury to the desire to please God.

3.6 A Bloodthirsty Emperor

Though she does not fear it for herself, Eulalia still recognises the horror of fellow Christians' suffering through persecution. She expresses this by describing the emperor Maximian (author of the persecutions) as a cannibal who feeds on the blood of Christians (87: *sanguine pascitur innocuo*), and who tears their flesh (89: *viscera sobria dilacerat*), presumably with his teeth. The mention of the taboo of cannibalism evokes disgust, especially in its attribution to a man who should embody refinement and dignity. In addition, the fate of those innocent Christians who are eaten evokes a strong sense of horror. Eulalia plays on this with her gruesome description (above) of how their flesh is torn apart. In addition, she attributes to Maximian a disgusting, unnatural longing to feed on Christian flesh. *Inhians* (88) is particularly evocative, as it has the primary meaning of opening one's mouth for food, but also has the secondary meaning of 'longing for' (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968, s.v.). Its use thus suggests that Maximian cannot control his cravings for this 'food source'.

3.7 Eulalia's Suffering and Death

Because Eulalia recognises the horror of persecution only when it befalls other Christians, we expect her to interpret her own suffering without reference to this particular emotion. This does indeed occur. However, the poet's description of her physical suffering is nevertheless a fertile source of horror. Eulalia is first attacked by two torturers wielding metal hooks:

*nec mora, carnifices gemini
iuncea pectora dilacerant
et latus ungula virgineum
pulsat utrimque et ad ossa secat*

(vv. 131–134)

The use of hooks is a particularly brutal method of breaking up the physical body. Unlike a sword, which can produce a clean cut without the expenditure of much effort, hooks must first be hurled at the body with sufficient force to penetrate the flesh (134: *pulsat*), and then dragged through the resistant muscle and sinew (132: *dilacerant*). It is perhaps the use of the hook as an instrument of torture which leads Prudentius to use the metaphor of ploughing the flesh so much in this collection. As the earth is forced to yield to the plough, so the body is forced to yield to the double hooks. In addition, the use of *ad ossa secat* indicates that the hooks do not merely plough up the flesh, but penetrate to the body's deepest interior, the bones, hence exposing them for all to see. Prudentius mentions bones in line 5, in connection with Eulalia's final resting place. They are thus associated with the finality of death, being all that remains of the body after decomposition has taken place. The horror here stems from the fact that while still alive, a part of Eulalia's body is now visible which is typically not revealed until long after death. Thus, at the commencement of her torture, she already partakes in death through the partial revelation of her skeleton.

3.8 Torture and Eloquence

Eulalia's reaction to this violent torture is both astounding and disturbing. As Scarry explains, the intense pain and suffering associated with torture typically breaks down victims' ability to reason and communicate. She notes that victims' replies to torturers become shorter and less coherent as the pain of torture increases. Eventually the victim is no longer able to speak at all (Tilley 1991, p. 469). Stories of other Christian martyrs show that they often resort to repeating short phrases as the pain of torture increases and they lose their ability to reason and express themselves. Common phrases of this type are 'I am a Christian', 'Thank you, God' and 'Christ, have mercy'.²³ Eulalia, on the other hand, exhibits heightened rationality and ability to communicate after she is attacked with the hooks:

*"scriberis ecce mihi, Domine.
quam iuvat hos apices legere
qui tua, Christe, tropaea notant!
nomen et ipsa sacrum loquitur
purpura sanguinis eliciti."*

(vv. 136–140)

Here, we see that even while suffering terrible torture, Eulalia is not only highly articulate, but capable of making a very sophisticated interpretation of her suffering. She views her body as a blank surface for the inscription of a text, and her wounds as the letters making up that text, and conveying the story of Christ's victory. In addition, her demeanour is cheerful. She is *sine fletibus et gemitu* (141) and her speech is described in terms of joyous singing or poetry (141: *laeta canebat et intrepida*), further suggesting her role as an interpreter of her body-text. However, immediately following these descriptions of Eulalia's joyful mood is a stark reminder of the horror of her torture:

²³ Tilley (1991, p. 470), citing *Carpus* (6 and 23), *Saturninus* (4–12) and *Pion*. (18).

*membraque picta cruore novo
fonte cutem recalente lavant.*

(vv. 144–145)

The extent of her injuries have resulted in a huge, horrifying blood loss – an outpouring of life itself, and one from which there can be no recovery. There is a strong visual appeal here with the image of the fresh stream of blood washing Eulalia's body. We are especially encouraged to picture the intense, vivid red of a thick stream of fresh blood. In addition, we are encouraged to feel its warmth.

While Eulalia's reaction to her torture is very impressive, it is also unnerving, and even horrifying due to its unnaturalness. As a normal human being would be unable to command such articulate speech and rationality under torture, we must understand that Eulalia is inspired by God, and thus, in this scene, we perceive her to be like the inanimate body of the Sibyl, through whom a god speaks. Indeed, her earlier description as *anhela deo* (34) has already likened her to the Sibyl at Cumae, of whom Virgil states *pectus anhelum* (*Aeneid* VI, 48) (Malamud 1990, p. 75; Kubiak 1998, p. 312). In addition, the Sibyl, like Eulalia, partakes of old age, and is indeed doomed to grow older and older, because she asked Apollo for eternal life, but neglected to ask for eternal youth.

3.9 Eulalia's Final Torment

Eulalia is then subjected to the pyre, which finally kills her:

*ultima carnificina dehinc,
non laceratio vulnifica,
crate tenus nec arata cutis,
flamma sed undique lampadibus
in latera stomachumque furit.*

(vv. 146–150)

Prudentius takes care to distinguish this final, or worst torture (*ultima* can mean both) from the ones that Eulalia has already suffered. *Laceratio vulnifica* and *crate tenuis ... arata cutis* are graphic, horrifying reminders of what she has already undergone, and yet the *non ... nec* emphasises that an even worse fate awaits her: an intense fire which surrounds the whole of her body and targets her sides and stomach.

However, even though the pyre is presented as the ultimate punishment, Prudentius does not detail any of the gruesome effects of immolation, such as the shrinking of the sinews and the liquefaction of body fat which then drips from the victim. This is all the more surprising considering that the terrible, striking spectacle of the martyr on the pyre, and the agony of burning, have been well-documented by other martyrologists, such as John Foxe. Here, he describes the death of the martyr John Lambert on the pyre: 'For after that his legs were consumed and burned up to the stumps, and that the wretched tormentors and enemies of God had withdrawn the fire from him, so that but a small fire and coals were left under him ... Then he, lifting up such hands as he had, and his fingers' ends flaming with fire, cried unto the people in these words, "None but Christ, none but Christ"; and so ... fell into the fire, and there ended his life'²⁴.

In addition to the lack of information about Eulalia's injuries, there is little focus on her reaction to this new torture. Earlier, Eulalia remained vocal and forceful despite her terrible injuries. Here, however, she gives no speech, and appears comparatively calm. The only action she performs while on the pyre is to draw in the flames through her mouth, in order to speed her death. The focus of this torture is the flames themselves, and the disturbing image of Eulalia's long hair catching fire:

²⁴ John Foxe *Acts and Monuments* 5:236. Quoted in Byman (1978, p. 637).

*crinis odor ut in iugulos
 fluxerat involitans umeris,
 quo pudibunda pudicitia
 virgineusque lateret honos,
 tegmine verticis opposito,
 flamma crepans volat in faciem
 perque comas vegetata caput
 occupat exsuperatque apicem*

(vv. 151–158)

What is striking about this scene is the roaring, uncontrolled fire, which contrasts so strongly with Eulalia's calmness. Again, however, the physical agony resulting from this blaze is left to the reader to imagine. There are strong appeals to the senses, which add vividness to the scene, but these do not, by themselves evoke a sense of horror. However, there is one indirect appeal to disgust. Eulalia's hair is described as *odorus*, which suggests that it is pleasantly fragranced; however, anyone familiar with the smell of burning hair will know that it is acrid, and highly unpleasant.

Thus, at the conclusion of the poem, we see a Eulalia who is very different from the strident, angry, active girl presented at the beginning of the poem. The combined effect of this focus on the fire, her passivity, her silence during her burning and lack of information about her physical suffering serve to create a strangely tranquil atmosphere and a muted coda to a hitherto vigorous and forceful poem. The horror generated earlier in the poem is thus diminished towards its end, in preparation for the final peaceful images of the release of Eulalia's spirit (169), in the form of a dove, which then flies up to heaven, and her body being covered by a fall of pure, white snow (176–177), which literally blots out the visual reminders of her horrific punishment.

CHAPTER 4: *PERISTEPHANON* IX:

THE PASSION OF ST CASSIAN OF FORUM CORNELII

4.1 A Visual Spectacle

Peristephanon IX tells the story of the martyr Cassian, a schoolteacher whose fate is to be handed over to his own pupils for punishment.²⁵ This poem differs strikingly from the Lawrence and Eulalia poems due to its complete lack of foreshadowing of Cassian's fate. We learn about his end when a painting of his punishment makes an unexpected appearance early on in the poem, revealing all at once, and without warning, the shocking circumstances of his death. The presence of this painting also gives the poem a strong visual element. As we shall see, Cassian's death is presented as a spectacle.

Prudentius himself appears as a character in the poem, and begins the narration. At the beginning of the poem, this poet-character stops at Cassian's shrine en route to Rome. Hoping for God's favour, he kneels down before the martyr's tomb and begins to pray and meditate on his own sins, and the painful episodes in his life. These so affect him that he describes them in terms of physical pain (7: *mea vulnera*, 8: *dolorum acumina*) and is moved to tears (7). Thus absorbed, he gazes upwards and is suddenly confronted with a painting of Cassian's martyrdom, which is horrifying in its graphic detail:

*erexi ad caelum faciem, stetit obvia contra
fucis colorum picta imago martyris
plagas mille gerens, totos lacerata per artus,
ruptam minutis praeferens punctis cutem.*

(vv. 9–13)

²⁵ This specific example of role-reversal in punishment has a precedent in Livy (V.27), where a Faliscan schoolmaster who attempts to betray his charges instead receives his punishment at their hands:
Denudatum deinde eum manibus post tergum inligatis reducendum Falerios pueris tradidit, virgasque eis quibus proditorem agerent in urbem verberantes dedit.

Suddenly, the *vulnera* (10), *labores* (11) and *dolorum acumina* (11) of Prudentius' emotional life pale in comparison to the physical suffering, depicted in realistic *fuci colorum*, that he sees in the painting. In it, Cassian is being attacked by a large group of schoolboys, who strike and stab him with the *stili* they formerly used to write on their wax tablets during lessons. As a result, his entire body is covered with small puncture wounds. By using the words *mille* and *totos*, Prudentius encourages us to picture the full extent of Cassian's wounds. The extent to which his skin is punctured gives his punishment its particular horror. To suffer several such wounds might be regarded as unfortunate, but a man covered in these wounds is truly a shocking and arresting sight. The participles *gerens* (especially in the sense of 'wearing') and *praeferens* reflect this by indicating that the sight of the wounded martyr is striking and unmistakable. Like the eyeless man in *Peristephanon* II, (146: *orbes cavatos praeferens*), Cassian's mutilation dominates our impression of him. Indeed, the poet's eye goes first to the martyr and his wounds, and only second to the murderous boys who surround him in the painting.

4.2 Communication Through Wounding

The number of marks left on the martyr's body also carries meaning. Cassian's pupils have deliberately covered his body in wounds as a means of expressing their frustration at what they felt to be an excessive workload. Thus, they compare the many wounds they leave on the martyr's body to the many characters he made them copy down during lessons:

*"reddimus ecce tibi tam milia multa notarum,
quam stendo, flendo te docente excipimus."*

(vv. 71–72)

The use of *tam milia* and *flendo* suggests the utter exasperation the schoolboys feel at the seemingly endless written exercises they were made to do. This exasperation provides motivation for their cynical 'payback' of characters.

4.3 Attacking the Skin: Unattractiveness and Disgust

In addition, the fact that the schoolboys target only Cassian's skin makes his punishment unique within the *Peristephanon*. Unlike other martyrs, for instance, those who suffer the double claw, the interior of Cassian's body is not opened up and made visible, and so his mutilation is not one which produces the horror of seeing something taboo. Rather, his particular horror results from the destruction of his skin as his pupils attack him with their *stili*. As these were not especially sharp, their use to puncture the skin would have resulted in broken rather than cleanly cut skin (12: *ruptam ... cutem*) and would have created tears and flaps in the skin. In addition, as more and more tiny puncture wounds were made, they would have joined together to create larger wounds, and thus deprive larger areas of skin. Thus, the barrier between the outside world and the interior of the martyr's body is broken down, but the skin is not peeled back so that the interior structure of the body is clearly visible. Rather, it is annihilated.

As well as horrifying, Cassian's mutilation is also particularly disfiguring, and thus raises issues of unattractiveness and the evocation of disgust. In this respect, his situation is different to those martyrs who suffer burning. During burning on the pyre, certain distinctive features of the body, such as facial features, are erased, and the form and colour of the body are utterly transformed. This transformation is usually so complete that, by the end of their punishment, victims of burning can be almost unrecognisable as human beings. Hence, at some point, they cease to be classifiable in terms of attractiveness or lack thereof. Nor do the remnants of their bodies evoke the disgust associated with sights or smells of the living, breathing body. Cassian, on the other hand, is still

recognisable as a person even at the end of his punishment, but he is a person who has been robbed of all beauty. While his *forma* is preserved (we can imagine how, even after his injuries, he would still look almost the same when silhouetted), his lack of skin makes him hideous. While smoothness of skin, milkiness of colour or a reddening blush (as praised by Roman poets)²⁶ can add greatly to a person's attractiveness, Cassian's lack of skin makes him not only unattractive, but also potentially disgusting, due to the wounds and flaps of skin created by the *stili*, and the raw, bloody flesh underneath the skin which is exposed by his mutilation.

In contrast to the horrifying and potentially disgusting sight of Cassian's punctured, broken skin, there is one point in the poem at which Prudentius evokes the sensory qualities of the martyr's skin and flesh before their mutilation. *Nitescens area* (54) is used to describe the smooth, glossy, surface of the wax tablet ready to be inscribed with letters, and this description also strongly recalls the smooth, luminous expanse of the martyr's unbroken skin. In addition, *viscus molle* (56) suggests the softness of the flesh beneath. Thus, Cassian's skin and flesh prior to his punishment are both attractive and vulnerable. To the angry, vengeful schoolboys, these qualities would probably invite mutilation. In addition, then, to giving vent to their feelings of *ira et metus* (26), their mutilation of Cassian also carries with it the sadistic pleasure of spoiling something perfect – the smooth, unbroken expanse of his skin.

4.4 Youthful Executioners

The fact that Cassian's attackers are children rather than career executioners also makes his punishment unique within the collection. Once again, Prudentius emphasises the visual impact of Cassian's martyrdom – this time the spectacle of the murderous little boys.

²⁶ E.g.: Horace *Carmina* (1.13.2), Catullus (64.65 and 64.162), Propertius (1.20.45 and 3.24.8).

*innumeri circum pueri, miserabile visu,
confossa parvis membra figebant stilis,
unde pugillares soliti percurrere ceras
scholare murmur adnotantes scripserat.*

(vv. 13–16)

The sight of these schoolboys is referred to as pitiful (*miserabile visu*), and is also, no doubt extremely striking due to the incongruous association of children, who are generally assumed to be innocent of cruelty, and this brutal attack on Cassian. Later in the poem, Prudentius plays on this incongruity by referring to an individual child as *tortor infans* (59). This may recall Octavian's nickname *adulescens carnifex*, which also had the power to shock.

4.5 The Instruments of Torture

This incongruity of torturers who are little boys is compounded by the fact that they have co-opted writing instruments as weapons. The every day dullness and banality of the *scholare murmur* contrasts strongly with the gruesome purpose to which their *stili* have been turned. This strangeness is further emphasized by the fact that Cassian himself is an expert in using the *stilus*:

*verba notis brevibus comprehendere cuncta peritus,
raptimque punctis dicta praepetibus sequi.*

(vv. 23–24)

The tool of Cassian's trade has thus been turned against him. The instrument that he is so at home with, and so skilled at using, is now the instrument of his execution. Once used creatively by him, the *stilus* is now turned to a destructive end. The *puncti praepetes* he once practiced on wax tablets are now inflicted by his former pupils on his body, resulting in *nota breves* like those of the texts he

formally produced. In addition, the image of swift pricks (*punctis praepetibus*) of the *stili* on the soft, whitish surface of the *pugillares cerae* (15) immediately bring to mind the piercing of soft, whitish flesh with the same instruments.

Later, Prudentius tells how both ends of the *stili* have different functions:

*qua parte aratis cera sulcis scribitur.
et qua parte secti apices abolentur et aequoris hirti
rursus nitescens innovatur area.*

(vv. 52–54)

Here again, Prudentius describes the act of writing on the *tabella* in a similar way to the mutilation of the skin with the *stili*. The *arati sulci* inscribed on the tablet are like those inscribed on the martyr's skin. In addition, there is a significance to the different functions performed by each end of the *stilus*: the effect produced when stabbing Cassian differs according to which end is used:

*hinc foditur Christi confessor et inde secatur;
pars viscus intrat molle, pars scindit cutem.*

(vv. 55–56)

Here we have two gruesome pairs of contrasts describing the destruction of Cassian's skin. The digging into his soft flesh (*foditur*) with the *stili* is an image which is repeated throughout the poem (*confossa ... membra figebant* (14); *membra fixere* (57); *summa pupugerat* (59); *profunda perforarat* (60); *pangere puncta* (77)). This image closely relates to those of ploughing up the skin (52 (see above); *sulcisque intexere sulcos* (77)), breaking or splitting the skin (*ruptam minutis ... punctis cutem* (12)) and tearing the skin (*totos lacerata per artus* (11); *Lacerent inpune* (39)). All suggest the rending of the skin by the use of force. This contrasts with the effect produced by the opposite end of

the *stilus*, which is more akin to cutting (*secatur; scindit cutem* (above)), an action which at least involves less trauma to the skin. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that these would not have been particularly clean cuts. This ambiguity is captured by *scindit* (56), which can have the sense of cutting and of tearing.

As well as turning their writing instruments to weapons, some students also attack Cassian with the wax tablets they used to write on at school:

*coniciunt alii fragiles inque ora tabellas
frangunt, relisa fronte lignum dissilit,
buxa crepant cerata genis inpacta cruentis
rubetque ab ictu curta et umens pagina.*

(vv. 47–50)

Again, the schoolboys have transformed innocuous objects into weapons for use against their teacher. While these wax covered tablets cannot cause any serious injury to Cassian, the schoolboys use them as another means of expressing their *ira et metus* (26), and as a means of venting frustration. Here, Prudentius makes several appeals to the reader's senses, and in doing so, makes Cassian's suffering all the more vivid. There are several striking images here which suggest suffering, namely the martyr's bleeding face, and the bloodstained, broken *tabellae*. In addition to these static images, the poet conveys the movements and sounds associated with the scene, thus giving it a cinematic quality. We see the broken pieces of the *tabellae* flying through the air after the forceful blow, and we hear the crack of the brittle box-wood (*crepant*). This verb is also associated with physical suffering in other poems, being used, for example, to describe the crackling of Eulalia's pyre (*Peristephanon* III, 13: *crepitante pyra*).

4.6 The Poet's Reaction

Prudentius is so moved by what he sees in the painting that he feels compelled to ask the verger for more information. The verger responds by emphasising the truth of what the painting depicts:

*... "quod prospicis, hospes,
non est inanis aut anilis fabula;
historiam pictura refert, quae tradita libris
veram vetusti temporis monstrat fidem "*

(vv. 17–20)

By stressing the painting's verisimilitude, the verger recognises that the nightmarish quality of the image makes it difficult to believe that such a terrible thing could really happen. Despite the awfulness of the painting, however, Prudentius' response is one of spellbound fascination. This is indicated by the level of detail in which he recalls the painting (10–16 above), and by the verger's use of *prospicis* to describe his contemplation of it. By choosing this verb rather than the more neutral *vides*, the verger signals that Prudentius is actively surveying the scene before him. Although rarely used in this way, *prospicere* can mean 'to watch or survey' (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968, s.v., def. 2), which captures Prudentius' mood of fascination. The painting is such a striking sight that Prudentius desires to know more. Thus, instead of returning to his prayer, he immediately consults the verger regarding the story behind the painting. He is clearly experiencing the paradox of horror discussed in our introduction: he is confronted by a horrific sight which saddens and disturbs him, yet the sight is so compelling that instead of recoiling from it, he cannot tear his gaze away, and immediately desires to know more.

4.7 Cassian's Unique Sentence: Moral Considerations

The verger explains to Prudentius that on discovering that Cassian is a Christian, the local magistrate sentences him to a very unusual punishment:

*"donetur ipsis verberator parvulis.
ut libet inludant, lacerent impune ..."*

(vv. 38–39)

Part of the horror of Cassian's treatment lies in the nature of the magistrate's sentence. Unlike the fixed penalties usually handed down by a court, Cassian's punishment is open-ended. He is handed over to the schoolboys to do with him as they wish, and so their treatment of him is governed only by the *ira et metus* (26) they feel towards him. There is nothing Cassian can do or say which will have any influence on his fate. He is powerless, and completely at the mercy of his former pupils. He can only hope that the children will be restrained by moral considerations, or kindness and sympathy, and thus treat him humanely.

However, Cassian is unlikely to be treated humanely for several reasons. Firstly, the Romans believed, as we still do now, that a child's understanding of morality develops over time, and hence that children below a certain age are not fully capable of morally assessing their own actions.²⁷ Augustine and others believed that puberty (defined by jurists of the late empire as age 14) marked the commencement of the 'age of reason (*rationales anni*)' (Eyben 1993, p. 12), and hence the time at which a child's moral understanding was fully developed. Fourteen is thus the age at which children were thought to be capable of possessing *dolus malus* (criminal intent) and could hence be held legally responsible for their actions (Rawson 2003, p. 74). In contrast to this, Modestinus explains that those who are incapable of possessing *dolus malus* cannot be held criminally liable for

²⁷ For example, English common law and Catholic canon law have both traditionally held that the 7 year old child has begun to attain moral awareness (Rogoff et al. 1975, p. 356–357).

their actions. He uses the example of an infant who causes a person's death. The infant is not held liable because it is 'incapable of homicidal intent (*innocentia consilii*)' (*Digest*, 48. 8. 12) (Rawson 2003, p. 74). The schoolboys of *Peristephanon* IX most likely fall somewhere in between the extremes of the infant, who lacks any moral awareness, and the 14 year old, who is expected to have developed it. Thus, part of the horror of Cassian's punishment is that the schoolboys' choice of whether or not to treat him with compassion is not based on a fully developed understanding of morality.

On the other hand, if these schoolboys are mature enough to understand the immorality of what the magistrate is urging them to do, a sense of horror related to the transgression of Roman moral codes is created – namely those relating to respect and deference to elders. Cicero appropriately includes this moral duty in the *de Officiis*, stating that *est igitur adolescentis maiores natu vereri* (1.34.122) (Eyben 1993, p. 203). Aulus Gellius even stated that in Rome's early history, older men were esteemed by the young as highly as their own parents, and almost like gods (2.15.1–2) (Eyben 1993, p. 203). The importance of these moral standards to the Romans is clear from the horror in which they held the ultimate transgression of this code: parricide. This crime was considered shocking enough to merit (at least in Rome's early history) the exceptionally horrible punishment of the sack.

Furthermore, even if the children are fully morally developed, the magistrate has made a gift of Cassian to them, thus decisively turning him from a subject into an object. All moral constraints on how the children may treat him are thus removed. He belongs to them in the same way a slave belongs to his master. In addition, the magistrate makes clear that the children will suffer no consequences if they treat him badly:

"ut libet inludant, lacerent inpune ..."

(*vv.* 39)

Thus, instead of acting to curb the schoolboys' immoral, cruel instincts, and the natural sadism of children, the magistrate instead encourages them to give free rein to these things.

4.8 The Suitability of Youth to Cruel Punishment

The very fact that the magistrate can so easily urge these children on to such unnaturally cruel acts again emphasizes their youth. The Romans recognised that malleability was a distinctive characteristic of children and young adults. (Eyben 1993, p. 39). This pliability is perhaps an indication that the child's character is not yet fully formed, and can be viewed in a negative light. Seneca (*De Constantia*, 12 1–2), for example, considers childhood as a phase of life which is 'changeable [and] uncertain' (Rawson 2003, p. 85), and thus saw children as lacking the *constantia* so valued by the Romans as a personal quality. Likewise, Horace describes the young man as *cereus* – as soft as wax (*Ars Poetica* 163) (Eyben 1993, p. 39). This analogy is striking in the context of *Peristephanon* IX, as we see that the schoolboys themselves are like wax tablets that the magistrate imprints with ideas and inscribes with meaning.

In addition, the magistrate has strongly linked Cassian's mutilation with fun and play – ideas which are universally appealing to children. The Romans certainly recognised children's natural inclination towards playfulness, with Cicero referring to childhood as a *lasciviens aetas* (Eyben 1993, p. 39), and Livy speaking of the *iuvenalis iocus* which is characteristic of children and youth (Eyben 1993, p. 39). Thus, the magistrate encourages the schoolboys to be playful in their mutilation of their former teacher:

*“ut libet inludant, lacerent inpune manusque
tinguant magistri feriatas sanguine.”*

(vv. 39–40)

Here, horror is produced by the juxtaposition of words suggesting fun with those suggesting mutilation: *inludant*, *ludum*, *feriatis* and *volupte est* sit uneasily alongside *lacerent* and *manus tinguant sanguine*. Later in the poem, we see that the magistrate's exhortations have the desired effect. Not only do the children butcher Cassian, but they enjoy themselves at the same time:

*"pangere puncta libet sulcisque intexere sulcos,
flexas catenis inpedire virgulas."*

(vv. 77–78)

4.9 The Relationship between Teacher and Student

Thus, the encouragement and sanction of the magistrate have resulted in the schoolboys attacking their former teacher without reservation. In addition, however, it is probable that the desire to hurt Cassian was already present, albeit restrained, for Prudentius notes that the schoolboys strongly disliked his teachings:

*aspera nonnumquam praecepta et tristia visa
inpube vulgus moverant ira et metu.
doctor amarus enim discenti semper ephebo,
nec dulcis ulli disciplina infantiae est.*

(vv. 25–28)

Here it is Cassian's *praecepta*, his teachings or, as it can also mean, his commands which the students resent. A more obvious cause for resentment would be corporal punishment with the *ferula* (cane), *flagellum* (cat) (Poynton 1934, p. 9), and more rarely the *scutica*²⁸. These were the means with which Roman schoolmasters traditionally enforced discipline. However, there is no indication

²⁸Martial remarks at 10.62.8–10, *cirrata loris horridis Scythae pellis,/ qua vapulavit Marsyas Celaenaeus,/ ferulaque tristes, scepra paedagogorum*. Prudentius himself notes of his schooldays, *aetas prima crepantibus/ flevit sub ferulis* (*Praefatio*, 7-8).

that Cassian used these painful methods to control his class. The resentment of his pupils is instead explained in terms of the child's natural antipathy towards the teacher and towards lessons. This was recognised by Quintilian, who said that the love of study is not innate in children, but must instead be fostered if they are not to resent their time at school. For this reason, he recommends that young children should not be worked too hard, *nam id primus cavere oportebit, ne studia qui amare nondum potest oderit et amaritudinem semel perceptam etiam ultra rudes annos reformidet* (1. 20).

Thus, Cassian is not to blame for the boys' ill-feeling. In addition, the absence of any reference to corporal punishment suggests that they probably enjoyed much more lenient treatment than their contemporaries, especially if we consider Eyre's statement that primary school-age children, as they seem to be, were treated worst of all (1963, p. 56). Indeed, the boys complain of nothing worse than harsh teachings, and later in the poem, lack of holidays. The Roman magistrate, however, on hearing that Cassian is a schoolteacher, assumes that he punishes his pupils in the usual way, as he refers to him as *verberator* (38) and *doctor severus* (42) who *nimis coarctat* (43), and this assumption presumably influences his choice of Cassian's punishment.

4.10 A Reversal of Roles

However, even if Cassian did not use corporal punishment to restrain his pupils, his role as teacher nevertheless involved control and coercion. His pupils were powerless to exercise their will, or act on their desires. For example, they could not take as many holidays as they wanted or cease work when they were tired. It is a fitting punishment that he himself is now subject to extreme coercion. He is incapacitated and far less able to exercise his will than his pupils were while under his control. Furthermore, his former pupils now have a much greater level of control over him than he ever had over them, because they now have the power of life and death over him.

The experience of this power allows a release of pent-up anger within the boys, which they would formerly have been punished for expressing to Cassian. This contributes to a sense of freedom:

*quantum quisque odii tacita conceperat ira,
effundit ardens felle tandem libero.*

(vv. 45–46)

Further contributing to a sense of freedom is the fact that the schoolboys can express themselves while they torture Cassian. They can give vent to their grievances and unhappiness, and express their true opinion of him – that he is a mean and unfair teacher – in a way that is usually impossible when the traditional, unequal student-teacher relationship is in place:

*“non petimus totiens te praeceptore negatas,
avare doctor, iam scholarum ferias.”*

(vv. 75–76)

4.11 The Cruelty of Youth

The schoolboys also use their newfound freedom of expression to taunt and humiliate Cassian. The magistrate has earlier opened up this possibility by saying *ut libet inludant* (39). While the more common meaning of *inludere* is to play or sport with something, it can also mean to mock or ridicule, and this is what the schoolboys go on to do:

*“quid gemis?” exclamat quidam; “tute ipse magister
istud dedisti ferrum et armasti manus.*

...

...

*non potes irasci quod scribimus; ipse iubebas
numquam quietum dextera ut ferret stilum.”*

(vv. 69–74)

Here, there is a certain horror in the schoolboys' interaction with Cassian. They address him, and acknowledge his response by recognising that he is angry, but they trivialise his anger by offering a cynical justification for their cruel actions. There is also the suggestion that they exhibit even greater callousness by trivialising Cassian's physical suffering. *Gemis* can suggest groans of agony as well as complaints, and even if Cassian had remained silent throughout his ordeal, it must be apparent to his young torturers that their actions are causing him great pain. Their failure to acknowledge or respond to this pain in any way adds a certain bleakness to Cassian's experience.

4.12 Acting *En Masse*

Their imperviousness to Cassian's pain stems, at least partly, from the fact that the schoolboys are gathered together in a large group, and are acting as a unit. Like the *Candida Massa*, another group who embark on a course of action they might hesitate to as individuals, the schoolboys of *Peristephanon IX* 'move and think *en masse*' (Malamud 1989, p. 140). Nowhere in the poem do we see these boys as individuals. They are almost always presented as a group (21: *grege*, 26: *vulgus*, 31: *coetu*, 35: *agmen*) who act together, speak in the first person plural, and menacingly encircle Cassian even at the beginning of the poem (14: *innumeri circum pueri*, 21–22: ... *grege multo / saeptus*).

The boys have thus adopted a herd mentality, in which reasoning occurs at the level of the group, not individually. Although this mentality allows the boys to act with forceful cruelty and resolution throughout the poem, we are nevertheless periodically reminded that they are little boys who lack adult strength and require adult guidance.

4.13 The Frailty of Youth

Prudentius uses a variety of words and expressions to indicate youth, such as *pueri* (13), *inpube vulgus* (26), *ephebo* (27), *infantiae* (28), *agmen tenerum ac puerile* (35), *parvulis* (38), *infans* (59) and *tener infirmisque* (67). Some of these indicate lack of strength or decisiveness. The adjective *tener*, for example, is frequently associated with youth and immaturity, as well as with the physical delicacy and lack of strength which is characteristic of youth (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968, s.v.). The adjective *infirmus* (67) has similar connotations.

The use of *tener* in the poem also serves to indicate lack of independent thought and exercise of the will:

agmen tenerum ac puerile gubernat

(vv. 35)

Here, we are reminded that the schoolboys pass from Cassian's direction to the control of the magistrate. Throughout the poem, they act not independently, but under the guidance and advice of adults. *Inpube* (26) explicitly refers to the lack of adult faculties. This suggests that the magistrate wants to inspire in them a degree of cruelty which it is not normal for a child to possess. He is asking them to act in a way which is unnatural for them, by going beyond what children are usually capable of, in order to inflict a brutal punishment on Cassian.

Although the magistrate easily convinces the children to attack Cassian, we soon see that he has asked too much of them. Being mere schoolboys, they quickly become physically tired, resulting in painful, half-hearted blows to the martyr:

*sed male conatus tener infirmusque laborat;
tormenta crescent dum fatiscit carnifex.*

(vv. 67–68)

Thus, despite the schoolboys' best attempts, the adult Cassian is able to outlast them. Other martyrs exhaust and outlast their torturers in the *Peristephanon*, but this is because they find within themselves a superhuman strength to match that of their experienced adult torturers. In this case, Cassian's torturers simply do not have sufficient combined strength to finish him off.

4.14 Gentle Torture

This paradox of gentle torture (the lighter the wounds, the more painful and drawn-out the death) has already made an appearance in the Lawrence poem. In the Cassian poem, Prudentius mentions this paradox early on. Even before the children begin to tire, it is noted that the boys who inflict only superficial wounds upon Cassian are crueller torturers than those who wound him deeply:

*maior tortor erat qui summa pupugerat infans,
quam qui profunda perforarat viscera;*

(vv. 59–60)

The reason is that the latter child will hasten Cassian's death and, with it, his release from physical pain:

*ille, levis quoniam percussor morte negata
saevire solis scit dolorum spiculis,
hic, quanto interius vitalia condita pulsat,
plus dat medellae dum necem prope applicat.*

(vv. 61–64)

Apart from the fact that some children exert a greater force on Cassian than others, the overall force of the group's torture diminishes as time elapses. Therefore, another aspect of the horror of Cassian's fate is that while the schoolboys initially torture him with enthusiasm and energy, they then become fatigued, and their wounding begins to trail off, leaving Cassian in great pain, but bringing him no closer to the relief of death. Eventually it is God who must intervene and end his agony, by causing his blood to exit his wounds more copiously, and thus allowing him to bleed to death. This belated release from physical suffering brings freedom and a sense of relief for the martyr:

*iubet resolvi pectoris ligamina,
difficilesque moras animae ac retinacula vitae
relaxat, artas et latebras expedit.*

(vv. 86–88)

These lines recall Dido's suicide at the end of *Aeneid* IV. Dido, like Cassian, is dying, but because this is occurring prematurely and at her own hand, her soul is similarly unable to make a swift and easy exit from her body. Juno, seeing this, sends Iris to perform a similar role to the one performed by Christ in the Cassian poem:

*Tum Iuno omnipotens longum miserata dolorem
difficilisque obitus Irim demisit Olympo
quae luctantem animam nexosque resolveret artus.*

(vv. 693–695)

By helping her soul to break free from the physical constraints of her body, Iris helps Dido to die and thus achieve peace. This scene concludes book IV of the *Aeneid*. It ensures that the preceding atmosphere of horror and sadness which accompanied Dido's act of stabbing herself is transformed into one of serenity. Similarly, at the very end of the Cassian poem, the horror, sadness, tension and

intensity related to the events of his torture give way to a sense of peace, and satisfaction at the way events have concluded.

Following the description of the martyr's death, Prudentius returns to the image of the painting, which he now describes in a way which reflects the altered mood of the poem. Rather than being an image which evokes horror and disgust, as it did at the beginning of the poem, the painting now depicts the glory of Cassian (94) in liquid colours (93), thus providing a sense of wonder and transcendence, and transforming Cassian's fate from horrible slaughter to triumph.

CHAPTER 5: PERISTEPHANON XI: TO BISHOP VALERIAN

ON THE PASSION OF THE MOST BLESSED MARTYR HIPPOLYTUS

In this poem, the elderly presbyter Hippolytus is sentenced to die in the same way as his mythological namesake: by being dragged behind wild horses. He thus suffers one of the most spectacular and violent deaths of all the martyrs in the *Peristephanon*, but despite this, his story appears to be one of the less well-known, for reasons revealed in the opening meditation of the poem.

5.1 An Array of Martyrs

The Hippolytus poem is unusual because its first two sections evoke a different sense of horror to that encountered so far in our poems. The beginning of this poem deals with the large number of martyrs buried in Rome, and the following section deals with the punishment of a group of martyrs by the Roman magistrate. Both the deceased martyrs and those awaiting punishment are dealt with as a group, and thus the sense of horror evoked by their respective situations is a diffuse, generalised one. As such, it has a different sort of impact from the horror surrounding the fate of the individual, which has hitherto been the focus of our poems.

As occurred in the Cassian poem, Prudentius appears as the narrator here. This poet-narrator opens the poem by responding to a request by Bishop Valerian that he record the names and inscriptions on the tombs of all the martyrs buried in Rome. The difficulty here is that, unlike the smaller towns mentioned in other poems in the *Peristephanon*, which hold between one and 18 graves, Rome holds *innumeros cineres sanctorum* (1). The impact of this statement is heightened by its placement at the very beginning of the poem. We realise immediately the hopelessness of any attempt to record the names and stories of all those buried in the capital. The number of martyrs' graves here is simply

overwhelming. However, a far greater problem also faces those who wish to preserve and hand down the martyrs' stories: many of the graves do not record the names of those buried there.

5.2 Anonymity and Loss

The importance of being able to identify each martyr by name is stressed at the beginning of the poem: in the first 15 lines, *nomen* appears three times and *vocabulum* once. However, the condition of the Roman graves makes identification of each individual impossible. Prudentius tells us that in the capital, there are many groups of anonymous individuals buried together in single tombs that function like mass graves. On such tombs, which *solum significant numerum* (10):

*quanta virum iaceant congestis corpora acervis
nosse licet, quorum nomina nulla legas*

(vv. 11–12)

These martyrs seem to contract anonymity through being piled up together. The intertwining of their bodies, and their reduction to a mere number emphasise the terrible transformation of this profusion of names and stories into a single, monolithic mass.

The fact that Prudentius spends 16 lines discussing this loss of names and stories, and the sad, bleak images of the anonymous dead he paints, suggest that he is deeply affected, and even possibly horrified by the loss of this information, which is so precious and valued in the Christian community. There is further evidence for this in other poems in the collection. For example, in *Peristephanon* I, which recounts the story of the martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius, the poet laments this breakdown in the transmission of this information:

o vetustatis silentis obsoleta oblivio!
invidetur ista nobis fama et ipsa extinguitur.

(vv. 73–74)

The type of horror evoked by the loss of the Roman martyrs' stories is obviously different from the horror evoked by the various aspects of martyrdom itself, which have largely to do with attacks on the physical body. I suggest that the martyrs' enforced anonymity is horrifying because the loss of their stories entails a loss of the meaning associated with their deaths. If the Christian community is unable to fully understand the circumstances of their deaths, those deaths are meaningless, and have thus been in vain. Thus, ironically, the worst fate that one can suffer as a martyr is not any form of physical punishment, but rather to have one's story lost to posterity, and thus to have been an ineffectual martyr.

Hippolytus' story, as dramatic and spectacular as it is, might have remained one of those sadly lost to posterity had Prudentius not been determined to prevent this particular horror, wherever possible, by assiduously searching for information others might have missed (17: *lustris oculis*, 18: *sequor*). However, before Prudentius relates the events of Hippolytus' execution, he spends considerable time setting the scene.

5.3 One of Many

Hippolytus is only one of a large group of Christians who face the Roman magistrate for punishment, and is himself brought forth only once the rest of the group have been questioned and sentenced. Prudentius discusses the fate of this group at length, but, as pointed out earlier, the focus never narrows to individual martyrs. As with the anonymous martyrs buried in Rome, this focus on the group has implications for the type of horror their fates give rise to.

While Prudentius' presentation of these Christians before the magistrate adequately conveys the atmosphere of the *quaestio*, and the horrors experienced by those accused, it is one of his less effective scenes. This is partly because the poet's use of imagery and his characterisation of both magistrate and Christians differ very little from earlier *quaestio* scenes in the *Peristephanon*, and partly because the accused Christians are seen only as an undifferentiated mass. We neither hear individual voices nor see individual reactions.

The Christians brought before the judge are presented as faceless *agmina* (53). Even in appearance, there is nothing to distinguish the individual, as all have long hair due to their lengthy incarceration (53: *carcereo crinita situ*). While the band of crippled and disabled men presented in the Lawrence poem are also described as *agmen*, Prudentius takes care to detail the various disabilities suffered by certain individuals within the group, with the result that the reader can understand the individual nature of each person's suffering. In addition to this, their individual injuries and disabilities are horrific in nature, and hence the suffering of each individual leaves a strong, distinct impression on the mind of the reader.

However, even the tortures that these particular *agmina* suffer are painted with very broad brushstrokes. Prudentius mentions only that the judge intends to torture them in frightful ways (54: *horrendis excrucienda modis*). In contrast to earlier poems, this statement is followed not by a detailed account of the martyr's suffering, but merely by the disembodied sounds made by the various instruments of torture:

*inde catenarum tractus, hinc lorea flagra
stridere, virgarum concrepitare fragor.*

(vv. 56–57)

While the sound-effects created here are evocative, and could certainly cause the reader to wince when imagining the corresponding pain, the connection between the lashes and rods, and the martyrs' physical bodies must be supplied by the reader. Those who have read the earlier poems in the *Peristephanon* are well-equipped to do this. The use of these sound-effects is thus a convenient short-hand for Prudentius – a way for him to convey the martyrs' physical suffering without mentioning it explicitly.

Following this, Prudentius deals with the use of the claw, but does not mention the creaking or groaning sound that he associates with it in other poems. Rather, he returns to the well-used image of the opening up of the body and the revelation of its interior spaces:

*ungula fixa cavis costarum cratibus altos
pandere secessus et lacerare iecur.*

(vv. 57–58)

As with the sound effects preceding it, the reader must make the connection between this image of torture and the living, suffering martyr upon whom the torture is inflicted. However, this is a connection which the poet has made several times in the earlier poems in the *Peristephanon*, especially in the Eulalia poem. Therefore, this abbreviated image can again serve as a kind of shorthand.

Following this, instead of showing the reaction of the martyrs to their torture, Prudentius simply informs the reader that none of the Christians has recanted as a result of the punishment. The magistrate reacts to this with typical rage and loss of control (63), and orders various forms of the death penalty to be carried out. His assignation of the various penalties is arbitrary, with the victims referred to not by name, but differentiated merely by use of demonstratives:

"huic abscide caput, crux istum tollat ...

...

*hos rape praecipites et vinctos conice in ignem,
sit pyra quae multos devoret una reos."*

(vv. 65–68)

Here, the magistrate's lack of concern with the fate of the individual recalls the horror of the loss of information about the martyrs evoked by Prudentius at the beginning of the poem. Their reduction to *hi* and *illi*, along with this offhand assignation of punishments, makes a proper record of each individual's fate unlikely. In addition, we can imagine that the group executed together on the pyre will end up with their remains intertwined and buried in exactly the kind of mass grave Prudentius describes at the beginning of the poem.

5.4 Exceptional Punishments

Although the martyrs themselves are treated as a group, two of the punishments proposed for them by the magistrate are discussed in more detail, and both can certainly evoke horror. The first punishment is crucifixion. The magistrate conceives of it as a punishment which lifts its victim up into the air, the realm of birds, which he then imagines pecking at the victim's eyes:

*"...crux istam tollat in auras
viventisque oculos offerat alitibus."*

(vv. 65–66)

While crucifixion is mentioned in other poems in the collection, the idea that birds may attack the victim's eyes is unique to this passage. Besides making the punishment more gruesome, this idea also brings crucifixion into line with other punishments in the *Peristephanon* (most commonly, the

claw) in which the victim experiences the breaking up of an area of the physical body while still alive. Thus, the horror and disgust elicited by the mutilation and destruction of the body in other contexts is here transferred to crucifixion, a punishment which did not traditionally involve either of these things. The pecking out of a crucifixion victim's eyes is particularly horrible because he is immobilised and defenceless, and thus must suffer this terrible injury at the hands of animals he would usually be able to brush away.

The other capital punishment explored in detail is that of the leaky boat. This is a particularly elaborate form of the death sentence in which prisoners are pushed out to sea on a derelict boat, and left to drown as the boat disintegrates. Despite the fact that death will occur too far from the shore to make it a horrific sight for onlookers, the very nature of the punishment can have a powerful effect on the imagination, which is perhaps the reason that Prudentius dwells on it for longer (eight lines) than the others mentioned in this section.

Part of the horror of this punishment is that its victims are at the mercy of powerful forces of the natural world. As we will see later, similarly uncontrollable forces of nature play a large part in Hippolytus' execution. Here, it is the power of the ocean which can evoke horror. This power is instinctively feared, even in this age of relatively easy sea travel, for it is still true that even a strong swimmer is no match for the ocean's waves and currents, and would be lucky to survive unaided if his vessel were destroyed far from land.

That the ancients took the power of the sea very seriously is indicated by the old superstition that sea-travel was forbidden to man (Shelton 1974, p. 15). Accidents at sea were thus easily attributable to man's impiety in this respect. In addition, the sea's uncontrollable power (as well as the denial of the possibility of burial) led the Romans to view drowning as a particularly horrible death.

Literary sources also reflect how much the sea's power was feared in the ancient world. Tacitus, for example, writes about a ship which had similar defects to the one described in this poem. It had been constructed to kill Nero's mother, Agrippina. This earlier vessel was also clearly intended to take advantage of the power of the sea, as Tacitus has Anicetus suggest:

"Nihil tam capax fortuitorum quam mare; et si naufragio intercepta sit, quem adeo iniquum, ut scelere adsignet, quod venti et fluctus deliquerint?"

(Annales, XIV.3)

Prudentius expresses similar sentiments in poem V of the *Peristephanon*. Here, he makes his pagan persecutor Datianus express mistrust of the ocean:

*"insana numquam naufragis
ignoscit unda, et spumeum
nescit profundum parcere."*

(Peristephanon V, vv. 438–440)

In the Hippolytus poem, it is the magistrate who expresses similar opinions of the sea. He describes it as *ravidum* (71), and *tumidis aquis* (72), indicating power and wildness. He also mentions its vastness (70: *medii stagna profunda freti*). This would further inspire fear in those contemplating this particular punishment, as being isolated in the middle of hostile waters would make the possibility of rescue remote.

Adding to this punishment's sense of horror is the fact that the boat, rather than being a means of safe conveyance and protection from the elements, is instead an instrument to deliver the victims to their deaths. Prudentius packs his description of the boat with adjectives indicating incipient fragmentation due to inherent structural weaknesses. Like Charon's boat (Virgil *Aeneid*. VI. 414), this

one is *rimosa cumba* (69). In addition, it is *male suta* (71), suggesting that it has been poorly made, and *caesa* (72), suggesting that it has been deliberately weakened for the purposes of this punishment. The bottom is *putrem* (73), and the deck itself will give way (*dissociata*, 73). Likewise, verbs of sinking and giving way are used to describe its motion and disintegration of its parts (72: *labarit*, 73: *tabulata laxent*).

In a final twist to the punishment of the leaky boat, the magistrate imagines that a disgusting sea-monster will devour the victims once they have drowned:

*"squamea caenoso praestabit ventre sepulcrum
belua consumptis cruda cadaveribus."*

(vv. 75–76)

These two lines contain a high proportion of words and images which can evoke disgust and horror. *Belua* may simply mean 'wild animal', but is here more likely to take on its secondary meaning of monster. *Squamea* links this monster with other despised animals such as snakes, and *caenoso* associates it with filth and slime. It is thus a vicious, dirty and disgusting creature. This description makes the prospect of contact with this creature seem revolting, and evokes fear of contamination. Adding to the horror is the fact that this monster feeds on human flesh. *Consumptis cruda cadaveribus* suggests that the beast will be well satisfied with the disgusting meal provided by the martyrs' corpses. In addition, the use of *sepulchrum* leads us to picture the monster's stomach as a graveyard for decaying human flesh, an image which can evoke both disgust and horror.

The only hope for the Christians condemned to the punishment of the leaky boat is that God will intervene, and save them from the ocean and the sea monster, as happened in the case of Jonah, who was swallowed alive by a whale and then regurgitated. However, before his rescue, Jonah also

undergoes a disgusting and horrifying experience: that of being contained within the whale's stomach for three days and nights. Prudentius writes about Jonah's ordeal in *Cathemerinon* VII. After he has been swallowed whole, the poet's use of descriptive terms suggests the strangeness and horror of his situation, for while he wanders the twisted paths of the beast's entrails, sweating from the hot conditions, he is both man and morsel of food (even though he is not crushed by the creature's teeth) (121–125).

5.5 Hippolytus' Spectacular Punishment

Having examined these two unusual punishments, Prudentius returns to the fate of Hippolytus. When the old man is finally brought before the magistrate for sentencing, the crowds surrounding him demand that he be punished in an unusual way, so that his execution has maximum deterrence value (83–84). His fate is thus similar to that of Lawrence, another man of high standing in the Christian community whose punishment is also intended to be exemplary. There is evidence here to indicate that in making an example of Hippolytus through a particularly novel and gruesome punishment, the Roman persecutors intend to create a sense of horror in the minds of those who witness, or hear about, the martyr's fate:

... exemplo quo trepident alii.

(vv. 84)

When the magistrate learns Hippolytus' name, he immediately decides to make him suffer the same fate as the Hippolytus of myth, and sentences him to be dragged to death behind a team of wild horses (87–88). Hippolytus is thus forced to take part in a 'fatal charade' like many other Christians, although this particular 'performance' occurs outside the usual venue of the arena. At this point in the poem, we come to understand the reason that Prudentius earlier attached so much importance to

knowing each martyr's name, for if we did not know Hippolytus' name, the significance of his story would have been entirely lost.

5.6 Forces of Nature

Before the punishment commences, Prudentius spends considerable time exploring its nature and the way in which it is set up. What makes this punishment particularly horrific is that, much like the punishment of the leaky boat, it is carried out by a force that no human agency can control. Once the wild horses are spurred on and set in motion, no application of strength, pleading, bargaining or protestation can bring the punishment to a halt. Prudentius emphasises this aspect of the punishment by evoking the immense destructive force generated by the nervousness of the wild horses:

*prorumpunt alacres caecoque errore feruntur,
qua sonitus atque tremor, qua furor exagitant.
incendit feritas, rapit impetus et fragor urget,
nec cursus volucer mobile sentit onus.*

(vv. 111–114)

The horror here is the complete opposite of that evoked in the Lawrence poem, in which the force of the fire is tempered and moderated. The power generated by the horses (and transferred to the martyr's body) is immense, but inconstant and unpredictable. Thus, Hippolytus has no way of anticipating how much pain he will suffer, or how long his torment will last before death releases him.

5.7 Giving up Control

Also noteworthy is the manner in which Hippolytus is swept along by the wild horses, and literally carried off to his gruesome fate. This is the continuation of a pattern established at the outset of the

poem. Hippolytus is far from being the instigator of the events which lead up to his martyrdom, as is the case with Eulalia, who presents herself before the magistrate and behaves in a manner which is sure to incur his wrath. By contrast, Hippolytus displays passivity throughout the poem, and is merely swept along by the events as they occur (21: *ad martyrii provectum*, 25: *raperetur ab hoste*, 39: *sistitur insano rectori*, 78: *offertur*).

The idea of being carried off to face a terrible punishment would evoke significant dread for most people. It gives a sense of inevitability – of being forced to confront something horrible. Despite this, there are indications throughout the poem that Hippolytus actually enjoys this lack of control, and the sense of being swept along to an inevitable fate. In lines 25 and 26, in which the poet relates how he is carried away by a furious enemy, he is described as *exultante anima*, suggesting that for him, the experience of losing control over his destiny is a thrilling, uplifting one. Likewise, his last words before the horses set off indicate that he likens his relinquishing of control during his punishment to his subordination of his will to God, and hence views his execution in very positive terms:

"Hi rapiunt artus, tu rape, Christe, animam."

(vv. 110)

5.8 Wilderness and Civilization

Even after the spurring on of the horses, which marks the commencement of Hippolytus' punishment, it is nine lines before Prudentius begins to describe its effects on the martyr's body. Before this, the poet lists in some detail the different aspects of the wild landscape which the horses encounter and traverse:

*per silvas, per saxa ruunt, non ripa retardat
fluminis aut torrens oppositus cohibet.
prosternunt saepes et cuncta obstacula rumpunt,
prona, fragosa petunt, ardua transiliunt.*

(vv. 115–118)

The bleakness of this wild landscape strongly contrasts with an earlier reference to Rome, in which the poet draws attention to the urban landscape by mentioning the *Janiculum, fora, rostra* and *Subura* (45). We are also told that before his encounter with Hippolytus, the magistrate had prosecuted many Christians within the city itself:

*... humum celsae intra moenia Romae
tinguere ... caedibus*

(vv. 43–44)

The city walls of Rome form an important dividing line between civilization and wilderness. Elsewhere in the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius speaks of Rome as a centre of law, custom and history. In *Peristephanon* II, Lawrence says that Rome was founded and given its commanding position over other nations by Christ himself (418–419: *qui scepta Romae in vertice / rerum locasti*), so that the Romans might unite other nations under their own law and custom (419–424). This view of Rome as natural leader of the world is expressed again in *Peristephanon* IX, where Prudentius refers to it as the world's capital (3: *rerum maxima Roma*), and in *Peristephanon* X, in which he terms it the supreme head of the world (167: *saeculi summum caput*).

Even though the persecutor has tainted Rome with extensive bloodshed (Roberts, 2001, pp. 542-543), the city continues to function as a symbol of the triumph of reason over passion. As

such, it forms a strong contrast to the setting for Hippolytus' death: a wild land outside of the control of reason. Hippolytus thus will not be saved because he is cut off from Rome, and hence from rationality, law and civilization.

5.9 Hippolytus' Injuries

The explosive energy of the horses, their nervousness, the aimless nature of their frantic cross-country dash, and the wild landscape through which they careen, all accumulate to overwhelm the reader, even without the mention of the physical impact of this punishment on Hippolytus. When the poet finally mentions the terrible injuries he suffers, it merely serves to add to the reader's sense of being overwhelmed. As the horses break through obstacles and flatten fences, Hippolytus' body, too, is broken:

*scissa minutatim labefacto corpore frusta
carpit spinigeris stirpibus hirtus ager.
pars summis pendet scopulis, pars sentibus haeret,
pars rubent frondes, parte madescit humus.*

(vv. 119–122)

Although these lines are the only four in the poem devoted to the destruction of Hippolytus' body, they are particularly vivid and effective. *Labefacto* leads the reader to picture how the exterior of the body is battered and bruised as it is dragged along, before the force of the horses' flight finally causes it to break apart into pieces. The theme of severed body parts is a well-worn one in the horror genre, but this is an extreme case, in which total fragmentation of the body has occurred. It is transformed into *frusta* – literally, scraps of food. Unlike Seneca's depiction of Hippolytus' punishment (discussed in Chapter 1), in which we see the torment and anguish of the living man, Prudentius' Hippolytus is transformed into chunks of flesh so fast that we do not see him react to his

punishment at all. To even account for him as an individual, it is now necessary to locate the torn-off body parts which are widely scattered across the landscape (*pars ... pars*). A sense of disgust arises because of the ambiguous status of these dismembered fragments of the body: they both do and do not constitute the martyr himself. The problem of identity is acute.

5.10 A Visual Record

Following this description of the martyr's body parts being scattered across the landscape, Prudentius describes a painting of the scene which hangs at the martyr's tomb. At 21 lines, this description is far longer than the description above of the breaking up of the martyr's body. It strongly encourages the reader to picture the climax and aftermath of Hippolytus' punishment in visual terms:

*exemplar sceleris paries habet inlitis, in quo
multicolor fucus digerit omne nefas.
picta super tumulum species liquidis viget umbris
effigians tracti membra cruenta viri.*

(vv. 123–126)

Multicolor, *omne*, *species ... viget* and *effigians* all stress the vividness, completeness and lifelike qualities of this image. In addition, Prudentius stresses how he himself has taken in all the horrible details of the painting (127: *vidi*, 131: *cernere erat*). The impression given is that every single aspect of this punishment, no matter how disturbing, is deliberately and clearly presented to the viewer. This shows that Prudentius is very aware of how the visual aspect of Hippolytus' punishment is capable of evoking a strong sense of horror and disgust, and is thus playing upon, and emphasising, this visual aspect.

5.11 The Living Flock and the Dismembered Body

Perhaps the most disturbing part of this painting is its depiction of Hippolytus' grieving flock, who follow the course of the horses and try to retrieve the pieces of his body. Prudentius spends 11 lines describing this sight – more than he devotes to other parts of the painting – and devotes four lines to the specific body parts involved:

*ille caput niveum conplectitur ac reverandam
canitiem molli confovet in gremio;
hic umeros truncasque manus et bracchia et ulnas
et genua et crurum fragmina nuda legit.*

(vv. 137–140)

For early Christians, retrieval of a martyr's body parts for use as relics was normal practice, and would not evoke any feelings of disgust or horror. However, by dwelling on the various fragments of Hippolytus' body, and the faithful's cherishing of them, Prudentius shows awareness that this sight would cause disgust in non-Christian readers due to the usual view of a fragmented corpse as both revolting and miasmatic. He is here playing on that disgust. In addition, a strong sense of horror can arise here due to the question of identity. The chunks of flesh which are so lovingly handled by this group made up a living person only moments ago – one with whom the congregation interacted and whose character they were familiar with.

Physical contact with the martyr is also highlighted in *Peristephanon V*, in which a gathering of the faithful interact in similar ways with the dying Vincent:

*ille unguarum duplices
sulcos pererrat osculis,
hic purpurantem corporis
gaudet cruorum lambere.*

(vv. 337–340)

Here, however, the sense of disgust evoked is even more extreme. Hippolytus' followers merely touch the bloodied fragments of the martyr's body. Vincent's followers go one step further by actually ingesting a disgusting and contaminating bodily fluid during their expressions of devotion.

The congregation's collection of Hippolytus' body parts marks the final evocation of horror and disgust in the poem. Following this scene, Prudentius moves away from the spectacle of the martyr's suffering and death, and describes at length the underground cave just outside the walls of Rome in which his body is interred (152–155). The description of the light filtering into the mysterious depths of this cave (159–162) creates a sense of stillness which contrasts very strongly to the chaos and violence of the horses' journey. This provides relief from the horror which has been built up during the poem, and, as has occurred in our previous poems, helps to end the poem on a tranquil note. There is also a note of satisfaction in the return of Hippolytus' body to the boundaries of Rome itself. Even though he has died in a wilderness setting, his final resting place is close to the ordered, civilized landscape of Rome, suggesting that his death has been saved from the irrationality and meaninglessness associated with its surroundings.

CHAPTER 6: THESIS CONCLUSION

The poems of the *Peristephanon* are, first and foremost, devotional texts. They were suitable for use privately, for individual reflection, and publicly, during church festivals to celebrate the lives of the martyrs who are their subjects. But these poems are also captivating stories. They engage their audience by presenting them with bold and daring heroes and heroines, bloodthirsty magistrates, miraculous occurrences which demonstrate the power of God, and last, but not least, violent scenes depicting cruel and agonising tortures.

The idea for our study resulted from a perusal of the various violent scenes within the *Peristephanon*. One cannot help but be struck by the quality of these scenes. They are forceful, vivid, and do not spare the reader the full effects of the martyrs' suffering. Several things suggest that the poet constructed these scenes in order to maximise their impact on the reader. These include his use of foreshadowing to build anticipation and tension, the level of detail he uses, especially when discussing the effects of this violence on the body, and his appeals to the senses, especially to the visual aspects of the martyrs' punishments. Hence, we were surprised to observe that the study of the effects that such scenes might have on their readers has played only a subordinate role in scholarship relating to the *Peristephanon*. Our study was thus motivated by the opportunity to explore an aspect of this collection which has not yet been well examined.

We proposed to explore the effects of these violent scenes in terms of horror and disgust. The choice of these particular emotions was motivated partly by considerations of the intended audience of the *Peristephanon*. These poems were most likely written for a devout Christian audience. As such, their religious aspects would no doubt have prompted certain emotional reactions within the Christian reader, relating, for instance, to the strengthening of faith and the encouragement of devotion. Speculating on these reactions would, in itself, be an interesting exercise. However, we

must not discount the possibility that pagan readers, too, might have explored the collection for themselves, or formed part of the audience during a reading. And while some emotional responses would have been unavailable to pagan readers, these poems contain much material – in particular their violent scenes - that could affect them just as much as it affected Christian readers. Horror and disgust were thus chosen firstly because they are emotions that all readers could potentially experience, regardless of their religious affiliations, and secondly because the graphic nature of the violence in the collection makes it natural to assume that these emotions would have been experienced by a large proportion of readers.

Having chosen to study two emotions that are accessible to all readers of the *Peristephanon*, we were then faced with the task of determining how, and to what degree, different readers experience these emotions. By claiming that disgust and horror are prominent reactions amongst readers of our poems, we are, in effect, claiming that readers from completely different social backgrounds, and even readers who lived in completely different eras, nevertheless react in very similar ways. Determining the truth of this claim is important for several reasons. For instance, it is natural to wish to use our own reading experiences in exploring what kinds of emotional reactions could be elicited by these poems. However, it is not certain that our own reactions as modern readers are a reliable guide to how ancient readers would have reacted. Thus, in order to speculate about the reactions of readers outside our own cultural and temporal milieu, it was necessary to put aside our own emotional paradigm, and to try to understand more about the nature of emotions generally, and their constituent parts in particular.

We discovered that while common emotional experiences across cultures and historical eras are certainly possible, cultural influences play a large role in determining the quality of an individual's emotional response. The possibility of such variations between cultures introduced a first layer of

complexity into our study. Knowing only this, we were able to make several observations about the likely differences in reaction between ancient and modern readers.

It therefore became necessary to examine aspects of Roman culture and society which could have influenced how ancient Romans reacted to the violent scenes in the *Peristephanon*. In searching for such aspects, attention naturally fell on the high levels of violence in Roman society. We noted that violence was common in all areas of life, from the household to schools, entertainment, the legal system, and the military, and that, beginning in the 1st century AD, violence even became an increasingly common theme in Roman literature.

We argued that the high levels of violence in Roman society correlated with a lower likelihood that Rome's citizens would be moved to disgust and horror when they witnessed this violence. We made use of the work of Elias to support this claim. He argues that in historical periods which pre-date the late middle ages, high levels of violence in societies correlate with the absence of feelings of shame and abhorrence in citizens towards this violence. The changes in individual psychology which mark the development of these feelings, he argues, tend to occur along with the development of nation-states, and the corresponding decrease in interpersonal violence within these states. On this model, ancient Rome, with its high levels of violence, is one of the societies in which the inculcation of an aversion to violence had not yet occurred on a wide scale. For evidence of this, one need only look at the immense enjoyment that Rome's citizens derived from watching violence at the arena games.

We also noted that much of the violence commonly encountered in Roman society was committed by stronger, higher status groups against those who were weaker and considered inferior. We noted that this was especially apparent at the arena games. Arena *noxii* were mostly unable to avoid their dreadful fates or protect themselves from this violence. In addition, the more unwilling amongst them

were subject to high levels of coercion. Thus, the games often amounted to little more than victimization, and for this reason, we might expect that they were very difficult to watch. However, we noted that the Romans conceived of the arena games in a completely different way, and that this made it possible for them to not only tolerate, but genuinely enjoy the violence on offer there. To begin with, and consistent with Elias and Dunning's example of fox hunting, the witnessing of violence actually correlated with stronger taboos against it in comparison to earlier historical periods, in which taking part in violence was the more common mode of experiencing it. Thus, those observing the violence of the games were absolved from the guilt of committing it. In addition, various justifications for this kind of violence existed, eg: that it was proper to the status of the victims, that the victims had brought it upon themselves, or that it served some legitimate purpose, such as just punishment or the preservation of social order. This social sanctioning of arena violence thus strongly influenced the Roman attitude towards it, and would have made it less likely that the majority of Romans would experience horror and disgust while reading our poems, which contain very similar sorts of violence, carried out for very similar reasons.

In addition, the high levels of violence the Romans witnessed impacted upon them in other ways. We noticed that especially in the case of the arena games, exposure to frequent and repetitive violence led to the Romans becoming jaded and desensitised to it. This is important because it means that new and novel forms of violence were increasingly required to move them to horror and disgust. The high proportion of novel punishments amongst our poems is probably a reflection of this trend. In addition, we noted that disabled or disfigured victims of violence were likely to be treated with scorn, or revulsion, and that the Roman experience of pain, and philosophical attitudes towards pain, were likely to result in an unfavourable view of those who failed to cope well with physical suffering.

Having thus noted that the kinds of violence commonly witnessed in Rome could strongly influence how its citizens experienced disgust and horror while reading our poems, we explored the nature of these emotions in order to understand them more fully. Disgust and horror work well as a framework for discussing our poems because they are not simple or linear, but highly complex emotions. The existence of different nuances of these emotions thus introduced a second layer of complexity into our study. Disgust and horror are paradoxical by nature, as they can exercise a strong fascination and repulsion at the same time. They thus proved useful in accounting for the strong, but often contradictory feelings that can be evoked by our poems. In addition, we were able to discover ways in which disgust and horror were experienced differently by ancient Romans. It is probable that horror, for example, was a less paradoxical experience for the Romans, who lacked our culture's reservations towards certain forms of violence.

We then examined the idea of horror and disgust in ancient aesthetic theory, which Prudentius, as a sophisticated writer, would have been aware of. Here we saw that theories concerning the depiction of the ugly and unpleasant could, by extension, be used to examine the depiction of the horrific and disgusting. We saw that Aristotle's ideas about mimesis are important here, as is the idea of artistic distance. This latter idea links naturally with Prudentius' artistic inversion of the martyrs' suffering. We also discussed the related ideas of *enargeia* and *ekphrasis* and showed how Prudentius made use of them in his scenes of suffering.

Following this exploration, we examined the ways in which Prudentius made use of horror and disgust in our four chosen poems:

6.1 Peristephanon II

Prudentius places stronger emphasis upon disgust in this poem than in any other. The sources of disgust are very wide-ranging: from instances of mutilation and bodily injury, to the visible effects of disease, to moral disgust evoked by the various sins of pagan Rome. These sources of disgust result in many vivid images, such as the men who are missing limbs or parts of limbs, the men afflicted with weeping, festering sores, and the man with hollow eye-sockets. The potency of these images, and their sheer number, suggests that the poet was very aware of their potential to strongly affect the reader, and that their inclusion was thus for this purpose.

Many of these images of injury can also be fertile sources of horror, depending on the esteem in which readers hold the sufferer. Christian, and perhaps modern readers, would be more inclined to feel sympathy and pity for these men than pagan readers. They could be horrified by the implication that these men's injuries are the result of physical violence, and hence that they have suffered greatly. However, even readers who were not moved to horror by the plight of these men could still experience this emotion for a different reason. This is the awful thought of the incapacitating or limiting effects of these diseases or injuries, which so adversely impact the victims' lives. As the Romans were much more at risk of disease and injury than we are today due to the conditions in which they lived, such thoughts would have been likely to play on their minds.

Prudentius uses these many instances of disgust and horror to structure the poem and manipulate his readers' emotional experience. As we have already noted, the lavishness of his descriptions shows that he anticipates that his readers will respond with disgust, and possibly horror, to the beggars' injuries and afflictions. Thus, he expects his readers to attach common, accepted cultural meanings to these images. At some points in the poem, he reinforces these accepted meanings, and even goes to great lengths to intensify the disgust created by using accumulations of revolting

images. However, at other points in the poem, he subverts the usual meanings of disgust and horror by associating their sources with ideas of pleasure, beauty or benefit, thus creating tension and unease. Even more unsettlingly, this reinforcement and undermining of the meanings of these emotions is alternated throughout the poem, and even occurs simultaneously when Prudentius discusses the smell of Lawrence's burning flesh. The smell is at the same time horrifying and delightful, depending on who is smelling it. This adds a very disturbing quality to the image.

Lawrence's burning on the gridiron, occurring after a lengthy build-up, produces its own particular type of horror related the use of a slow-burning fire, rather than a roaring one. Ironically, this modulation and tempering of the torture produces an even greater agony than an unrestrained fire would have, by drawing out the martyr's suffering over a great length of time, and by the particular effects of the slow-burning fire, which are not mentioned in the poem, but described for us by Lactantius, and probably familiar to arena-goers. This irony of the modulated torture will again occur in the Cassian poem, when that martyr's young torturers become fatigued. It should also be noted here that the use of a slow-burning fire to execute Lawrence could have been considered something of a novelty. The theme of the novel torture will recur in both the Cassian and Hippolytus poems.

6.2 Peristephanon III

In the Lawrence poem, the main focus was on disgust. In the Eulalia poem, the focus shifts strongly to horror. However, the primary source of horror in this poem is not any injury to the body, but rather, certain facets of Eulalia's character. The first of these is her unnatural assumption of the characteristics of an old woman. The resultant steadfastness and maturity she displays could inspire admiration in all readers, especially Christian readers, because it is connected with her faith. However, as she is only a twelve year old girl, this rejection of the pleasures of childhood gives rise

to a sense of unnaturalness and monstrosity, and can also inspire horror due to the forcefulness with which she carries out this rejection.

Following this, Eulalia's lack of concern for the prospect of pain and death has the potential to evoke a strong sense of horror even among Christians, despite their beliefs that a better life awaits the faithful after death. Even Tertullian, who approves of martyrdom, recognises the potency of the fear of death. In addition, he believes that the fear of the torture which precedes the martyr's death is even more difficult to overcome (*Ad Martyras* IV), and that no one undergoes such suffering willingly (*Apologeticum* L. 1). However, this is precisely what Eulalia does. She not only disdains suffering, but unhesitatingly pursues a course of action that she knows will result in it, and ultimately in death. Her torture and death are thus essentially self-inflicted actions, and evoke the horror of an act of suicide. This disdain for, and even seeking out of suffering is a major source of horror in the poem. Over and over again, we are reminded of this aspect of Eulalia's character by her words and actions.

However, this sense of horror is not a simple or unalloyed one. The Christian reader must admire Eulalia for her willingness to embrace suffering and self-sacrifice for her religious principles, despite the horror this arouses. In addition, there are aspects of Eulalia's behaviour which would have been highly esteemed by pagan readers because they corresponded with aspects of the traditional Roman value of *fortitudo*. Thus, even though Christian and pagan readers might find her fate horrifying, they must also admire it, and perhaps even perceive it as something to be emulated if the situation required it. Again, this leads to a more complex emotional experience for the reader, who most likely experiences horror, admiration, and perhaps even dread, simultaneously.

Eulalia's tortures are also a fertile source of horror, even though non-Christian readers may have considered her as nothing better than a common criminal, and hence undeserving of sympathy or

mercy. In addition, readers might have been alienated by the harsh aspects of her character, and hence not disposed to be moved by her fate. However, it is hard not to be affected by her suffering. Thanks to the poet's presentation of her, we engage with her as an individual, and are caught up in her story. In addition, her suffering is truly dreadful. Even before she is placed on the pyre, Eulalia's body is opened up with hooks, exposing its hidden, secret interior and thus producing the horror involved in observing the hidden and taboo. Apart from this, horror is aroused by the vast outpouring of her blood during this phase of her torture. Eulalia's reactions to her sufferings are also a source of horror. She continues to make sharp observations even while experiencing the kind of agony which usually renders victims completely inarticulate. Here again, she comes across as unnatural and therefore horrifying, as she did earlier when depicted as an old woman.

As in the Lawrence poem, Prudentius here uses horror as a structuring device. In both poems, he creates anticipation long before the horror commences. However, the dissipation of horror and disgust is achieved in a different manner at the end of these two poems. Lawrence's gruesome joke at the height of his torture forms a high point of horror and disgust in poem II. However, the worst of Eulalia's torture coincides with the dissipation of the mood of horror. During her burning on the pyre, she is silent and motionless, in strong contrast to her vigorous speech and gestures during her earlier torture. In addition, we do not see the effects of this torture on Eulalia's flesh, unlike the very vivid depiction of the effects of the hooks on her body. Instead, we are presented with the spectacle of a calm and passive Eulalia with her hair ablaze. This sets the scene for a more subdued ending to the poem.

6.3 Peristephanon IX

The horror of this poem is largely related to the sense of incredulity produced by Cassian's punishment. Even given the endless novelties and refinements of the arena, it is unlikely that the

Romans would have ever witnessed a teacher handed over to his young pupils, who would be inexpert executioners at best, and who are equipped not with sophisticated instruments of torture, but with the *stili* and *tabellae* they used at school. Hence, the magistrate's desire to punish Cassian according to the *lex talionis* in fact manifests as a spectacle that we find hard to believe is really happening. This feeling of disbelief is reflected in the verger's insistence that it is not merely an old wives' tale.

For this reason, the existence of the painting of Cassian's punishment is very important. Perhaps to counter this sense of incredulity, the painting is presented at the outset of the poem, thereby sacrificing the opportunity to build tension by revealing Cassian's fate slowly, as occurred in the Eulalia and Lawrence poems. It would appear that it is more important to provide a visual record of a fate that seems too nightmarish to be true.

The existence of the painting gives the poem a strongly visual emphasis. The horror and disgust evoked here have much to do with the spectacle of Cassian's suffering, and with the poet-narrator's reaction to this spectacle. We experience this poem through the emotional lens of Prudentius. He finds the gruesome sight of the painting utterly compelling, and it is thus quite clear that he is experiencing the paradox of horror here. Despite the nightmarish quality of the painting, he cannot tear his eyes away, and is so eager to find out more about it that he abandons his prayers in order to ask the verger for information. This also influences the reader's reaction to the poem.

Unlike our other poems, this one does not feature a wide range of horror elicitors. Instead, the focus of the horror is solely on the destruction of Cassian's skin, resulting in a poem which is shorter in length, but which features an intensity stemming from its narrowness of focus. Prudentius repeatedly emphasises the ploughing up, rending, stabbing and cutting of the skin, even to the extent of

differentiating between the effects produced by attacking the skin with the two different ends of the *stili*. This focus upon Cassian's skin can certainly evoke disgust too, although no direct appeal is made to this particular emotion. However, the mention of the smooth, white, luminous surface of the wax tablet suggests that Cassian's punctured and broken skin is disgusting by comparison.

The murderous boys form the other focal point of the painting, and for good reason. There is a strong element of psychological horror in this poem involving Cassian's fate being in the hands of little children. He is a man who once held a position of authority over these children, and could manage and discipline them as he saw fit (although there is nothing in the poem to suggest that he used corporal punishment). Now, however, the situation is reversed, and he is given over to his former pupils, who are allowed to treat him in whichever manner they choose. The fact that they are children, and hence have probably not developed full moral awareness, and moreover, disliked the hard work that Cassian made them do, means that they cannot be relied upon to treat him with restraint or fairness. This particular source of horror is unique within the collection, and contrasts strongly with Eulalia's sufferings, which are a manifestation of her will. Cassian, by contrast, is very clearly powerless and helpless. His experience is much more readily characterised as victimisation.

Just as Eulalia's lack of playfulness was strongly linked with her attitude and behaviour, and thus contributed to the horror of her story, so these children's natural sense of fun contributes to the horror of this poem, because the magistrate manipulates it in order to elicit cruel treatment of the martyr. There is thus a terrible playfulness. In addition, several other characteristics of children form part of the horror, for example their malleability, which allows them to be urged on to greater cruelty by the judge.

As in the Lawrence and Eulalia poems, horror is used here as a structuring device. As Cassian's torturers are only children, they eventually become fatigued while attacking him. This means that the intensity of his torture actually diminishes towards its end. Paradoxically, however, this worsens the martyr's situation, and also causes an increase in the intensity of the horror evoked, as explained in the paradox of gentle torture. This paradox is also evident in the moderate fire beneath Lawrence's gridiron, which causes him greater and more drawn-out suffering than a blazing fire would have. Here, by trailing off in their wounding of Cassian, his young executioners actually draw out and intensify his suffering by bringing him close to death, but denying him the relief from pain it offers.

6.4 Peristephanon XI

This poem is the most complex of the four, and contains the greatest variety of disgust and horror elicitors: well-worn themes from earlier poems as well as new and novel sources of these emotions. However, because the journey to the martyr's eventual torture and death is also the most wide-ranging and variegated, the poem lacks the forcefulness of the shorter, more direct Cassian poem.

The first half of this poem deals with horror which befalls groups of Christians. This is unusual in our collection, which has, in most other instances, focussed on the fate of the individual. Even the group of poverty-stricken beggars in the Lawrence poem were characterised in terms of their unique afflictions, so that we saw at least some of them as individuals. Here, however, the focus is far more general. First, Prudentius laments the large number of martyrs buried in Rome whose names and stories are unknown. The bleak picture that he paints of their anonymous, intertwined bodies lying in Roman graves indicates that he views their condition with a kind of fascinated horror. This is an ironic horror: the terrible martyr death becomes even more terrible when it is lost to posterity, and hence loses all meaning. Fading from the collective memory is the worst kind of 'death' a martyr can suffer.

Prudentius then discusses the group of Christians brought before the magistrate. Their punishments are painted with very broad brushstrokes. This is sufficient to recall to the reader the more detailed examinations of these tortures offered in earlier poems, but by itself creates a less intense, more diffuse sense of horror. Following this, the poet narrows his focus and offers discussions of two unusual punishments in greater detail. These punishments are significant because both involve forces of the natural world and wild animals, and thus introduce a theme which is very important in Hippolytus' punishment, too. The role of forces of nature in these punishments serves to evoke horror related to the breaking apart of the body. The first punishment mentioned is crucifixion, in which birds are imagined to be pecking at the victim's eyes. The second is the punishment of the leaky boat, in which the power of the ocean contributes to the death of the condemned, and a disgusting sea monster is then pictured as eating their corpses.

These punishments are unique within our poems, which have hitherto only featured punishments meted out by men or boys. They also bring with them a unique kind of horror. While it is possible to make use of forces of nature to inflict injury or death, these forces cannot be controlled or tamed, meaning that an element of unpredictability is always present. Prudentius emphasizes this unpredictability, especially in the punishment of the leaky boat, and later in Hippolytus' punishment, where he describes at length the horses' wild, frantic, aimless dash across the countryside. The natural forces involved in these punishments are thus depicted as powerful, irrational, and hostile. Being subject to such forces plays upon the powerful fear of being subject to something we cannot control. In cases where one is subject to another individual, one can at least appeal to reason or pity, and thus potentially exert some kind of influence over one's fate. Here, this is impossible.

Ironically, although Hippolytus is presented from the beginning as lacking control over his fate, he finds this lack of control thrilling and rejoices in it. This completely subverts our feelings of horror on

the matter. Here, an inversion similar to that of the Lawrence poem occurs. Just as Lawrence takes physical suffering and transforms it from something fearful into something beneficial and hence desirable, Hippolytus transforms lack of control over one's fate from a terrifying experience into an ecstatic one.

The poet's emphasis on the horses' wild journey and Hippolytus' giving up of control means that the short description of the martyr's injuries which follows is almost an afterthought. This section, in which we finally see the effects of Hippolytus' punishment on his body, is only four lines long. It is, nevertheless, a potent source of disgust and horror. This is reflected in its singling out by Henderson (1983) as a scene in which Prudentius' use of gruesome material is extreme and excessive. The image of Hippolytus' torn and bleeding body parts lying scattered across the landscape is the pinnacle of horror resulting from violation of the bodily envelope. Even more horrifying is that just a few lines previously, these parts made up a living, breathing, speaking man.

Following this description of the fragmentation of Hippolytus' body, the poem's emphasis becomes even more intensely visual with the introduction of a painting of the scene. As in the Cassian poem, our emotional reaction to the painting is coloured by that of the poet-narrator, who emphasises the various gruesome sights that he sees in the painting and describes it as depicting a crime and an outrage. The horror created by the complete fragmentation of the martyr's body is reinforced by the depiction of the faithful collecting and cherishing the various body parts, which are listed and named. While the collection of a martyr's body parts to serve as relics was common practice for early Christians, the listing of the parts, and the detailing of the congregation's handling of them shows that Prudentius is also aware that contact with them can serve to elicit a strong sense of disgust. Here, as with the smell of burning human flesh in the Lawrence poem, which can simultaneously

serve to horrify and delight, the handling of the martyr's body parts is at once an act of loving devotion and a potent source of disgust and horror.

6.5 Closing Thoughts

We have seen how a wide variety of disgust and horror elicitors, some of them very powerful indeed, feature in our chosen poems. Their use achieves a variety of effects and can produce a number of different responses in the reader, some of which are mutually reinforcing, and thus acting to strengthen a certain mood or tone, and others which are contradictory, and hence give rise to tension and discomfort in the reader.

We could account for these strong appeals to disgust and horror in two ways. Firstly, they may simply be a reflection of the time and culture in which Prudentius lived. If this is true, it would suggest that he included many sources of disgust and horror in his poems without much conscious thought. Indeed, he might perhaps not have even felt that they were particularly noticeable or prevalent in his work. This would imply that our perception of these scenes as striking and numerous is more a reflection of our own less violent cultural milieu than of any intention of the poet to make them so.

However, the number and vivid presentation of these sources of disgust and horror, coupled with the existence of ancient aesthetic norms concerning their depiction, suggest a more complex reason for their inclusion. This is that Prudentius was well aware of the complexity of meanings and level of intensity surrounding these emotions, and made deliberate and conscious use of them in his poems in order to increase their emotional impact. This idea is supported by the poet's related inversion of the martyrs' suffering to subvert readers' expectations and express religious truth. Therefore, I believe it is quite likely that Prudentius had a deep appreciation for the rich variety of meanings that

accompany disgust and horror, and that he quite naturally turned to them as tools to add nuance and depth to his poems.

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