Lucan's *Bellum civile* and the Social Process of Cultural Trauma

Lucan's *Bellum civile* has long puzzled readers with its frequent repetitions, its contradicting narratorial perspectives, and its excessively graphic descriptions of battles and violence. More recently, the identification of the work as an example of 'trauma literature' has shed some light on the author's literary choices (cf. Walde 2011), but little attention has yet been paid to the actual mechanisms of trauma in the text. In this paper, I would like to illuminate the ways in which Lucan mirrors the process of trauma and its transgenerational transmission in his poem, thus establishing a master narrative for the civil war, which even a century later still haunted the memory and imagination of Roman society.

Making use of Freud's distinction between (unconscious) repetition and (conscious) remembrance as the two main modes of 'working through' a trauma, I will show that Lucan speaks with a "fractured voice" (cf. Bartsch 1997) throughout his epic. On the one hand, *as narrator*, he repeats the horrors of the civil war and, in so doing, recreates its experience; on the other, *as poet*, he consciously remembers and re-enacts it, keeping his historical distance. As a consequence, his account oscillates between the now and then, as he is simultaneously a virtual – and deeply partisan – eyewitness and a detached retrospective interpreter. Analyzing a number of key scenes, I will argue that this disassociation between narrator and poet enables Lucan to confront his readers with the reality of the civil war and at the same time to put it in perspective and maintain the temporal boundaries between past and present. His epic thus provides a complex re-enactment of and reflection on the trauma of the civil war and sheds light on the process of social mediation of this collective experience and its subsequent integration into cultural memory.

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