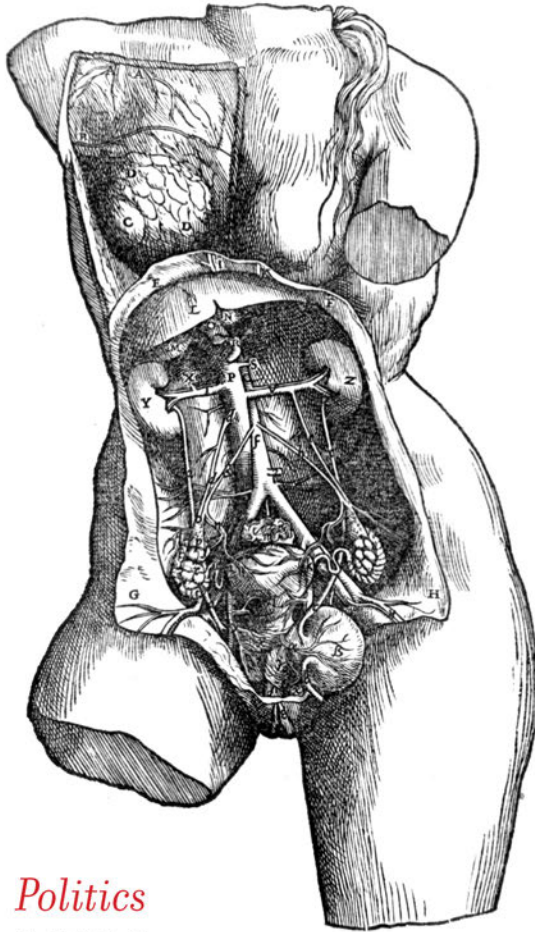


ROME'S
.....
VISCERAL
.....
REACTIONS



Politics
.....
AND *Poetics*
.....
in Flesh
.....
AND *Blood*

Caitlin
.....
Hines

Rome's Visceral Reactions

Rome's Visceral Reactions
Politics and Poetics in Flesh and Blood



Caitlin Hines

University of Michigan Press

Ann Arbor

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For Sharon

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations for primary source texts in Latin follow the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*; in Greek, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i> . Edited by René Cagnat et al. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1888–.
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1863–.
Ernout-Meillet	<i>Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine</i> . Edited by Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet. 4th Edition. Paris: Klincksieck, 2001.
<i>IGUR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae</i> . Edited by L. Moretti. Rome: Istituto Italiano per la Storia Antica, 1968–1990.
<i>OLD</i>	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> . Edited by P. G. W. Glare. 2nd edition (2 vols). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> . Leipzig. 1900–.
Walde-Hofmann	<i>Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch</i> . Edited by Alois Walde and J. B. Hofmann. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1938–1956.

Note on the formatting of Latin quotations in this book: individual words in Latin are set in italics only when they first appear in each chapter, after which they generally appear in plain text. Latin quotations of three words or less appear in italics; quotations of four words or more appear in plain text and are set within quotation marks. Select exceptions to these rules have been made to avoid confusion between Latin and English words (e.g., uterus) or to maintain readability in context.

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Introduction

Body Metaphor, Semantic Change, and Visceral Reactions

The word *viscera* conjures imagery of a body's most vulnerable internal parts. The viscera are vital organs, properly hidden from view. They host robust emotional reactions. Their integrity is essential to survival. In their affiliation with mortal injury, viscera slither into the semantic domains of butchery and bloodshed—the prospect of their emergence into the open air is both grotesque and terrifying. When English speakers describe an experience as “visceral,” we invoke something graphic and disturbing; the phrase “visceral reaction” describes an emotional recoil born of shock and horror, strong enough to generate physical sensation.

For the Romans, the Latin word *viscera* likewise denoted the essential inner parts of the body, where physical sensations related to fear and anger could be felt and whose injury meant certain death. But Latin *viscera* were also entangled with religious, political, and reproductive imagery: the word could refer to cuts of sacrificial meat, to the inner workings of a governing body, to a mother's fertile womb, and to the offspring she has carried. In Latin texts, the word appears in scientific descriptions of human anatomy, in repulsive elaborations of violent deaths, in passionate accusations of political conspiracy, and in the desperate laments of parents who must watch their children die. As with many body words, Latin *viscera* were particularly vulnerable to abstraction, their somatic force leveraged for figurative expressions that conceptualize and describe the world in terms of the body. In employing these metaphors, where *viscera* are made to represent an entity's most vital and vulnerable parts, Roman authors generally elaborate serious concerns about the failing health of the state, the ruptured stability of the family, or the volatility of divine favor.

The polyvalence of Latin *viscera*, as this book demonstrates, was neither inherent nor transhistorical. A fair portion of its wealth of significations apparently accumulated during Rome's transition from republic to empire (1st cen-

ture BCE–1st century CE). In fact, the sudden expansions of viscera into vivid metaphors for the body politic, the violated womb, and the desecrated sacrifice all seem to have materialized in meaningful parallel with watershed moments in Roman history, reflecting urgent contemporary anxieties about politics, reproduction, and succession. This book therefore traces and interprets the rich semantic history of Roman viscera, whose progressive acquisition of charged new meanings offers a curious and compelling case for the dynamic interaction between body metaphor, semantic change, and political crisis at Rome.

Body Metaphor

Throughout Latin literature, the human body provides a rich origin point for figurative language. Roman authors continuously abstract the *corpus* as a whole and its individual parts into metaphorical expressions that disclose, through implicit processes of comparison, correlation, and extrapolation, how Romans structured their thinking about the world. Romans described their city as the *caput orbis terrarum* (head of the world),¹ conceived of their political system as a body politic,² defined kinship relations in terms of *sanguis* (blood),³ and framed texts as literary *corpora* (bodies).⁴ From the imposition of class difference through the appetitive belly⁵ to self-conscious punning on the metrical

1. E.g., Liv. 1.16.7, 21.30.10. The phrase *orbis terrarum* literally means “the circle of lands”; Ovid favors the abbreviated *caput orbis* (head of the circle; *Am.* 1.15.26, *Met.* 15.435) and Silius Italicus *caput terrarum* (head of the lands; 1.8); cf. *caput mundi* (head of the world; Luc. 2.136, 2.655), *caput Italiae* (head of Italy; Liv. 21.35.9), and the ancient etymology for the Capitoline connected to the discovery of a human *caput* (*Var. L.* 5.41). See Dinter (2012, 19–21) on the political symbolism of the *caput* in Lucan; Mebane (2016) on the word’s transition into a symbol of autocratic authority; Carlà-Uhink (2017) for metaphorical uses of *caput* as a symptom of Rome’s centripetal self-fashioning.

2. E.g., Cic. *Phil.* 8.15 (“in rei publicae corpore,” in the body of the republic), Sen. *Cl.* 1.4 (“opus est et huic [sc. rei publicae] capite,” the republic needs a head), Flor. *Epit.* 2.14 (*imperii corpus*, the body of empire), and Menenius Agrippa’s parable of the Roman governing body (as reported at Liv. 2.32).

3. For comprehensive treatment of *sanguis* and family relationships, where social kinship sometimes supersedes biology, see Guastella (1985).

4. E.g., Cic. *Fam.* 5.12.4; Tac. *Dial.* 21.8; Petr. 2.2 (*corpus orationis*, the body of a speech). Zanker (2016, 123–45) examines personified texts and the treatment of texts as the offspring of their authors in Greek and Latin literature.

5. As deployed generally in the form of the *parasitus* (parasite) of Roman Comedy (e.g., Gelasimus in *Stichus*), whose ravenous appetite is both symptom and product of social humiliation (Damon 1997); consider again Menenius Agrippa’s parable, where the (senatorial) stomach sustains life even as it depends on the other (plebeian) body parts to perform the labor of feeding it (Liv. 2.32). On the metaphorical values of food, consumption, and the belly in Roman literature, see Gowers (1993) and Rimell (2002).

and anatomical foot,⁶ Roman authors consistently employ the body as a symbolic vehicle for describing and interpreting the complex systems that governed their lives.

Recent scholarship in the discipline of classics, and Latin literature in particular, has found much to explore at the intersection of metaphorical expression and the human body. Roman preoccupations with the body as a useful framework for explicating political structures have been investigated by Brian Walters and Julia Mebane, whose recent monographs both demonstrate how significant the human body became for framing Roman political discourse, especially in times of turmoil and transition.⁷ Victoria Rimell's exploration of food and consumption as metaphor for textual composition and reception in Petronius emphasizes the significance of the belly to imperial Roman discourses on class and taste; Vitruvius' architectural treatise, as John Oksanish has demonstrated, posits the "ideal" human body as visual metaphor for a perfectly constructed building; Nandini Pandey's work on the symbolics of hair in Latin elegy excavates the complex linguistic and geopolitical play intrinsic to the genre's engagement with arrangement, dye, wigs, and importations.⁸ This apparently widespread experimentation with body metaphor, it should be noted, was not unique to the Romans but part of a broader network of symbolic thinking recoverable throughout Greco-Roman antiquity: a number of collected volumes, from the seminal *Constructions of the Classical Body* (Porter 1999) to the more recent *The Comparable Body* (Wee 2017) and *The Body Unbound* (Hsu, Schur, and Sowers 2021) include numerous contributions establishing the significance of body metaphor throughout the ancient Mediterranean and considering the complex and often subconscious linguistic and cognitive processes underpinning the formation and comprehension of metaphor.⁹

The abundant and diverse array of materials under consideration as part of this developing scholarly conversation indicates that the human body was, for Roman authors, a formative source of metaphor: political and geopolitical, cultural, ideological, and, as these metaphors are elaborated within the Latin literary tradition, plausibly representative of distinctly Roman modes of perceiving

6. Such puns are, as Hinds has pointed out (1985, 19), irresistible to Roman authors; Waterhouse (2008), Ferriss (2009), and Henkel (2014) demonstrate that foot puns (in Ovid, Catullus, and Tibullus, respectively) offer more value to Roman poetics than mere superficial fun.

7. Walters (2020) and Mebane (2024).

8. Rimell (2002), Oksanish (2019), Pandey (2018a).

9. For a thorough overview of the metaphorical and metapoetic value of the body and its parts in both Greek and Roman literature, see Schilling's (2025) entry on "corps, organicité, parties du corps" in the recent *Dictionnaire des images du poétique dans l'Antiquité*.

and constructing the world. What remains wanting in this emerging discourse is a comprehensive diachronic study of a single Latin body word's metaphorical valences, which chronicles and accounts for semantic change over time as correlating with and, in some cases, responding directly to specific moments of political and cultural crisis. Such a case study is precisely what this book aims to offer. Before embarking on a focused examination of the shifting figurative contours of this single word, however, we must first take into account the intricacy of metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon and the difficulties presented by the state of the record.

Metaphor (or *translatio*), as defined by Roman rhetorical treatises, entails a transference of meaning from one word to another, resulting in an expression both more complex and more meaningful than would be possible through a *vox propria*.¹⁰ It constitutes a form of borrowing often compelled by need but apt to be as ornamental as it is functional, as Cicero remarks (*de Orat.* 3.155):

quem necessitas genuit inopia coacta et angustiis, post autem delectatio iucunditasque celebravit. Nam ut vestis frigoris depellendi causa reperta primo, post adhiberi coepta est ad ornatum etiam corporis et dignitatem, sic verbi translatio instituta est inopiae causa, frequentata delectationis.

[Metaphor] was born from necessity, compelled by scarcity and constraints, but afterward pleasure and agreeableness attended it. For just as clothing, devised at first to hinder the cold, later began to be used also for the body's adornment and grandeur, so was the transference of words established out of want, but made use of frequently for pleasure.¹¹

Quintilian calls metaphor both the most common (*frequentissimus*) and the most attractive (*pulcherrimus*) of devices (*Inst.* 8.6.4), clarifying further that it is an inherent quality of language and not merely the domain of the highly educated:

quae quidem cum ita est ab ipsa nobis concessa natura ut indocti quoque ac non sentientes ea frequenter utantur, tum ita iucunda atque nitida ut in oratione quamlibet clara proprio tamen lumine eluceat.

10. Cicero defines and discusses metaphor at *de Orat.* 3.155–170; see also *Cic. Orat.* 80–82, 92–94, 211. Quintilian offers a similar but still distinctive treatment at *Inst.* 8.6.4–18 (on which, see Novokhatko [2017]).

11. Translations into English provided throughout this book are my own, unless otherwise noted.

[Metaphor] not only has been granted to us by nature itself, such that even the uneducated and unaware make regular use of it, but also is so pleasant and lustrous that in however splendid an oration it appears it still shines with its own light.

It was therefore recognized, even in antiquity, that metaphor is not necessarily an intentional flourish of style, but in fact requires no special training to use, being so integral to communication that it is often used subconsciously.¹²

Modern studies of metaphor confirm its fundamental importance to communication as a cognitive process inscribed at the most basic levels of linguistic and semantic patterning. In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson famously applied cognitive linguistics to establish “conceptual metaphor theory,” an embodied theory of metaphor that treats figurative language as originating in and inextricably tied to the human body. Conceptual metaphor theory postulates that metaphor is as much an embodied phenomenon as it is a cognitive one, because all verbal communication depends upon metaphorical processes of transferring into language perceptions of the world that must begin from the experience of inhabiting a body. Orientational metaphors, for example, which generally entail spatial indicators, originate from the way that bodies inhabit and move through physical space (14–19); ontological metaphors allow us to categorize and quantify abstract concepts by referring to them as entities (25–51); structural metaphors use “systematic correlations within our experience” to organize our understanding of one concept according to the structures of another (61–68). The particularities of how these metaphors manifest likewise have intrinsic cultural specificity: “a metaphor can serve as a vehicle for understanding a concept only by virtue of its experiential basis.”¹³

More recent works in cognitive linguistics and embodied cognition expand and refine the implications of conceptual metaphor theory.¹⁴ Eve Sweetser’s (1990) study *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* posits metaphor as both culturally specific and intrinsic to processes of semantic change, exploring the phenomenon of polysemy and considering the stages through which a given form acquires new functions as closely interwoven with cognitive experiences. In 1991, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch further developed theories of embodied cognition (*The Embodied Mind*:

12. For more on ancient theories of metaphor, see Zanker (2016), who offers an insightful analysis of how classical definitions of metaphor were themselves entirely dependent upon metaphorical language.

13. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 18.

14. I survey only select highlights below. For a recent and comprehensive treatment of the history and evolution of conceptual metaphor theory, see Kövecses (2020), who offers several original propositions of his own.

Cognitive Science and Human Experience) by bringing the phenomenological embodiment theory of Merleau-Ponty to the emergent field of cognitive science, emphasizing that embodiment “encompasses both the body as a lived, experiential structure and the body as the context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms,” (xvi); most significantly, this book defines cognition as embodied action (coining the term *enactive*) and further emphasizes the inextricability of cognitive and experiential processes.¹⁵ More recently, social psychologists Williams, Huang, and Bargh (2009) proposed the model of conceptual “scaffolding,” which suggests that human formation of abstract concepts is informed, often subconsciously, by early sensorimotor experiences.

These theories of metaphor and embodied cognition have been applied and expanded fruitfully by scholars thinking specifically about Latin literature and the Roman world. Several recent volumes have demonstrated the broad efficacy of these approaches to the study of antiquity, including *Embodiment in Latin Semantics* (Short 2016), *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Cognitive Theory* (Meineck, Short, and Devereaux 2019), and *Distributed Cognition in Classical Antiquity* (Anderson, Cairns, and Sprevak 2019). In Jennifer Devereaux's study of body metaphor in Latin literature, she conceptualizes the body as “a whole that serves as a source and basis for metaphors that structure other (esp. non-physical) concepts” (2019, 169). Devereaux further posits that the body-as-metaphor is a transhistorical phenomenon and suggests that literature itself should be treated as “intercorporeal.”¹⁶ William Michael Short, meanwhile, has demonstrated from multiple angles the extent to which the study of metaphor can reveal the inner workings of culture,¹⁷ with specific attention to metaphors in the Latin language as indicative of Roman patterns of thought. To this end, Short has engaged with both conceptual metaphor theory and cognitive anthropology to evaluate figurative language as a tool for “reconstruct[ing] the conceptual models that characterize the everyday thinking of Roman society and that organize and shape its symbolic activities (including, but not limited to, language).”¹⁸

15. This book made important contributions to emergent conversations on embodied cognition; one should note its larger program of applying Buddhist psychology and meditative practices as part of its efforts to theorize transformative experiences.

16. Devereaux borrows the concept of “intercorporeality” from Gallese and Cuccio (2015), applying it to a case study of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

17. Cf. Lakoff and Johnson (1980): “The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture” (22); “every experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions” (57).

18. Short 2019, 79. Short's entire body of scholarship exemplifies the application of these theories to Latin literature and Roman culture; he has published too broadly on this topic to catalogue every work here, but see especially Short (2018) and (2019).

The central contributions of these theories of embodiment and cognition to this study of Latin viscera include the recognition that (1) the body, at the most fundamental level, plays an essential, structuring role in how humans formulate their experiences of the world; (2) metaphor, as a conceptual phenomenon, originates from embodied experience; and (3) all metaphors, but especially and immediately body metaphors, reflect the cognitive structures of the language-users who construct and understand them. With these principles in mind, as we analyze the contours of a specific body word within the Latin language, we can connect with a greater degree of confidence our findings about the word's metaphorical developments to contemporary Roman ways of perceiving and reacting to the world they inhabited.

Changing Words

There has long been interest among philologists in the process of semantic change over time: how do words acquire new meanings, when and from where do these new meanings originate, and why do they emerge?¹⁹ The diachronic reach of our extant record makes it clear that changes in Latin word usage were not merely probable but inevitable: Latin was just as fluid and susceptible to change while it lived as any language still living today. The answer to *whether* any Latin words experienced measurable semantic change is a resounding “yes”—even a brief glance at the lexical resources reveals a surfeit of words that would have meant something very different to Plautus than to Petronius. For most individual Latin words, however, the most comprehensive narrative of semantic change is available only implicitly through lexical entries, which often provide broad chronological labels (archaic, classical, post-Augustan) or identify the specific genres in which particular sub-meanings proliferate but are not designed to offer analytical attention to the precise contexts in which new meanings first appear or the process by which they find solid footing in the language. The fragmentation and bias of the record, moreover, pose serious obstacles to our ability to identify with confidence and precision the motivations and mechanisms (that is, the “whys” and the “hows”) of semantic change.²⁰ Much

19. These questions structured the earliest wave of interest in lexical semantics, a stage of that subdiscipline that Geeraerts (2010) terms “historical-philological,” where linguists working with languages both ancient and modern worked to find explanations (and to establish terminologies) for changes in meaning observable over time.

20. The interdisciplinary field of historical sociolinguistics has long contended with similar problems of gathering evidence from biased and incomplete written records—what William Labov, pioneer in this field, famously characterized as “making the best use of bad data” (1994, 11). On

of the most detailed and compelling work on change within the Latin language, perhaps for this reason, has focused on the evolution of formal elements like morphology, orthography, and articulation rather than on semantics.²¹

In broad terms, linguistic theories indicate that semantic change is a mostly random, unconscious, and inconsistent process.²² It is also inevitable. Any language, while it lives, is constantly in flux, subject to large- and small-scale modifications, despite the best efforts of conservative prescriptivists to fossilize their preferred version of it.²³ Linguists recognize that semantic change has transpired when “conventionalization” happens—that is, when there is evidence that the new sense has been transmitted to other language users.²⁴ Most changes of this type happen gradually, due to a complex network of factors that are not always possible to describe or explain.²⁵ For those pulling data from incomplete written records, the most secure evidence of change often spans years or even decades, recoverable primarily through patterns of collocation that aid in the recognition of small-scale shifts in meaning.²⁶ Isolation of the temporal contours and underlying processes of semantic change, particularly when these changes happen incrementally and arbitrarily, is therefore an extraordinarily difficult and uncertain prospect.

these methodological challenges and how historical sociolinguists aim to account for them, see Hernández-Campoy and Schilling (2012); Anipa (2012) discusses the challenges of using literary sources in particular; cf. Schneider (2013), who identifies several spectra of reliability for written documents (in the eyes of variationist linguistics), in accordance with which literary sources (because they contain “invented” speech) are less useful than other testimonia.

21. Most notably, Adams (2007) and (2013). This is not to say that no Latinists have offered valuable insights into semantic change: Fruyt (2009) and Dowson (2021), for example, propose theoretical approaches to identifying and interpreting lexical innovation in Latin, including neologisms and semantic calques; Gildenhard and Viglietti (2020), in a collected volume tracing the development of the Roman virtue *frugalitas*, provide diverse perspectives on the changes over time experienced by the constellation of words and concepts related to moderation.

22. See Keller (1994), whose evolutionary theory of language change posits the existence of an “invisible hand” which produces spontaneous order without conscious design. There are numerous theoretical frameworks for interpreting lexical semantics, many of which resist or contradict each other—for a clear and detailed overview, see Geeraerts (2010)—but most of them share the presumption that semantic change is a diffuse process directed most often (but not always) by community-wide patterns of usage without conscious planning or choice on the part of language users.

23. According to Hickey (2012), “prescriptivism tends to have a retarding influence on change rather than promoting it . . . it is frequently characterized by attempting to reverse changes which are already well underway” (391).

24. For a detailed exploration of ‘conventionalization’ as a linguistic phenomenon, see Schmid (2020, 87–123); see also Traugott and Trousdale (2013) *passim*.

25. See Roberge (2012) for a helpful survey of scholarly efforts in the field to explain the processes behind language change. Carling et al. (2023, 2–3) offer a useful and concise summary of scholarship that has grappled with the difficulties of reconstructing semantic change and the various methods proposed to account for those difficulties.

26. Allan and Robinson (2012) synthesize updated methodologies for recovering semantic change in the historical record.

On occasion, however, instances of semantic change do occur which are not entirely attributable to chance. Such instances often appear remarkable in retrospect for the relative speed with which the new meaning catches on and for its apparent historical specificity. To illustrate this point, I offer three words in English for which new meanings arose in correlation with moments of political crisis or shifts in ideological discourses. Take, for example, the English “-gate,” which before the 1970s functioned as a neutral nominal compound stem (as in “floodgate”). After the break-in at the Watergate hotel and the ensuing political fallout that led to President Nixon’s resignation from office, however, it transformed rapidly into a flexible suffix indexing scandal.²⁷ Around the same time, increasing global attention to the cause of environmental sustainability coincided with an emerging usage for the adjective “green” as a marker of conservatism; art historian and journalist James Fox, addressing the color’s now irreversible association with the environmental movement, writes that “that connection is the product of a very recent crisis.”²⁸ Over the past few decades, the semantic range of the verb “whitewash,” which initially denoted the application of white paint to a surface and, by abstraction, the covering over of flaws or impurities, has expanded to include a new and specifically racialized meaning: “to alter (something) in a way that favors, features, or caters to white people.”²⁹ The prevalence of this usage, and even its dominance over the word’s original sense, has increased measurably alongside public discourses about systemic racism.³⁰ Instances of language change that, like these three examples, appear

27. See Maier (2012) on the rapid development of this suffix in the wake of the Watergate crisis. Usage of the “-gate” suffix remains persistent in modern public discourses, such that its meaning is clear even to those without knowledge of its lexical origin. Its powerful affiliation with scandal has perhaps even overpowered its formerly neutral connotations: ask someone born after the year 2010 to define “floodgate” and I suspect that they would be as likely—perhaps *more* likely—to assume that there has been some sort of national crisis involving a flood than to think of a mechanism for controlling the flow of water.

28. Fox 2022. Note that the phrase “very recent” in this sentence is relative to the author’s larger goal of exploring ancient histories of the color’s conceptual associations with nature. Fox traces the origin of this semantic shift in English to a precise moment and individual, an anonymous attendee at a Canadian activist meeting in Vancouver in 1970: “At the end of the meeting, the chairman raised two fingers to the room and shouted ‘Peace!’ After a brief pause, one young attendee responded with a now immortal line: ‘Let’s make that a *green* peace.’ The group were so taken with the phrase that they named their first boat the Green Peace.”

29. This sense was added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in September of 2019. They trace the earliest printed usage to Wiley A. Hall (*Afro-American Red Star*, December 6, 1997) writing about Hollywood casting practices. To continue the thought experiment proposed in n27, if you were to ask the same person to define “whitewash,” I anticipate their answer would engage with discourses about racial inequity before (if ever) making any reference to paint.

30. Helligar (2020) surveys the development of the new meaning and its expansion to domains beyond the film industry. The title of Helligar’s piece, “This is What Whitewashing *Really* Means” (emphasis my own) indicates the extent to which public discourses have exerted pressure on the primary semantic applications of the word.

decisively linked to historical circumstance, have been recognized by scholars of linguistics as attributable to one of the more securely recoverable motivations for semantic change, a motivation which Traugott labels “changes in cultural discourse practices.”³¹

According to Milroy (1992, 169), it is important to distinguish between language “change,” which is a large-scale, structural adjustment adopted by the majority of speakers, and “innovation,” which is an act undertaken by an individual. In connection with this phenomenon, we have primary evidence from a native user of Latin—Horace—who explicates in the *Ars Poetica* his own understanding of how individuals can introduce semantic and lexical innovations through literary production (53–59):

quid autem
Caecilio Plautoque dabit Romanus, ademptum
Vergilio Varioque? ego cur, adquirere pauca
si possum, invideor, cum lingua Catonis et Enni
sermonem patrium ditaverit et nova rerum
nomina protulerit? licuit semperque licebit
signatum praesente nota producere nomen.

Why, then, should Vergil and Varius be denied what Romans allow to Caecilius and Plautus? Why, if I am able to add a few [new words], should I be begrudged the chance, when the tongues of Cato and Ennius enriched our native language and produced new names for things? It was permitted and it will always be permitted to bring forth a word stamped with a fresh mark.

Horace even goes on to contextualize these interventions amid larger processes and accidents of language change, emphasizing that *usus* (usage), above all, determines which changes stick, and for how long (70–72):

multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque
quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi.

31. “Vocabulary shifts as cultural scripts shift . . . [the] meanings of words themselves may change, reflecting and/or promoting cultural change” (Traugott 2017, 6.1). For exploration of this phenomenon with illustrative case studies see Williams (1976) and Wierzbicka (2006, 2010).

Many words will be reborn which have already fallen out of use, and those will fall away which are now held in esteem, if usage demands it, in whose power lies the judgment, right, and pattern of speech.

We observe here an acknowledgment not only that individuals can influence language—playwrights, poets, and prose writers alike—but also that they must do so within the confines of others’ positive judgment and willingness to accept and repeat their innovations. Authors may engage in the process of invention all they like, but the staying power of a new word or a new word meaning lies always at the mercy of usage.³²

I would like to take Horace at his word and to accept that, while the process of language change over time is generally arbitrary and accidental, Roman authors could and did introduce modifications and variations to word usage within their literary community,³³ especially in circumstances where their social position and the register of their language (as in the consciously formal and artificial language of much of Roman literature) afforded their words prominence and prestige.³⁴ We might refer here to Roberge’s theory of the “teleology of purpose,” which allows for individual actors to exert influence on language alongside larger cultural movements. According to Roberge (2012, 381), “new patterns of usage may come about through deliberate intervention on the part of institutions, political and cultural elites, and individual ‘language strategists,’ in accordance with prescriptive articulations (ideologies) and with desired

32. Horace, it seems, anticipates modern standards for “conventionalization.” His reference to new usage being “stamped with a fresh mark” suggests a further anticipation of the “cultural discourses” theory, as it acknowledges that an innovation will inevitably be connected to what is *praesens* (“fresh,” in the sense of “current,” “situated in the present”) for the author’s historical and cultural moment.

33. Although factors like class, gender, and literacy would certainly have circumscribed the community of Roman authors and their readership to a relatively isolated (if still sizeable and influential) social group, the rich intertextual networks connecting Latin literary works to each other indicate that within this group there existed a diachronic and attentive commitment to reading, adapting, and responding to the linguistic and stylistic choices of their fellow authors. A series of linguistic studies by Lesley and James Milroy (1985, 1987, 1992) on social networks and language change consider data from similarly isolated groups; but note critiques of their methodologies leveled by Labov (2001, 325–65) and Ogura (2012, 441).

34. On the influence of “prestige” on patterns of language change, see Sairio and Palander-Collin (2012), who define prestigious individuals as “those whose language is imitated and have the power to propagate new linguistic forms in their community” (629). Changes originating from prestige are not necessarily straightforward or simple to identify (as Sairio and Palander-Collin explicate in detail, with a comprehensive survey of the sociolinguistic scholarship on this topic), but we may fruitfully adopt the position that the social and cultural prestige of most Roman authors and their texts granted them a unique platform for effecting language change.

practical outcomes.” The particular communicative power of our extant Roman literary texts—their broad circulation, complex engagements (both explicit and implicit) with other authors, the careful attention paid to the works of contemporaries and antecedents, the anticipation of future reception and even literary immortality—suggests that not only were Roman authors invested with the power to influence language usage, but they were *aware* that they possessed this power and that their interventions, however experimental or surprising, could become permanent (so long, as Horace clarifies, as their choices accorded with the final judgments of *usus*).³⁵ Foundational to my argument is the premise that individual Roman authors could introduce or concretize new word usages whose specific connotations were indelibly tied to the author’s contemporary moment and whose longevity hinged upon acceptance by a larger community of readers and fellow authors.³⁶ That is to say, Roman authors were particularly well-positioned to participate in the “cultural discourse” motivation of semantic change—and they knew it.

The mechanisms of semantic change, meanwhile, have been extensively theorized, with most standard typologies including “metaphorization” (association through similarity) and “metonymization” (association through continuity) as primary processes through which words acquire new meaning.³⁷ Study of these mechanisms is typically distanced from questions of motivation and concerned more precisely with the mental processes that underlie the formation of new meanings through resemblance, proximity, and modifications of perspective. My interest in this monograph, however, lies at the rich intersection of the “cultural discourse” motivation discussed above and those mechanisms of semantic change linked to metaphor and metonym. Here we can finally bring the question of semantic change into accord with our previous consideration of body metaphor. Because the body is so foundational to metaphorical thinking about the world, the lexicon of the body is particularly susceptible to the phenomenon of semantic change through metaphorization.³⁸

35. Tarrant speaks of Latin literature’s “great sensitivity to models and its highly developed techniques of imitation” (1978, 214); Pandey emphasizes “Latin authors’ . . . dependence on the validating judgment of an audience” (2018b, 2); cf. Galinsky’s sustained emphasis (1986, 1996a, 1996b) on reader participation in the construction of meaning, especially for Augustan literature.

36. The invention by Latin authors of new usages for familiar words has been demonstrated by e.g., James (1995; for the verb *condere* in the *Aeneid*), Rabe (2015; for metaphors of rhetorical violence, like *frangere* and *lacerare*, in Cicero), and Dowson (2021; on the necessary semantic expansions produced by adaptation of Greek philosophical ideas into the Latin lexicon).

37. For differentiation between metaphorization and metonymization, see Koch (2012). Other major mechanisms include “subjectification” and “intersubjectification” (which have to do with perspective and relationality; see López-Couso 2010), pejoration and amelioration (association with positive and negative connotations), and restriction or extension (sometimes called “narrowing” and “generalization”). For a general overview of these classifications, see Traugott (2017, 3.1).

38. See André (1991, 249–64) for a persuasive demonstration, with detailed catalogue of

Body words, and body metaphors in particular, can reveal important features of the cultures in which they were invented and refined. As I noted previously, Sweetser (1990) proposed that semantic change relies on culturally specific and embodied metaphorical processes. Clifford Ando's *Roman Social Imaginaries*, a compelling study of patterns in Roman metaphorical and conceptual thinking, posits a similar relationship between figurative language and cultural context, making a case for the study of this phenomenon in Latin (2015, 5):

the great historical sweep of the Latin language allows one to witness the birth, development, and naturalization (or death, if you will) of specific figures, or changes in the metonymic reach of certain clusters, and invites thereby historical reflection on the imbrication of linguistic-cognitive shift and contextual change.³⁹

Lakoff and Johnson present a complementary argument that metaphors themselves can enact change on conceptual systems (1980, 145):

New metaphors have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it. If a new metaphor enters the conceptual system that we base our actions on, it will alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to. Much of cultural change arises from the introduction of new metaphorical concepts and the loss of old ones.

Based on the sum of these two principles—first, that semantic change can reflect shifts in the embodied metaphorical frameworks of a given culture, and, second, that new metaphors can change conceptual systems—it is my contention that new body metaphors, and the precise contexts in which they surface, can be extraordinarily useful touchstones for tracing shifting ideologies and social pressures within the culture to which they belong. Authors who introduce or elaborate new body metaphors, I further propose, participate actively in a conceptual restructuring (however microcosmic) of the world around them and invite their readers to accept these new conceptual structures as determinative of the way they perceive and describe the world.

examples, of how susceptible Latin anatomical vocabulary is to metaphorical extension. This phenomenon holds even in our modern digital age: think, for example, of Apple's "FaceTime" label for audio-visual teleconferencing, or the term "skins" for virtual cosmetic customizations in video games; see Chan (2021) for a recent exploration of embodied metaphor in digital technologies.

39. Cf. Moatti (1991, 40), in a study of reorganizations of knowledge and language during Rome's transition from republic to empire: "Les mots portent les traditions."

And so this monograph will trace the semantic shifts of the single body word *viscera*, working to recover those aspects of changing usage over time that can be attributed to more than mere accident. These changes, like that of the “-gate” suffix, sometimes coincide with high pressure crisis moments in Roman history; sometimes, as in the cases of the words “green” and “white-wash,” new meanings appear in correlation with broader trends in cultural discourse; often, innovative usages appear in the works of authors who enjoyed enough social and literary capital to afford them the ability to actively intervene in the language and to anticipate that their innovations could endure.⁴⁰ In the chapters that follow, I scrutinize variations and revolutions in the extant usages of this single Latin word and aim to explain, with as much clarity and precision as is possible, how the word changed, when it changed, and why those changes matter to our broader understanding of the language, literature, and culture of ancient Rome.

Visceral Reactions

Oxford Latin Dictionary, s.v. *viscus*¹:

1. (usu. pl.) The soft fleshy parts of the body (as distinct from skin, bone, etc.).
 - b. (eaten as meat).
2. (usu. pl.) The innermost parts of the body (esp. as containing the vital organs).
 - b. (fig. or transf., applied to the parts of something, esp. a country or state, most essential for its survival).
3. (pl.) The internal organs of the body (sometimes spec. those of the abdomen); (spec.) one of these organs.
 - b. (used w. ref. to the womb).
 - c. (used w. ref. to the testicles).
 - d. *~us (~um) sacrum*, (app.) the parts involved in secreting urine.

40. Britain (2012, 453) cautions that, since diffusion must precede change, the observation of language change can only occur “*after* [Britain’s emphasis] the act of speaker-innovation” and therefore “the act of successful innovation is not observable.” This reality must remain a caution in the background of all claims made in this book, which treats the literary record as preserving something like “acts of innovation,” but must also recognize that those moments that present as innovation may have been preceded in spoken communication (and possibly in lost written form) by a true first—and, as Britain suggests, not observable—innovator.

4. (pl.) The innermost parts of the body regarded as the seat of thought, emotion, etc.
5. (pl., w. poss. adj. or gen.) A person's flesh and blood, i.e. his kindred, nearest and dearest (usu. w. ref. to offspring).
6. (pl., transf.) The innermost part, heart (of something, esp. the earth).

The Latin word *viscera* is a neuter noun of the third declension, appearing most often in the plural, with nominative singular form *viscus* and the stem *viscer-* applying in all forms except the nominative and accusative singular.⁴¹ *Viscera* refer in concrete terms to the vital inner organs of a human or animal body. As the entry excerpted above from the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* illustrates, the word comes to encompass a broad range of abstracted meanings with political, reproductive, and cognitive connotations.⁴²

When the word *viscera* is used in its concrete anatomical sense, typical translations include modern cognates (English “viscera,” French *viscères*, Italian *visceri*) and more expansive, generalized terms for the body's interior like “innards” or “insides.” There is also fairly common recourse to the vocabulary of the abdomen—“guts” and “bowels” in particular—which presents a somewhat misleading characterization of the word's anatomical contours.⁴³ As I will show in chapter 1, the *viscera* (at least as defined by medical treatises) are as much thoracic as they are abdominal, comprising organs like the lungs, liver, kidneys, spleen, and sometimes heart, exclusive of the intestines and other digestive organs. The *OLD*'s treatment of the word's potential to mean “offspring” (subentry 5) is particularly illuminating for its inclusion of a modern idiom: when *viscera* refer to someone's descendants, the lexicon suggests, one might interpret it to mean “a person's flesh and blood.” The lexicographers lean here on a pervasive figurative connection that exists in many modern languages

41. The word should be disambiguated from *viscus*, a variant of the second declension noun *viscum*, which refers to birdlime and other sticky substances.

42. Ernout-Meillet call the word a “terme général, s'appliquant à tout ce qui est à l'intérieur du corps.” Walde-Hofmann similarly define it as “Eingeweide, alles unter der Haut liegende Fleischige;” and include one additional meaning related to property (“Vermögen, Mittel”; cf. the subsection of *OLD* s.v. 2b headed “applied to resources”). A number of Proto-Indo-European roots have been tentatively proposed (including **uei-*, “winding,” in connection with the loops of the intestines, and **ues-*, “fire,” relating *viscus* to the cooking of sacrificial meat (see Walde-Hofmann s.v.); more recent scholars assert, without further comment, that the word has no clear etymology (Ernout-Meillet s.v.; de Vaan 2008, 638). See André (1991, 141) for a focused anatomical definition. At the time of this book's writing, the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* is progressing steadily through the letter “r” with an entry for *viscera* still some years away.

43. This slippage can perhaps be attributed to the more expansive anatomical range of English “viscera,” which the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies as including “the entrails or bowels together with the heart, liver, lungs, etc.” (s.v. *viscera* 1a).

between flesh, blood, and familial relationships. Similar figures exist in Italian (*carne della mia carne, sangue del mio sangue*), Spanish (*carne de mi carne, sangre de mi sangre*), German (*mein Fleisch und Blut*), and French (*ma chair et mon sang*); modern commentators on visceral figures throughout the Latin literary corpus seem to appreciate the cross-cultural resonance of this idiom, latching on to the concept of “flesh and blood” as a useful translation for viscera when it refers to someone’s kin. What is missing from this reflex toward an appealing modern parallel is further reflection on the specific contexts in which this metaphor is deployed and how its connection to the term viscera could be particularly resonant or historically contingent. It is a central argument of this book that this relationship between viscera and reproductive relationships was *not* an inherent property of the word; rather, this definition was a marked innovation attributable to the interventions of a single author, Ovid, during a moment of intense cultural crisis surrounding fertility and civil war.

Although I have framed this study as one predicated on an interest in the contours of metaphor, I must address the fact that there are circumstances where it can be difficult, and even counterproductive, to try to draw a clear line between what is a “literal” or a “figurative” usage of a given word, especially when that literal/figurative distinction is correlated with assumptions about which meaning is “primary.” To account for these difficulties, I turn to G. E. R. Lloyd, who in his book *In the Grip of Disease* emphasizes “how dangerous it would be to assume that it is easy to diagnose transferred or metaphorical usage. . . . It is unhelpful because it sets up a rigid dichotomy between a supposed primary, literal, use and other deviant ones” (2003, 8–9). Lloyd proposes instead a concept called “semantic stretch”: the potential of language, and especially body words, to encompass multiple meanings without recourse to a hierarchy of importance or derivation and without strict separation between what is figurative and what is literal.

In this regard, Ruth Padel’s concept of “somatic tinge” is also useful, as explained in a chapter on “Innards” in her monograph *In and Out of the Mind*. In discussing the complex semantic entanglements of internal organs and emotions in Greek thought, and with specific reference to the words *thumos*, *kardia*, and *phrēn*, Padel indicates her suspicion that “all fifth-century uses of these words have some somatic tinge, more or less strong in different contexts, but always available” (1992, 36). In other words, when a body word is abstracted, that abstraction does not detach it from its concrete meaning—usage does not flip back and forth like a light switch between literal and abstract, and even body words subjected to multiple stages of abstraction nevertheless retain latent corporeal connotations. Padel encourages us further to “imagine a use of

the language in which both the abstract and the concrete coloring of each word are part of its sense” (1992, 40). These same phenomena of “semantic stretch” and “somatic tinge,” though Lloyd and Padel have formulated these ideas with reference to the Greek language, are, I believe, also observable in the Latin word *viscera*, which retains a particular elasticity of meaning whenever it appears, with a sticky corporeality that clings to it even in abstraction.⁴⁴ Because of the word’s anatomical valence, there is always potential for “somatic tinge,” even in those instances that may seem essentially metaphorical. It is, in fact, a peculiar characteristic of Roman *viscera* that they often occupy a hazy semantic space between the literal and the figurative. The power of *viscera*, especially as the word accumulates new referents, to invoke concrete and abstract shades of meaning simultaneously—to carry the weight of the corporeal, political, reproductive, and desecrated body all at once—is crucial to its efficacy as a barometer of political and cultural change.

The most detailed examinations of Latin *viscera* that have yet been undertaken remain brief and supplemental—the word is a favorite denizen of the footnote—and even succinct treatments have been subject to accusations of “overinterpretation.”⁴⁵ I aim to demonstrate, with this book-length study of *viscera*, that a thorough examination of a single word’s lexical history, with detailed scrutiny of situational semantics and changing patterns of usage, can in fact offer a great deal of useful information about both the word itself and the larger conceptual frameworks informing the progressive development of its semantic range.

Structure of the Book

Though this book endeavors to provide an account of semantic change over time, the imposition of an absolute linear chronology would be both misleading and impractical; the former, because the state of the record prevents us from ever identifying with absolute certainty a “first” occurrence of anything in Latin (thus all “firsts” within this book must be accompanied by a silent

44. Rosenmeyer 1999, a study of *medulla* (marrow) as a word capable of denoting both a body part and a site of erotic desire, emphasizes the porous boundary between what is literal and what is metaphorical in Latin body vocabulary.

45. Anderson (1972 *ad Met.* 8.478) briefly comments (in sixty-five words) on the triple repetition of *viscera* in the episode of Meleager’s death and Althaea’s suicide; Bömer (1977, 151) subsequently accused Anderson of “Überinterpretationen zu *viscera*.” Barrandon and Vial-Logeay (2021) offer the lengthiest treatment of *viscera* that I have encountered, a chapter examining vital organs in Lucan’s *de Bello Civili* from a primarily anatomical perspective (see chapter 7).

“extant”), and the latter because language change is a complicated, diffuse, and nonlinear process. The introduction of a new context for a word, or the innovation of a new referent, rarely entails an immediate transformation of its primary connotations and never renders already existing usages immediately obsolete. Even so, given that we must work with the evidence available, a generally linear chronological progression will allow us to draw tentative conclusions about broader patterns in usage over time. For my purposes, therefore, chronology is useful as a tool for organizing evidence but not as a totalizing scheme. Although I begin from early Latin and move through the republic to the early empire, the internal pathway of individual sections is not dictated by strict linear chronology, which is sometimes set aside in favor of thematic or generic groupings of evidence and sometimes necessitated by the state of the record.

As I will observe, the most striking innovations—at least those explored and negotiated most fully within high-register literary discourses—do cluster around specific moments of crisis at Rome: the death of the republic, the birth of autocracy, and the instability of the Neronian era. This book is therefore divided into three parts and organized according to a generally linear but still flexible chronology that serves analysis of shifting semantic values over time, contextualizing the evolving usages of viscera against the literary and historical circumstances in which Roman authors presented novel meanings. Each part begins from lexical and literary analysis, with chapters and subsections generally dedicated to specific authors or genres; the final subsection of each part zooms outward to contextualize these findings against the broader political and cultural pressures that may have informed new semantic developments.

Part 1, “Politics,” begins from the earliest attested instances of viscera and establishes the word’s major connotations in the republican period, ultimately exploring its development at the end of the republic into a charged political metaphor. In chapter 1, “Anatomy, Sensation, and Sacrifice,” I survey the word’s earliest referents by examining its first appearances in Latin; attestations of viscera and related root-words in republican drama and satire, while infrequent, nevertheless suggest a consistent association of the word with the separation of flesh from bone. Lucretius provides further information about the relationship of viscera to other body structures and especially their participation in the process of sensation. Evidence from medical and scientific writing offers illuminating information about which specific organs are included in the viscera; despite some minor variations between authors, the viscera are reliably represented as the thoracic and abdominal organs essential to survival. Finally, I establish viscera’s role as a technical term in sacrificial contexts, where it is not, importantly, a referent for the animal victim’s vital organs, but a more generalizing term for the edible flesh that is prepared and distributed for consumption.

Chapter 2, “Civil Strife and the Body Politic in Cicero, Vergil, and Livy,” demonstrates the word’s emphatic association in the late republican period with internal threats to the state, as viscera are incorporated into the established Roman metaphor of the body politic. The viscera of the republic and of the Roman people, I show, are closely affiliated (especially in Ciceronian rhetoric) with the dangers posed by domestic enemies and alleged attempts to destabilize republican governance. In Vergil, the word appears most frequently as part of the lexicon of ritual sacrifice, though it is also associated with grievous injury to human bodies. One marked usage in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* is given particular attention, enriched by comparison with Cicero’s political viscera. Further elaborations of the visceral body politic in Livy’s historiographies of republican Rome confirm the word’s salience as a metaphor appropriate to expressions of wartime concerns about the internal integrity of political systems.

Part 1 concludes with broader consideration of the historical context in which viscera developed into a meaningful figure for expressing unease with internal political discord at Rome: the steady disintegration of fundamental principles of republican governance, I argue, motivated Cicero’s construction of the new political metaphor as a vehicle for expressing the gravity of the threat posed by individual actors to the health and security of the Roman *res publica*. In the midst of Rome’s transition to autocracy, Vergil and Livy recalibrate the metaphor to fit the framework of their new political reality but sustain its affiliation with threats of civic strife.

Part 2, “Reproduction,” demonstrates that the word viscera contributed to a sharpening of Roman poetics around fertility during the Augustan era, when it developed into a multivalent reproductive metaphor denoting both the womb and offspring. The authorial hand responsible for this shift appears to have belonged to Ovid, who is first in the extant record to have transformed viscera into a reproductive figure and who methodically elaborates and refines these innovative usages throughout his literary corpus. Chapter 3, “Womb Words and Kinship Metaphors,” sets the stage for this semantic expansion by exploring how other designations for the womb (e.g., *uterus*, *venter*, *matrix*) and for children (esp. figurative ones) operate in Latin, by outlining the intersecting histories of *Terra Mater* (Mother Earth) and earth’s topographical viscera, and by exploring possible semantic precedent for the visceral womb in Greek σπλάγχνα.

Chapter 4, “Abortion and Domestic Violence in Ovid,” demonstrates a systematic association throughout the Ovidian corpus between reproductive viscera and extreme violations of domestic bonds: Ovid’s use of the word viscera to denote wombs and children always appears alongside instances of familial violence, including matricide, patricide, fratricide, filicide, feticide, incest, and

cannibalism. Chapter 5, "Civil War and Dynastic Struggle in Ovid," analyzes the extension of domestic violations to the level of the state, identifying further links between visceral reproductive bodies and the fundamental transgression of kinship bonds necessitated by civil war. Ovid's self-conscious adaptation of these metaphors to encompass the figure of the text as authorial offspring in the *Tristia*, I contend, enriches his exploration of the self-destructive parental instinct. Part 2 concludes with the argument that this Ovidian innovation constitutes an active intervention in the dominant ideological discourses of the author's era, where Augustan insistence on citizen fertility as a pathway to peace was challenged by an irrepressible association in the Ovidian landscape between visceral reproduction and the disruption of domestic and civic bonds.

Part 3, "Succession," investigates the further development of viscera's contextual associations in the later Julio-Claudian era, especially an emergent affiliation with ritual pollution and sacrilege. Enthusiastic adaptation of Ovid's reproductive figures is, I show, evident in early imperial literature, where viscera's value as a referent for kinship relations holds but authors nuance the contexts in which these figures appear. Additionally, I identify a new contextual pattern in which viscera's status as a standard ingredient in ritual activities is twisted into a consistent index of unholy, ill-omened, and transgressive sacrifice. Chapter 6, "Overdetermined Violence and Polluted Sacrifice in Seneca," demonstrates the literary impact of the Ovidian figures on Senecan tragedy, where the playwright redoubles the violence in which visceral wombs and children appear but creates space for parents to protect, rather than harm, their children; he also initiates the staining of sacrificial viscera with connotations of ill omen by frequently substituting human for animal victims in sacrificial contexts.

Chapter 7, "Self-Destructive Devotion and Aberrant Divination in Lucan," argues that the epic poet's rich visceral imagery discloses a preoccupation with how zealous loyalty to kin and country can degenerate into wasteful self-destruction; in parallel with Seneca's exploration of impious ritual practices, Lucan constructs a pattern of associating viscera with inauspicious forms of divination. The final section of Part 3 addresses the contextual factors that may have motivated these alterations to the lexical patterns of viscera, especially under Nero; his alleged disregard for divine law, among other unpredictable and eccentric behaviors, emphasized Rome's emerging vulnerabilities to the unpredictable whims of its emperors. With unprecedented power centralized in an unelected office with insecure lines of succession, Seneca and Lucan transformed viscera into a lexical channel for anxieties about Rome's political instability and the potential consequences that looming civic upheaval might have on proper religious observance.

Even after the surge of semantic activity observable during the late republic and early empire, the word *viscera* enjoys a complex afterlife worthy of further analysis. In the conclusion, I offer a final case study from Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* designed to illustrate just how impactful a nuanced understanding of *viscera's* rich semantic history can be on our study of intertextuality and reception in Latin literature. Quintilian's famously grumpy critiques of Ovid are complicated, I argue, by the presence of an unmistakable and thoughtful reception of Ovidian *viscera* in a rare expression of personal grief.

My examination of the complex lexical histories of *viscera* shows us, first, how Roman authors could influence the development of their language through the invention, reception, and affirmation of innovative meanings and, second, how pressing political and cultural crisis could shape, and be shaped in return, by the sophisticated linguistic games of the Roman literary elite. The patterns of semantic innovation analyzed throughout this book—for which English idiom affords me the playful label “Rome’s visceral reactions”—help us to appraise *viscera* in precisely these terms, as a meaningful index of shifting ideological pressures incorporated within the elaborate Roman politics and poetics of flesh and blood.

PART 1



Politics

CHAPTER 1



Anatomy, Sensation, and Sacrifice

Viscera is, at its semantic core, a body word. This chapter aims to delineate its anatomical contours as an important first step in tracing the development of its abstracted meanings. The earliest evidence available, which appears primarily in the fragments of Latin drama and satire, suggests that viscera and related root-words were long associated with the separation, either conceptual or physical, of internal organs from skeletal structures and with the preparation and consumption of animal meat. The philosophical explorations of the internal workings of the human body in Lucretius offer insight into the structural features and biological functions of the viscera; for a more precise understanding of the word's corporeal referents, the limitations of the record require us to move forward in time to consult Celsus and Pliny the Elder, whose medical and scientific writings offer the clearest surviving articulations in Latin of which specific organs are included in this system. The chapter concludes with a consideration of viscera in sacrificial contexts, where the word tends to lack anatomical specificity, since the vital organs of animal victims used in prognostication are more typically signified by *exta* and *fibrae*: sacrificial viscera denote instead the victim's edible flesh, cooked and consumed by worshippers.

The technical evidence presented in this chapter—keeping in mind the complications introduced by distinctions in chronology, genre, and literary mode—demonstrates that the word *viscera* in its most concrete sense referred to a grouping of vital but vulnerable internal organs of the human or animal body that performed functions essential to sensation and survival. Although as a corporeal referent the word is not inflexible, especially in its capacity to act as a designator of both defined organs and larger internal systems, it remains closely tied to the body's interior. Penetration of the viscera or their separation from surrounding body parts entailed serious injury and often death; the word possessed, from its earliest attestations, an intimate connection to the integrity of life itself.

Appearances in Early Latin

The noun *viscera* survives only sporadically in early Latin literature. The nominal form is not attested in any of Ennius' extant fragments, but related adverbial and participial formulations suggest an early association of the word's stem with animal butchery or the separation of meat from bone. In the *Andromeda*, limbs are separated *visceratim* (in pieces of flesh) amid a sea foaming with blood,¹ while the *Thyestes* pairs a vision of Atreus *evisceratus* (eviscerated) with indication that he also sprays out blood and gore.² Pacuvius, too, uses *eviscerata*, the only trace of visceral language to survive in his extant tragic fragments, in riddling reference to the process of disembowelment by which a tortoise's shell is transformed into a musical instrument. This "Pacuvian riddle," to which the answer is *testudo* (both "tortoise" and "lyre"), reads: "quadripes tardigrada agrestis humilis aspera, / brevi capite cervice anguina aspectu truci, / eviscerata inanima cum animali sono" (Four-footed, slow-stepping, rustic, humble, rough, of small head, serpentine neck, fierce expression, eviscerated, soulless, yet still alive with sound).³

The word is first attested as a noun in the theater of Plautus, where the root's apparent connection to the parting of flesh from bone is sustained. In Plautus' *Menaechmi*, one of the eponymous twins uses the word in a scene of feigned madness as he threatens to disembowel the *senex* character: "securim capiam ancipitem atque hunc senem / osse fini dedolabo assulatim viscera" (I will seize the double-headed axe and, as for this old man, I will hew his viscera piecemeal down to the bone; 858–59).⁴ This threat gives a clear enough indication that the word *viscera* can refer generally to the internal body parts that surround the bone, as they must be cleaved through in order to reach the *os*. Further clarification of the word's anatomical referents appears in the opening scene

1. The *OLD* defines *visceratim* as "in pieces (of flesh), piecemeal" and Jocelyn suggests "with bits of flesh hanging" (1967, 266). One assumes that these mangled limbs belong to the sea monster slaughtered by Perseus, though there is not enough context to be certain: "alia fluctus differt disupat / visceratim membra; maria salsa spumant sanguine" (*Andromeda* 117–18, according to the edition of Jocelyn [1967]).

2. These lines, as Cicero indicates when he quotes them (*Tusc.* 1.106), are part of a curse uttered by Thyestes in a rage against his brother: "ipse summis saxis fixus asperis, evisceratus, / latere pendens, saxa spargens tabo sanie et sanguine atro" (*Thyestes* 296–97 Jocelyn).

3. Pacuvius *Antiopa* fr. 3 in Schierl (2006), who presses on the "Gegensatz zwischen Tod und Leben" (109) developed by the placement of *eviscerata inanima* beside *cum animali sono*. We may treat this as an early piece of evidence that the viscera were conceptualized as essential to life.

4. Translation follows the suggestions of Gratwick (1993, 218)—though it is my general practice throughout this book to leave *viscera* untranslated, note that Gratwick suggests "innards." Jocelyn (1967) connects Plautus' *assulatim* at *Men.* 859 to Ennius' *visceratim* (see above), suggesting that both words "may have belonged to the vocabulary of butchers" (266).

of the *Miles Gloriosus*, as the braggart soldier Pyrgopolynices and his parasite reminisce over the former's (fabricated) military exploits. The pair recall an occasion on which Pyrgopolynices supposedly broke an elephant's leg with a single punch. In response to the soldier's suggestion that he had struck carelessly, the parasite assures him that a focused blow would have been so powerful as to pierce "per corium, per viscera / perque os elephanti" (through the hide, through the viscera, and through the bone of the elephant; 29–30). This claim, humorous exaggeration aside, offers a revealing articulation of how viscera were related anatomically to other body structures: grammatically parallel to *corium* and *os* and arranged as both syntactical and organic intermediary between the two, the word encompasses here whatever inner parts lie between skin and bone.

In these early texts, viscera and its related root words tend to appear in proximity to fantasies of mutilated bodies. Apart from the fragment of Ennius' *Andromeda*, where lack of context prevents more certain interpretation, each of the examples cited above imagines evisceration as a hypothetical. Thyestes envisions an overdetermined series of corporeal retributions for Atreus' crimes as part of a curse; Pacuvius offers a riddling description of a lyre made from the butchery of a hypothetical tortoise; Menaechmus threatens but does not follow through on a violent maiming; Artotrogus, who has just disclosed the falsity of the soldier's arrogant claims in an aside to the audience, constructs an obviously hyperbolic fantasy of a one-punch transfixion. The sum of these examples suggests that the word, while associated with extremes of violence, also comfortably occupies imaginary spaces: it is a word suited to threats and fantasies of physical harm, whose strong associations with deadly injury extend easily to theoretical situations. The word's anatomical valences are also clear, if spatially generalized: viscera are internal to the body, lying beneath the skin but outside the bone.

Also of note is the potential association of the word viscera with portions of meat intended for consumption. This connotation is exemplified most clearly in the related noun *visceratio*, which, though it does not appear in the record until the 1st century BCE,⁵ denotes a "public distribution of meat" or a "meal (based on meat)."⁶ In earlier Latin, a fragment from the satires of Lucilius makes

5. *Visceratio* is frequently attested in the epigraphic record in inscriptions dated to the 2nd century CE or earlier, appearing as early as the 1st century BCE (*CIL* 14, 2121, 27 BCE–14 CE). The word *viscera* itself is rare in inscriptions before the 2nd century CE.

6. Kajava 1998, 124. I quote Kajava's definitions here because, as he persuasively argues in accordance with a comprehensive survey of the literary and documentary evidence, most lexical resources mistakenly identify sacrificial contexts as a necessary part of the practice. For more on *visceratio*, in addition to Kajava (1998), see Donahue (2017, 36, 59–60), with additional information on the distribution, expense, and scarcity of meat *passim*.

apparent reference to the practice of meat distribution, with one speaker playing on the distinction between singular and plural (*viscus* vs. *viscera*) to request a more generous portion (Lucil. 485–86)⁷:

“idne aegre est magis, an quod pane et viscere privo?”
 “quod viscus dederas tuquidem, hoc est; viscera largi.”

“Is this more distressing, or the fact that I deprive you of bread and
 viscus?”

“That which you have given is viscus⁸; grant [us] viscera.”

Even without further confirmation that these lines reference a public distribution of food, the pairing of *viscus* with bread still suggests that the word could refer, already in the 2nd century BCE, to edible meat.⁹ An orphaned line from Plautus, from a play perhaps titled *Cesistio*, appears to place viscera in parallel with *stribula* (thigh-meat) in association with sacrificial meat cut from cattle, with the added descriptor *de lumbo obscena* (the indecent parts from the loin) implying the existence of some hierarchy of meat quality connected to the specific part of the animal body from which it has been cut.¹⁰ Finally, it seems that Accius, in his *Atreus*, may have used the word *viscera* to characterize the serving up of Thyestes' children as food, though the circumstances of the passage's connection to the word as it survives within Cicero (*Tusc.* 4.77) complicate this interpretation:

7. I cite Lucilius according to the numbering of Warmington (1967). Christes and Garbugino (2015, 170–71) provide a succinct survey of scholarly opinions on this fragment and highlight the possibility of its relationship to a *visceratio* (n.b., in their edition the lines are numbered 463–64).

8. If we take *est* from *edere* (to eat) rather than *esse* (to be), this line would instead mean something like, “This man consumes the viscus which you have granted.” A pairing of the verb *edere* with *viscus* would affirm the word's capacity to denote edible substances.

9. For an interpretation of this passage against the backdrop of Lucilius' critical engagement with luxury, see Goh (2018, 274–75). A further reference in Lucilius to boar meat as *viscus aprinum* (*apud* Charisius *GL* 1.83.15) suggests that the word, even in the singular, could refer to the edible parts of an animal—Christes and Garbugino (2015, 502) take it to mean *Fleisch* in both fragments. There is limited context for the word's interpretation, however, since Charisius' interest was only in the orthography of *aprinum*. The earliest appearances of *viscera* in the epigraphic tradition are likewise suggestive of food: e.g., *cena et viscera* (*CIL* 1, 2634 = *AE* 2000, 567, dated 67–23 BCE).

10. Var. *L.* 7.67: “In Cesistione: ‘dis stribula aut de lumbo obscena viscera.’ stribula, ut Opillus scribit, circum coxendices, sunt bovis” (In the *Cesistio*: “For the gods, thigh-meat or the indecent viscera from the loin.” The word *stribula*, as Opillus writes, refers to the haunches of oxen). The amount of editorial intervention necessary to make this line legible (*obscena viscera*, for example, is conjecture for the MS reading *obscenabis cera*, and *bovis* a conjecture for *vobis*) along with the lack of further context means we ought not to depend on this selection for reliable evidence about the word's lexical histories.

“ipsus hortatur me frater, ut meos malis miser
 manderem natos”—
 —eorum viscera apponit.

“My brother himself urges me, so that I, wretched, might entrust my
 children to my jaws—”
 —he serves up their viscera.

The words spanning from *ipsus* to *natos* are, allegedly, a direct quotation from Accius,¹¹ but *eorum viscera apponit* appears to be Cicero’s summary of the plot. Because of the way that Cicero has framed the quotation, it is not possible to know whether Accius himself deployed the word *viscera* to describe the bodies of the children as they were butchered, roasted, and unwittingly ingested by their own father. Indeed, the word may well be attributable only to Cicero’s paraphrase. Even so, its relevance to the thematics of the butchery and consumption of meat do make it possible that, even for Accius, the connection of viscera with edible flesh could be meaningfully extended into the horrifying realm of cannibalistic consumption.¹²

Structure and Sensation in Lucretius

Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* (mid-1st century BCE) is the earliest Latin text in which the word *viscera* appears repeatedly; an examination of the evidence available within this didactic work will help to refine our understanding of the word’s corporeal referents. In Lucretius, viscera exhibit a greater specificity, both spatially and anatomically, than is recoverable from earlier Latin texts. In general, he uses the word as a collective term, never specifying which individual parts or organs comprise the viscera,¹³ but he does indicate their

11. *Atreus* 58–59 in Dangel 1995. Cicero includes the quotation in a discussion of *ira* (wrath), the dangers of which the members of the house of Atreus illustrate nicely. Cicero quotes the same lines at *De Oratore* 3.217 in a passage concerned with actors and affect; once again, the emotion under consideration is anger (see Čulík-Baird 2022, 43–45). There is no mention of viscera in connection with this passage in the *De Oratore*.

12. Cannibalism and the consumption of human flesh will become a key context for visceral language in later literary periods, especially in treatments of Thyestes: see chapter 6. It is important to note that viscera are a shared anatomical feature of human, animal, and monster alike—any living creature can be imagined to possess them, especially one experiencing grievous bodily harm. The portion of the word’s semantic field affiliated with religion and sacrifice, however, draws a clear line between the human and the animal: for more on this essential distinction, see the final section of this chapter (“Sacrificial Viscera”).

13. For treatments that do specify individual organs, see the next section in this chapter

anatomical distinction from other internal components like *sanguis* (blood), *medulla* (marrow), *venae* (veins), and *nervus* (sinew).¹⁴ The author's interest in explicating the processes of sensation situates viscera within a larger network of internal parts, while his (less frequent) descriptions of death by violent means deploy the word to represent the gravely injured body. Although there are plentiful indications that the viscera can be distinguished from other internal bodily structures, Lucretius also frequently uses the word with generalizing force to encapsulate, for example, the entirety of the internal system that produces sensation, or even the whole of the body's fleshy interior. Although there is considerable variation in the precise scope and nature of the body parts designated by Lucretian viscera, its appearances remain wholly somatic—that is to say, Lucretius does not stretch the word's semantic range to encompass any unambiguously figurative senses.

A straightforward indication of viscera's distinction from other internal features can be derived from Lucretius' frequent inclusion of the word in lists of body parts. He likes to join viscera with, for example, sinews and veins; this trio appears repeatedly in asyndeton, as in discussions of sensation: “nam sensus iungitur omnis / visceribus nervis venis” (for all sensation is joined to the viscera, the sinews, the veins; 2.904–5); and of the relationship between body and soul: “animam . . . / nexam per venas viscera nervos” (the soul . . . bound through the veins, the viscera, the sinews; 3.216–17).¹⁵ This list is elsewhere amplified, maintaining the asyndetic coordination, to include as many as seven items, as in Lucretius' assertion that the many varieties of creatures in existence are still built from much the same parts: “ossa cruor venae calor umor viscera nervi” (bones, blood, veins, heat, moisture, viscera, sinews; 2.670). A list more expansively delineated during Lucretius' critique of Anaxagoras further distinguishes the viscera from blood and bone, when he characterizes the Presocratic philosopher's theory of *homoeomeria* as a

(“Defining the Anatomy”). Langslow (1999) proposes that Lucretius relies on a (not extant) tradition of medical Latin for selecting his terminology for the human body. If this is the case, his lack of specificity about viscera's component parts is a curious departure from the (later) medical Latin that does survive.

14. Kenney (2014, 107 *ad* Lucr. 3.217) claims that viscera in Lucretius “always” designate “flesh,” as defined at *OLD* s.v. *viscus* 1a; Leonard and Smith (1968) likewise define it consistently as “flesh” (e.g., *ad* 1.837, 5.993) with reference to Servius' note (*ad Aeneid* 1.211) that viscera refer to “whatever is beneath the skin,” equivalent to the Latin word *caro*. Aside from the fact that Servius (4th c. CE) is a very late authority to be citing for the word's semantic range in a mid-republican text upon which he is not commenting, any claim of the universality of this definition throughout Lucretius is an oversimplification. Still, when catalogued in lists alongside the blood, marrow, veins, and sinew, the word does seem to designate the fleshy internal parts of the body that surround these other elements.

15. Edition: Bailey (1921).

belief that “bones are evidently born from smaller bits of bone, and viscus from smaller bits of viscera, and blood is created by many drops of blood commingled amongst themselves” (*ossa videlicet e paucillis atque minutis / ossibus hic et de paucillis atque minutis / visceribus viscus gigni sanguenque creari / sanguinis inter se multis coeuntibus guttis*; 1.835–38). Lucretius aims to disprove this idea that the smallest division of any one thing is identical in composition to its larger whole; scholars have observed that his representation of the theory contains notes of hyperbole and even mockery.¹⁶ Still, in his critical summary of the theory’s major premises, his recourse to these three corporeal examples (the bones, the viscera, the blood) implies that these portions of the body are anatomically distinct. It may be absurd, in Lucretius’ view, to posit that their smallest parts mimic exactly the structures of the whole, but the categories themselves are not presented as absurd. To place viscera in parallel with *ossa* and *sanguis* is to suggest that, like the bones and the blood, the viscera designate a collection of like material contained within (and running throughout) the body.

Perhaps more instructive than these lists are the moments where Lucretius explores the inner workings of these body parts in relation to each other. His step-by-step explication of the process of sensation in Book 3 identifies viscera as second in a sequence of four body parts that perceive and react to stimuli: “*concutitur sanguis, tum viscera persentiscunt / omnia, postremis datur ossibus atque medullis / sive voluptas est sive est contrarius ardor*” (The blood is agitated, then all the viscera feel deeply, then the emotion is given last to the bones and marrows, whether it is pleasure or its opposite; 3.249–51). From this passage we can infer that viscera, in their most precise corporeal instantiation, are anatomically distinct from the blood, bone, and marrow, with which they interact in a precise chronological progression (*tum, postremis*).¹⁷

We should note, however, that this precision is not necessarily a universal feature of the word’s usage. Viscera are, in fact, so key to Lucretius’ theory of sensation that they often appear alone as shorthand for all the internal parts that are essential to and interdependent in the process. In service of Lucretius’ proof that the first elements (*primordia*) cause sensation through their movements, but do not feel sensation themselves, he identifies viscera, alongside

16. These lines have attracted scholarly attention for their heightened stylistic affectations (Brown 1983, 152–55); Brown reads the formal qualities of Lucretius’ critique of Anaxagoras as satirical comment on the conceptual reduplications of his theory.

17. Kenney (2014, 110) points out that these parts are also ordered into a progression of “less and less rarefied” materials.

the larger body structure of the limbs, as the site through which sensations move: “dolor est ubi materiai / corpora vi quadam per viscera viva per artus / sollicitata suis trepidant in sedibus intus, / inque locum quando remigrant, fit blanda voluptas” (pain exists where particles of matter, stirred up by a certain force through the living viscera, through the limbs, quiver in their internal places, and when they return to rest a delightful pleasure results; 2.963–66). In emphasizing, meanwhile, that body and soul (*corpus* and *animus*) cannot sense independently, Lucretius uses viscera in isolation to encompass all sites of corporeal sensation: “accensus nobis per viscera sensus” (sensation is incited for us throughout the viscera; 3.336).¹⁸ The word exhibits a similar expansive reach when Lucretius explicates the contrast between creatures of hot and cold natures, associated respectively with fury and fear, through the exempla of lions and deer. Where lions, being quick to anger, are filled with heat,¹⁹ “the deer’s cold mind is airier and stirs icy breezes more swiftly through its viscera, which cause a trembling motion to occupy the limbs” (*ventosa magis cervorum frigida mens est / et gelidas citius per viscera concitat auras / quae tremulum faciunt membris existere motum*; 3.299–301). In numerous places like these, where detailed cataloguing of all distinct internal participants in sensation is less appropriate, Lucretius appears to substitute viscera on its own as an expedient metonym for the entirety of the system in which it serves a central function.

It is important to note, however, that when viscera stand alone to indicate the seat of sensation, this is a symbolic and not a scientific sequestration. Lucretius is careful to emphasize that sensation originates from a wholly interdependent system; viscera, while they serve an essential function in that process, are not capable of sensing in isolation. Just as physical separation of any part from the body immediately causes sensation to cease within that part, Lucretius explains, individual body parts rely upon each other to achieve sensation and could not do so alone: “nec manus a nobis potis est secreta neque ulla / corporis omnino sensum pars sola tenere” (neither a hand separated from us nor any part of the body is able to sustain sensation on its own; 2.912–13). For viscera alone to

18. Cf. *Lucr.* 3.272: “sensifer . . . oritur primum per viscera motus” (the sense-bearing motion arises first through the viscera). Since Lucretius had just explained, at 3.249, that the blood precedes the viscera in the order of operations for physical sensation, we should understand the viscera at 3.272 to act as shorthand for all parts involved, while the viscera at 3.249 have a more restricted semantic range.

19. *Lucr.* 3.294–98: “sed calidi plus est illis quibus acria corda / iracundaque mens facile effervescit in ira. / quo genere in primis vis est violenta leonum, / pectora qui fremitu rumpunt plerumque gementes / nec capere irarum fluctus in pectore possunt” (But there is more heat in those whose hearts are fierce and whose irascible mind boils easily in anger. Chiefly of this type is the violent force of lions, who burst their chests with roaring, groaning frequently, and cannot contain the waves of anger in their chests).

coherently indicate the site of sensation without contradicting Lucretius' assertions of the necessary interdependence of the system's individual parts, we must recognize the word's capacity to generalize, such that when Lucretius describes a sensation as experienced only *per viscera*, we understand the word's semantic range in this context to contain also those other parts (*nervi, venae, sanguis, ossa, medullae*) that have been identified as key participants in more expansive explanations of the process.

When Lucretius refutes Democritus' theory that human tissue consists of bits of body and mind woven together, he does so on the grounds that the *anima* is composed of "parts smaller than those from which our body and viscera are made" (*elementa minora / quam quibus e corpus nobis et viscera constant*; 3.374–75). Here viscera and corpus, since they jointly occupy one half of a comparison whose counterpart is the soul, seem to converge into a pleonasm for the body's entire physical form.²⁰ This apparent imbrication is clarified by a hierarchical treatment evident later in the same book, as Lucretius examines the mutual dependency of body and mind in sensation (3.565–67):

sic anima atque animus per se nil posse videtur.
nimirum quia <per> venas et viscera mixtim,
per nervos atque ossa, tenentur corpore ab omni.

Thus the soul and mind seem to have no power on their own. It's no wonder, because [their first elements] are held together by all the body, intermingled through veins and viscera, through nerves and bones.

Here, viscera is one of four named component parts within the corpus, which serves as the agent by which the primordia (first elements) of soul and mind are encompassed (*tenentur corpore ab omni*); the veins, nerves, bones, and viscera, meanwhile, are the sites within the corpus through which these primordia intermingle.²¹ These lines, which plainly treat the viscera as one among multiple interior elements of the corpus, illuminate the extent to which its usage in isolation from these other interior parts (as previously at 3.375) can serve as

20. The word *corpus* (and especially its plural *corpora*) has a broad and tricky semantic range in Lucretius; often, it refers not to the physical body of animate creatures but instead to the constituent materials that make up the universe. Context is key for determining when the word *corpus* operates on an atomic scale or (as here) on the scale of human bodies.

21. Cf. a list containing the same four parts in precisely the same order at *Lucr.* 3.691–92, once again amid discussion of the interdependence of mind and body: "namque ita conexas est per venas viscera nervos / ossaque, uti dentes quoque sensu participantur" (For [the soul] is so bound up through the veins, viscera, sinews, and bones, that even the teeth have a share in sensation).

shorthand for the body's interior as a whole. In these ways, it seems, the word viscera is useful to Lucretius as both a designation for a specific interior system and as a broad referent for all those parts internal to the body but separate—conceptually, if not mechanically—from the soul.

A different mode of generalization appears in a later discussion of the mythical chimaera, whose existence Lucretius denies based on the logical implausibility of its supposed ability to breathe fire; surely, he reasons, the flame would burn the creature's leoniform body as it burns all other living creatures: "flamma quidem <vero> cum corpora fulva leonum / tam soleat torrere atque urere quam genus omne / visceris in terris quodcumque et sanguinis exstet" (Since indeed flame is as accustomed to scorch and burn the tawny bodies of lions as it is every type of viscus on earth and whatever exists [that is made] of blood; 5.901–3). Here *genus omne visceris* suggests a distinction of kind between the viscera belonging to different species of creature—we may remember Lucretius' earlier assertion (2.670) that all creatures are made of the same component parts (including viscera), but those parts exhibit great variation in the arrangement of their elements (2.671–72)—though it also functions alongside *sanguis*, in notional apposition to *corpora*, to distill the animate/animal body into the two constitutive elements of flesh and blood.²² Moreover, *viscus*' grammatical function, modifying the direct recipient of the action of burning (*torrere atque urere*), presents a significant contrast with the spatial implications of the more frequent Lucretian prepositional phrase *per viscera*. This framework, in which a stimulus afflicts the viscera directly rather than moving through them, correlates with an important distinction between internal sensation and external damage; the viscera involved in sensation (whole, internal, functional) are distinguished from those that may receive external blows with grammatical reference to whether the action occurs *through* or *to* the viscera.

The emphatic corporeality of Lucretian viscera is perhaps most evident in its association with dead or dying bodies. As Lucretius addresses the question of whether and for how long a dead body retains its soul, he assigns viscus to a rotting cadaver as the site where necrophagous feeders cluster: "unde cadavera rancenti iam viscere vermis / exspirant atque unde animantum copia tanta / exos et exsanguis tumidos perfluctuat artus?" (How do corpses expel worms out of the already putrid viscus and how does so great a boneless and bloodless abundance of living creatures swarm through the swollen limbs?; 3.719–21). The singular viscus (alongside *tumidos artus*, "swollen limbs") provides a

22. A smoother translation from Campbell (2003) emphasizes this point: "the bodies of all species made of flesh and blood that exist in the world."

focal point for the process of decay, pairing naturally with *cadavera* (corpses) to suggest the disintegration of skin and exposure of internal organs that accompany putrefaction after death. A similar treatment, which emphasizes the word's function in communicating grave external damage to the body, appears in Lucretius' account of what life was like for the early generations of man.²³ The worst part of their generally peaceful existence, Lucretius suggests, was the prospect of violent death in the jaws of wild beasts (5.990–93):

unus enim tum quisque magis deprensus eorum
 pabula viva feris praebebat, dentibus haustus,
 et nemora ac montis gemitu silvasque replebat
 viva videns vivo sepeliri viscera busto.

For at that time [it was] more [likely] that each one of them, snatched away, offered a live meal to wild beasts, swallowed up by their teeth, and filled the groves and mountains and forests with his groaning, watching his living viscera be buried in a living tomb.

As this unfortunate victim witnesses the disappearance of his own innards into the belly of a beast, his viscera and the creature's stomach, conceptualized as a "tomb" (*busto*), are entangled (in form as well as content) by their repetitive designations as living (*viva . . . vivo*, 5.993), a descriptor anticipated in the "living meal" (*pabula viva*, 5.991) his body is said to provide.²⁴ The peculiar pairing of *viva* with viscera, made more emphatic by the stylized archaizing alliteration of "v" sounds throughout line 5.993, sources its horror from an association of viscera with very serious, even fatal, injury—the survival of viscera exposed by grievous wounds necessitates extraordinary suffering for their owner. Deployed in poetic elaboration of the dying man's horrifying end, the word viscera here possesses generalizing force as a referent for all internal parts. As the man witnesses the destruction of his own body, his focalized perspective does not isolate the individual substances that spill out of himself; surely his blood, sinew, marrow, and bone are each exposed as the beast devours him, but the narrator

23. Early men, according to Lucretius, had hardy bodies "equipped with strong sinews through their viscera" (*validis aptum per viscera nervis*; 5.928). This formulation suggests the spatial interconnectedness of those interior parts (*nervi*, but also *sanguis*, *medulla*, *venae*) that have previously appeared in simple parallel with viscera.

24. Gale (2009) identifies precedents in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Ennius for representations of an animal that has devoured a human body as a "living tomb," adding that Lucretius "intensifies the horror by focalizing the scene through the eyes of the still-living victim" (183); see also Campbell (2003, 246), who additionally notes that the onomatopoeia of "v" sounds reflects the scene's violence.

narrows his vision so that he perceives the violent externalization of internal parts as enacted only upon his viscera.

These passages together confirm several of the word's semantic features. First, we have evidence of continuity in its association with serious physical injury. Although the majority of viscera in *De Rerum Natura* remain intact and undamaged within the body, their appearances in these scenes of post- and perimortem bodily dissolution suggest that the word's relationship with corporeal disintegration, as was already evident in early Latin, has been sustained. Second, we can observe a dynamic relationship between death and damage to the viscera, where the viscera contained within a corpse will inevitably decay and grave injury to living viscera will inevitably result in death. Third, the word maintains its capacity to generalize beyond its most specific corporeal referent: when the integrity of the body's external structures is interrupted by decay or injury, viscera can refer in general terms to what remains within or spills out beyond.

Throughout Lucretius, then, viscera are unequivocally somatic. They are essential to the process of sensation, so central that the word can serve as an effective metonym for all individual parts involved. The word can also stand in for larger conceptual pieces of the body, when it is divided into flesh and blood, for example, or when a gravely injured man is made to witness the violent consumption of his own still-living interior parts. Already by Lucretius' time, we can conclude, the word possesses a marked fluidity—it is an anatomical term, but the precision of anatomy indicated varies widely in context. The practice of extending the conceptual scope of viscera to incorporate surrounding body parts anticipates a significant later development in its usage,²⁵ though this generalizing potential remains at this point grounded in scientifically-presented theories of internal structures and processes.

Defining the Anatomy

For the most precise anatomical definitions of viscera, we must move beyond the republican period. Celsus' *De Medicina*, a medical treatise from the early 1st century CE, is the earliest extant text to define in Latin which body parts

25. That is, its expansion to denote the womb, a meaning that does not appear until the Augustan period—see part 2. Lucretius' explication of the role of viscera in sensation also anticipates a major branch of the word's semantic range that will find frequent use in later (especially Flavian) literature, as the painful feelings associated with famine, dehydration, poison, and disease will be regularly localized to the viscera.

constitute the viscera and to discuss in anatomical terms their centrality to the body's survival.²⁶ Since Celsus was an encyclopedist, likely relying on the evidence of previous authors for constructing his portrait of human anatomy, it is probable that his treatise preserves the classifications and definitions of an earlier period.²⁷ His writings therefore deliver the best evidence available for reconstructing the word's technical usages,²⁸ even if we cannot confidently extrapolate these classifications to all Romans or even to all medical practitioners and theorists at Rome.²⁹ His treatment of viscera as a collection of specific organs indicates their clear lexical separation from the body frame, intestines, and reproductive system, as well as a significant understanding of the viscera as essential to life processes.

For Celsus, the term viscera serves as a broad anatomical category encompassing several distinct organs: the lungs (*pulmones*; 4.14), liver (*iocinor*; 4.15), spleen (*lienis*; 4.16), and kidneys (*renes*; 4.17).³⁰ The organization of *De Medicina* Book 4, on the arrangement of human anatomy and the diseases which afflict each body part, makes this demarcation of viscera as an anatomical grouping exceptionally clear: the discussion of viscera is introduced with an explicit transition away from the body frame (a compagine corporis ad viscera; 4.14.1), and concludes with a similarly structured turn toward the intestines (a visceribus ad intestina; 4.18).³¹ Internal parts excluded from the viscera, based on explicit articulations of difference³² or implicit in their inclusion in other portions of Book 4, include the heart and its surrounding muscles (*praecordia*), the stomach/abdomen (with some interchangeability of vocabulary: *stomachus*,

26. On the evidence for dating the writings of Celsus, see Langslow (2000, 43–44), who determines a likely range of 14–39 CE.

27. This fact may help us to make sense of Celsus' avoidance of using viscera to denote the womb, despite the word's clear expansion to encompass this meaning by the time of his writing; generic and poetic considerations may also have explanatory power here, since viscera appears as a designation for the womb overwhelmingly in epic and elegy (see chapters 3–5).

28. See Langslow (2000, 7–41) for careful consideration of the methodologies behind defining “technical terminology” and treating “medical Latin” as a shared professional language.

29. See Langslow (2000, 45–48) and Spivack (1991, 145n8 and *passim*) for opinions ancient and modern on Celsus' legitimacy as a medical authority; on Celsus' impact on medical terminology (esp. for constructing the female body), see Von Staden (1991).

30. Edition: Marx (1915). Note that while Celsus favors the plural viscera to refer to the anatomical category, he does sometimes use the singular viscus in reference to an individual example of one of these organs (e.g., in emphasizing that a certain disease does not belong only to the liver, he says “non huius visceris unius hoc vitium est” [this ailment is not of this one viscus]; 3.21.15; cf. 4.15.1, 5.26.24c).

31. Celsus also explains the spatial arrangement of the organs of the viscera in reference to each other and to other body structures at 4.1.4–6.

32. E.g., the transitional line “ac viscerum quidem hae sedes sunt. stomachus vero . . .” (and indeed these are the locations of the viscera. But the stomach . . . ; 4.1.6) evidently excludes the stomach from the viscera.

venter, alvus), the intestines (*intestina*), the womb (*vulva*), and the genitals/groin (*ilia, naturalia*).³³

Celsus' use of viscera elsewhere in his treatise, beyond these precise definitions, confirms his understanding that they are (1) interior, (2) essential to life, and (3) vulnerable. In the preface to Book 1, as Celsus offers a summary of the theories and practices of competing schools of medical thought (the "Rationalists," 1.pr.13–26, and "Empiricists," 1.pr.27–44), he turns to the question of human dissection.³⁴ Practitioners of rational medicine, he reports, consider vivisection a necessary tool for accurate understanding of the body's internal organization and thus fundamental to diagnosis and treatment. Here Celsus pairs viscera and *intestina* (intestines, bowels) to designate those interior parts whose scrutiny is possible only through dissection (1.pr.23).³⁵ The nearby phrase "cum per volnus alicuius viscera patefacta sunt" (when someone's viscera have been exposed through a wound; 1.pr.25) further suggests the interiority of the visceral system, which becomes visible only through profound damage to the body's exterior.

According to the Empirici (as Celsus reports), who condemned the Rationalist practice of vivisection, exposure of the viscera is coterminous with death. This school's rejection of vivisection on the grounds that the organs of a living individual are fundamentally different from those of a deceased one is framed by a distinction between a dissection that reaches the belly and one that reaches the viscera (1.pr.42–43):

neque quicquam esse stultius, quam quale quidque vivo homine est, tale existimare esse moriente, immo iam mortuo. nam uterum quidem, qui minus ad rem pertineat, spirante homine posse diduci: simul atque vero ferrum ad praecordia accessit et discissum transversum saeptum est, quod membrana quaedam est quae superiores partes ab inferioribus <di>ducit (διάφραγμα Graeci vocant), hominem animam protinus amittere: ita mortui demum praecordia et viscus omne in conspectum latrocinantis medici dari utique necesse est tale, quale mortui sit, non quale vivi fuit. itaque consequi medicum, ut hominem crudeliter iugulet, non ut sciat, qualia vivi viscera habeamus.

33. On Celsus' general aversion to discussing sexual intercourse and recourse to euphemism when forced to name the anatomy involved in reproduction, see Swist (2020).

34. See Bubb (2022) for a recent and comprehensive treatment of dissection in Greco-Roman medical theory (esp. 216–73 on the intensity of interest in the subject during the Roman period). Goyette (2021) identifies a broad Roman discomfort with human dissection, as evidenced in medical and mythographic writings that characterize it as a cruel and monstrous practice.

35. Cf. the parallel but singular *viscus intestinumve* at 1.pr.25.

[The Empirici say that] there is nothing more foolish than to believe that a living man's body is of the same quality and condition as that of a dying man, or rather of a man already dead. For truly the belly, which is less important, can be drawn apart in a man still breathing: but as soon as the knife has approached the inner chest and the transverse septum has been separated (which is a sort of membrane which separates the upper from the lower parts, what the Greeks call the diaphragm), the man loses his life straightaway: thus the inner chest and all the viscus of a dead man are made available for the inspection of the thieving doctor and are necessarily in the condition of belonging to a dead, not a living, man. And thus the doctor manages to slay a man with cruelty and not to learn what condition of viscera we living men possess.

Here viscera, paired with praecordia as representative of those organs necessary to life, is distinguished with clarity from the anatomy of the belly (*uterus*).³⁶ This distinction is immensely useful for our purposes, especially as we anticipate the poetic metonymization of viscera into a referent for the womb: in (reported) medical opinion, as rendered in Latin by Celsus, the *uterus* (as generalizing term for the belly) and the viscera are not only distinct but belong to entirely separate classifications of vitality, since the former's integrity is not essential to survival but the penetration of the latter entails certain death.³⁷ Celsus' later identification of the viscera as occupying an acutely vulnerable region of the body ("gravioribusque periculis is locus expositus est," that place is exposed to very serious dangers; 8.9.1a) likewise affirms their centrality to life.³⁸ Any injury or illness afflicting the viscera is a very serious matter, because viscera are vital in the most literal sense of the word: the body cannot continue to live if they should cease to function.³⁹

36. Though *uterus* is typically the *vox propria* for the womb (see chapter 3), Celsus uses *uterus* here and elsewhere for the belly as a general region (as in 4.1.4–5); cf. his frequent use of *venter* for the abdomen (e.g., 4.16.1, 4.19.2) and his preference for *stomachus* to denote the organ of digestion (e.g., throughout 4.12). Celsus' preferred word for the womb is *vulva*—he describes the anatomy of the womb and its relationship to surrounding parts at 4.1.11–13 (on which, see Flemming 2000, 155–56).

37. Celsus' own opinion of dissection is that it ought to be performed only on dead bodies and for educational purposes (1.pr.74). A later exploration of viscera and dissection appears in [Quint.] *Decl.* 8, which investigates whether one could accurately or ethically diagnose the illness of one twin by vivisectioning the other.

38. This statement comes as part of a discussion of the *costa* (rib); the vulnerability of this body region is attributed directly to its proximity to the viscera (*quia iuxta viscera est*; 8.9.1a).

39. Celsus advises strongly against disturbance of the viscera during surgical treatment, unless there is some exposed portion that must be cut away from the edge of the liver, spleen, or lung (5.26.24c)—this caution seems to affirm that any damage to the viscera puts the patient at risk of death.

Beyond Celsus, other medical texts in Latin offer little in the way of useful evidence for defining viscera's anatomical contours. Most sources are, regrettably, too late and/or fragmentary to be of much use for our purposes here (e.g., Theodorus Priscianus, late 4th/early 5th c. CE; Cassius Felix, 5th c. CE; Caelius Aurelianus, 5th c. CE). The total absence of the word viscera from the *Compositiones Medicamentorum* of Scribonius Largus—Celsus' rough contemporary in the 1st century CE—is not entirely surprising, since this author concerns himself with pharmacology rather than anatomy, but it is noteworthy that his brief critique of surgery as a last resort for medical treatment does not include the word viscera.⁴⁰ Additionally, since Celsus makes reference to *dolor viscerum* (pains of the viscera, e.g., 2.1.23, 2.7.11) as a symptom to be treated by his medical recipes, the omission of viscera from all of Scribonius' numerous treatments for internal pains is not entirely explained by his focus on pharmacology. Because Scribonius does address at length the ailments of the individual organs that Celsus assigns to the category of viscera (lungs, liver, spleen, kidneys),⁴¹ the word's absence is rather telling—we may at least surmise that it was not so essential to discussions of internal anatomy that it could not be disregarded in a detailed treatment of the body's interior complaints. The robust corpus of Roman medical writing in the Greek language, meanwhile, though these extant texts pay plentiful attention to the inner workings of human anatomy, can deliver only imperfect and indirect evidence on the contours of a Latin term.⁴²

In the absence of useful evidence from other medical texts in Latin, our best confirmation and complication of the anatomical definitions provided to us by Celsus come, in fact, from the technical writings of Pliny the Elder, whose *Naturalis Historia* (late 1st c. CE) includes comprehensive explorations of the inner workings of human and animal bodies.⁴³ Though Pliny never defines the

40. This appears in the work's dedicatory epistle, Larg. ep. 6: "tunc coacta ad sectionem . . . devenit" (then [medical treatment] progresses to surgery only when compelled). Goyette (2021, 104–6) presses on the surrounding contexts of this remark (especially its proximity to the author's rejection of abortifacient drugs) to demonstrate Scribonius' disapproval of surgical intervention.

41. He writes sections on ailments afflicting the liver (123–26), spleen (128–32), and kidney (143–49); there is no parallel section explicitly about the lungs, but sections 76–79 address problems with breathing. When Scribonius wishes to refer generally to internal problems, he uses formulations like *vitia interius* (defects within; 108) and *convulsiones interiorum partium* (cramping of internal parts; 165).

42. See further discussion on Greek terminology in chapter 3. The nearest Greek equivalent to viscera appears to be σπλάγχνα, though its equivalence is inevitably complicated and variable. Translations into Latin of the Hippocratic corpus and of Roman medical treatises originally written in Greek are, unfortunately, too late, indirect, and contaminated to be truly useful in reconstructing the lexical history of a Latin word; but see Jouanna (1991) for the value of such translations to scholars of the Greek Hippocratic corpus.

43. For Pliny, I use the Teubner editions of Mayhoff and Von Jan (1967–1970). This work's composition in the 70s CE makes it not too far distant from Celsus' *floruit* in the first half of the

viscera in as clear and focused a manner as Celsus, we can gather from the word's plentiful appearances throughout his discussions of zoological anatomy and physiology that his understanding of which particular organs of the body constitute the viscera was similar, but not identical, to that of Celsus.

Much of the useful information about viscera recoverable from the *Naturalis Historia* appears in Pliny's treatments of non-human anatomy: his identification of the chameleon as an animal unusually possessing *viscera sine splene* (viscera without a spleen; *Nat.* 8.122), for example, confirms that the spleen would typically be regarded as a component part of the viscera. He affirms that the lungs, too, belong to the viscera when he explores the anatomy of aquatic life, asserting that only a select few creatures, like whales, possess lungs among their viscera (*internorum viscerum pulmonem habent*; 9.16), while other species may possess alternate breathing viscera in place of lungs (*pulmonum vice alia possint spirabilia inesse viscera*; 9.17).⁴⁴ Also relevant is Pliny's discussion of whether or not insects breathe: after reporting that some do not believe insects have the capacity for breath because they have no "*viscera interiora nexus spirabilis*" (interior viscera of a respiratory system; 11.5), Pliny maintains that it is possible for them "to breathe without viscera" (*spirare sine visceribus*; 11.6).⁴⁵ In these efforts to account for the ability to breathe in the absence of viscera, it becomes evident both that the lungs would normally be considered visceral organs and that respiration is generally understood to be a function of the viscera.

Pliny's clearest departure from Celsus comes in his additional inclusion of the heart and the brain as part of the viscera. He identifies the human brain (*cerebrum*) as "the wettest and coldest of all the viscera" (*umidissimum omniumque viscerum frigidissimum*; *Nat.* 11.133) as well as "the highest [in position] of the viscera" (*hoc est viscerum excelsissimum*; 11.135). There is a significant emphasis in Pliny's description of the brain on its proximity to mortality, as he defines damage to the membranes surrounding the cerebrum as fatal (*rumpi mortiferum est*; 11.133). His treatment of the heart as a visceral organ, meanwhile, appears within an aside about its history in extispicy, as part of an anecdote

1st century CE (see again Langslow 2000, 43–44); Pliny in fact lists Celsus among his sources, though he classifies him as *auctor* rather than *medicus*. On Pliny's human and animal physiology, see Capponi (1995, esp. 134–36 on viscera). Note that, while there are obvious distinctions between human and non-human anatomy, Pliny does treat humans as animals throughout his explorations of physiology (including them within the larger categories of both *animantes* and *animalia*, as at e.g., *Nat.* 7.1–3).

44. For Pliny's treatment of aquatic respiration (esp. vis-à-vis Aristotle), see Capponi (1990, 49–55).

45. Cf. the same claim at 9.16, on the respiration of aquatic creatures. For a detailed consideration of Pliny's entomology, see Capponi (1994, esp. 31–35 on insect respiration).

dote that underscores the organ's vital functions. After a sacrificial bull was discovered to be missing its heart (*cor*), Pliny reports, there was serious discussion about "whether the animal could have lived without that viscus" (potueritne sine illo viscere hostia vivere; 11.186).⁴⁶ Here the *cor* is defined as a singular piece of the viscera so central to life that its absence from the body of a recently living creature is cause for real bewilderment; the rationalizing explanation that the organ had somehow been destroyed in the moment (ad tempus amiserit; 11.186) emphasizes a struggle to accept that life in the absence of a heart could ever be possible. To complicate matters: Pliny had, just a few sections previously, singled out the heart as an organ that can function independently of the viscera, such that its endurance can assure survival even with injury elsewhere: "solum hoc viscerum vitiis non maceratur . . . ceteris corruptis vitalitas in corde durat" ([the heart] alone is not weakened by defects of the viscera . . . with the rest damaged, vitality in the heart endures; 11.182). Injury to the heart, however, means instant death: "laesum . . . mortem ilico adfert" (a wounded heart brings death on the spot; 11.182). The combined evidence of this anatomical description, in which the heart is somehow outside of or beyond the viscera, and the story of the missing sacrificial *cor*, in which the heart is itself a viscus, demonstrates that even within the writings of a single author the word viscera does not necessarily sustain perfect internal consistency in its referents.

Pliny's expansion of the category of viscera to include the brain and heart, while it constitutes a definite departure from Celsus' more narrow classification, nevertheless sustains a connection between the viscera and those organs that are essential to survival. His later exploration of medical treatments likewise contains an apparent expansion upon the circumscribed set of four organs that Celsus had defined as the viscera.⁴⁷ When Pliny identifies the medicinal uses of vervain, he provides a list of all the viscera that it benefits: "verbenaca vero omnibus visceribus medetur, lateribus, pulmonibus, iocineribus, thoraci" (But vervain is a remedy for all the viscera—the sides, the lungs, the liver, the chest; 26.37). The word order here, with the verb *medetur* intervening between *visceribus* and the remaining catalogue of body parts, suggests that the four subsequent items all stand in apposition to the category of viscera and offer

46. The organ's absence, according to Pliny, was discovered by a *haruspex* during a sacrifice shortly after Caesar declared himself dictator. In Cicero's version of the same story (*Div.* 1.119), the missing heart is figured as part of the *exta* ("in extis bovis opimi cor non fuit," there was no heart among the entrails of the plump bull). Suetonius' account (*Jul.* 77) uses similar language ("sine corde exta," entrails without a heart). I examine the role of viscera and *exta* as technical terms in the lexicon of sacrifice in the next section, "Sacrificial Viscera."

47. On Pliny's pharmacology, especially his emphasis on remedies derived from the natural world, see Stannard (1982). On his place within the broader tradition of Roman medicine (esp. in critical relation to Greek medical theories and practices), see Nutton (1986) and Hahn (1991).

more precise examples.⁴⁸ The inclusion of *thorax* (chest) and *latus* (side) alongside organs elsewhere confirmed to belong to the viscera opens up the possibility for the category to include more general regions of the body—any part whose health could be essential to the continuation of life, perhaps, or even any part which implicitly contains organs that perform vital functions.⁴⁹

Pliny also potentially delineates a visceral subcategory that is not evident in Celsus, when he references the “principal viscera,” all of which “prudent nature enclosed with their own membranes” (*omnia quidem principalia viscera membranis propriis . . . inclusit providens natura*; 11.198). The immediate context does not make it entirely clear whether this modifier is restrictive (and thus implies the existence of less important viscera) or generalizing (emphasizing the vital importance of all viscera as a collective); while the former interpretation could be applied in accordance with the special protections of internal membranes, the latter is still plausible, especially given Pliny’s application elsewhere of the modifiers *interna* (internal; 9.16) and *interiora* (inner; 11.246, 36.202) to the viscera, for which there are no complementary external or outer varieties. In any case, we can still derive from this designation a continuous investment of visceral organs with paramount importance to vital bodily functions.

While the combined testimony of Celsus and Pliny precludes any assertion that the Romans collectively agreed on the precise internal contours of the viscera, what we can infer from the evidence presented in their writings about the body is that the viscera were intimately connected with survival. The specific anatomical referents in any given appearance of the word will inevitably depend upon context, where it could refer to an individual organ (especially

48. The English translation of Jones and Andrews (1956) punctuates with an em-dash between “internal organs” and the remaining items, but cf. Ernout and Pépin (2003), whose French translation merely separates with a comma. The presence of the lungs and liver, which we know to be visceral organs, support an appositional structure, but, since the *latus* and the *thorax* have not been elsewhere attested as part of this grouping, their presence requires a bit more explication. Pliny elsewhere uses *thorax* in parallel with the spleen, kidneys, and bladder (27.135), with the *praecordia* (26.35, 27.136), and with the liver (22.25) as objects of similar pharmacological treatments. But the *thorax* also appears in parallel with more general internal categories like the intestines (20.251) and with external spatial designations like the loins, hips, and shoulders (20.238). *Latus* is associated most often with other regions of the body (especially the *pectus*, “chest,” as at 20.241 and 24.54), but it does appear in parallel with specific organs like the liver (26.34) and kidneys (26.42). Pliny, it seems, is content to list individual organs alongside larger regions of the body without strict adherence to consistent categories or mutual exclusion between items on the list; for this reason, *latus* and *thorax* could indeed be appositional to viscera, as two regions of the body which contain visceral organs.

49. Note that Celsus generally treats the viscera and *latera* as separate regions of the body: e.g., “in faucibus in lateribus in visceribus” (2.1.9), “viscerum et laterum dolores” (2.1.23); but cf. 5.23.1a, where the catalogue “viscerum, laterum, faucium, interiorumque partium doloribus” (pains of the viscera, sides, throat, and inner parts) contains potential overlap between at least the first and final categories.

in the singular) or to a collection of interior parts, but the overarching justification for selecting this word seems to be the understanding that the referent's health proves vital to the body's survival. Viscera are life-sustaining; their injury quickens death; their absence is incompatible with life.

Sacrificial *Viscera*

In archaic Roman religion, viscera served as technical terminology for the flesh of sacrificial victims, specifically the parts of the animal that are cooked and eaten; these were generally distinct from *exta*, a word referring to the interior organs inspected for anomaly and/or burned as divine offerings.⁵⁰ This distinction seems to have held in the technical literature of the republic, since Cicero never once in *De Divinatione* uses viscera to refer to the organs consulted for prognostication, preferring the terms *exta* and *fibrae*. Magdelain (1943, 32–41) emphasizes that the Romans conceptualized animal sacrifice as a dedication of the *anima* rather than the body of the victim; Scheid (1990, 337) builds on this analysis to suggest that the organs comprising the *exta* were selected because of their centrality to life. Given *exta*'s potential to designate some of the same vital organs that Celsus and Pliny define as belonging to the viscera (the liver, the lungs, the heart), alongside its broader affiliations with vitality, there is plentiful room for semantic overlap between the two terms;⁵¹ still, it generally holds true that when the terms *exta* and viscera appear in ritual contexts, the former is invested with anatomical specificity and properly restricted to those organs which are exposed and examined for purposes of prognostication, while the latter most often refers in a generalizing way to the surrounding edible meat.

Religious contexts therefore impose a measurable variation upon the specific parts of the body denoted by viscera, in which the distinction between what is human and what is animal matters very much indeed. This significant gap between human and animal viscera is illustrated well by differing treatments of the liver. In sacrificial animals, the liver is an exceptionally impor-

50. See Dumézil (1966, 534), who emphasizes that after the *exta* (which included the liver, lungs, and sometimes heart) are examined and burned, the viscera are eaten by worshippers and/or priests. On the preparation, serving, and consumption of sacrificial meat in Roman contexts, see Scheid (1990, 337–39) and Rüpke (2001, 140–46).

51. There is some flexibility in the terms already apparent in Vergil, as when guests at Evander's feast for Aeneas "eat the sacrificial *exta*" (*vescitur . . . lustralibus extis*; A. 8.182–3); we also observed in the previous section Pliny's use of *viscus* to describe a sacrificial bull's missing heart. I will return to the semantic slippage between viscera and *exta* in chapters 6–7, especially viscera's apparent encroachment upon *exta* as a referent for divinatory entrails accelerating in the Neronian period.

tant feature of the *exta*, granted special prophetic power in haruspicy.⁵² In the human body, meanwhile, Celsus counts the liver among the viscera, which he defines as a collection of specific organs that are vital to the body's survival.⁵³ To examine an animal's liver is a standard sacrificial practice; to do the same to a human would be a deadly and unspeakable crime.⁵⁴ The line between what is permissible and what is taboo often relies on whether viscera belong to a human or animal body: viscera can comfortably designate edible flesh when applied to animals, but consumption of human viscera is a universally horrifying prospect; while the appearance of animal viscera in sacrificial contexts is perfectly standard, human viscera in ritual contexts are an absolute taboo.⁵⁵ The importance of these distinctions will become especially evident in the Neronian period, once authors begins actively introducing human viscera into ritual contexts.

The above exploration of the word viscera's technical definitions in philosophical, medical, scientific, and religious contexts has laid the groundwork for interpretation of its applications to the realms of politics, reproduction, and unholy sacrifice. When Roman authors incorporate the word into metaphorical expressions, the connotations of vitality and interiority established in this chapter remain central to its construal, as does the corporeal core of its referent. Even in abstraction, the word's somatic origin binds its metaphorical usages to the essential, life-sustaining inner organs of the body that it so frequently denotes.

52. Auspicious conditions of the liver include a strong membrane and a healthy, well-grown organ, while weakness, small size, absence, or clefts promised bad fortune. See Van der Meer (1987) on the "Piacenza Liver," a bronze model of Etruscan origin covered in inscriptions that were presumably keyed toward the interpretation of real sacrificial livers.

53. See the previous section in this chapter, "Defining the Anatomy."

54. Pliny discusses the centrality of the liver to divination at *Nat.* 11.189–90; he later labels the inspection of human entrails as an act contrary to divine law (*Nat.* 28.2; *aspici humana exta nefas habetur*).

55. Beard, North, and Price comment that republican associations of human sacrifice with the religious practices of barbarian peoples amplified in the imperial period such that "human sacrifice . . . was regarded as a monstrous perversion of legitimate animal sacrifice" (1998a, 234–35); "to accuse someone at Rome of having sacrificed a person rather than an animal was to accuse them of having broken all norms of proper civilized *Roman* behaviour" [authors' emphasis] (1998b, 159).

CHAPTER 2



Civil Strife and the Body Politic in Cicero, Vergil, and Livy

This chapter explores usages of *viscera* that take on charged symbolic meanings in the political sphere. This semantic expansion emerges most palpably in the rhetoric of Cicero, who invokes the word as part of the larger metaphor of the Roman body politic. He does so with pointed reference to the dangerous ambitions of his own rivals, fashioning viscera into a political figure to emphasize the threat of civic strife posed by domestic enemies. A marked reception of this Ciceronian figure appears in Vergil's *Aeneid*, as the hero receives a dire prophecy about Roman civil war that concretizes the word's symbolic associations with inward-turning political violence. Evidence from Livy's historiography further illustrates the metaphor's sustained associations in the early empire with representations of civic betrayal and internal discord.

It is significant that this semantic politicization of viscera developed in correlation with the death of the republic and the birth of a new autocratic system. Although the word's primary usages seem to have been essentially concrete in the early and mid-republic, viscera meaningfully transformed, for Cicero, Vergil, and Livy, into a productive bodily metaphor for exploring the pressures of civic discord. This shift commenced in 63 BCE in reaction to the Catilinarian conspiracy, advanced in incremental steps through the 50s and 40s as the republic buckled, and solidified in the literary works of authors negotiating an emergent autocracy at the turn of the era. By the 20s BCE, when Vergil was composing the *Aeneid* and Livy had embarked on the decades-long project of writing the *Ab Urbe Condita*, the political charge of the visceral body politic had been established as an appropriate channel for contemplation of the horrors of civil conflict. I demonstrate that viscera's incorporation into the metaphor of the body politic, occasioned by the internal strife that destabilized and ultimately destroyed the republic, generated a potent new affiliation of this word with political (and especially civil) violence; whether the viscera belong to a governing body, a territory, or the people themselves, the visceral body politic is never a peacetime concern.

Cicero and the Viscera of the Republic

As a statesman bearing reluctant witness to the final decades of a crumbling republic, Cicero often expresses his concern for the integrity of the *res publica* through the metaphor of the body politic. While the conceptualization of the state as a human body was not a Ciceronian invention,¹ he explores the contours of this figure in detail throughout his career, with particularly innovative spirit in his oratory.² It is within the works of Cicero that the rich symbolic life of the word *viscera* begins to develop: the first attestation of the *viscera rei publicae* (viscera of the republic) in the extant record appears in his corpus, as does the earliest instance of the *viscera Romani populi* (viscera of the Roman people). Cicero's apparent invention of the metaphor of the visceral body politic is linked, I argue, to his growing preoccupation with the decay of republican principles, especially as their breakdown threatens his own claims to authority and influence at Rome. It is a metaphor developed in the course of rhetorical attacks upon his political adversaries, designed to be forcefully suggestive of a Rome in grave danger from within.

Cicero's engagement with the larger conceptual structure of the *corpus rei publicae* (body of the republic) resorts to the vivid imagery of *viscera* on only a few choice occasions, each of which involves extraordinary threats to the stability of republican governance at Rome. The first attestation of the figure appears near the conclusion of Cicero's first oration against Catiline, delivered to the Roman senate during his consulship in 63 BCE. As Cicero's disdainful remonstrations against Catiline's character and conduct build to a crescendo, he explains that the removal of the conspiracy's leader will not fully heal the disease afflicting the republic (*Catil.* 1.31):

nunc si ex tanto latrocinio iste unus tolletur, videbimur fortasse ad breve quoddam tempus cura et metu esse relevati, periculum autem residebit et erit inclusum penitus in venis atque in visceribus rei publicae. ut saepe homines aegri morbo gravi, cum aestu febrique iactantur, si aquam geli-

1. The metaphor is implicit in early Greek medical discourses and political philosophies, with the explicit formulation "the body of the *polis*" first attested in Greek rhetoric of the 4th century BCE (Brock 2006). In Latin, the metaphor may appear as early as Lucilius (though this claim is not uncontroversial; see Walters 2020, 21, with n83). Early elaborations of the body politic in Greek and Roman thought frequently related to disease and lacked anatomical specificity—"it was only in the late Roman republic that the 'body of the state' was fully developed into an image for a unified political 'corporation'" (Squire 2015, 306). The latest scholarly explication of the body politic in Roman thought is Mebane (2024); other recent treatments include Bessone (2008), Gardner (2019), and Walters (2020).

2. As explored by Walters (2020); see also Squire (2015, 308–9).

dam biberunt, primo relevari videntur, deinde multo gravius vehementiusque adflctantur, sic hic morbus qui est in re publica relevatus istius poena vehementius reliquis vivis ingravescet.³

Now if from so great an act of thievery that [Catiline] alone will be removed, we will seem perhaps for a short while to have been freed from care and fear, but the danger will linger and will be enclosed deep within the veins and viscera of the republic. Just as often men ill with grim disease, when they toss about with feverish agitation, if they have consumed cold water, seem at first to be restored, but then are afflicted much more grievously and violently—just so this disease, which is in the republic, though relieved by the punishment of that man, will worsen more violently because the others remain alive.

Throughout this oration, Cicero had already framed the republic as a body vulnerable to the infection of Catiline's conspiracy.⁴ He proclaims first that Catiline ought to be inflicted with the *pestis* (disease) that he has been devising against his enemies (*oportebat, in te conferri pestem quam tu in nos omnis iam diu machinaris*; 1.2), then characterizes this disease as one "dangerous to the republic" (*infestam rei publicae pestem*; 1.11). Just before invoking the republic's viscera, Cicero twice reconfigures the threat into a disease of the republic (*rei publicae pestis*), asserting first his understanding that it can be temporarily restrained but not permanently removed by Catiline's execution (*hoc autem uno interfecto intellego hanc rei publicae pestem paulisper reprimi, non in perpetuum comprimi posse*; 1.30) and next that its advanced state means only the expulsion of Catiline along with his allies will fully destroy it (*exstinguetur atque delebitur . . . haec tam adulta rei publicae pestis*; 1.30). Cicero's concluding demand for Catiline's departure, in the penultimate sentence of the oration, invokes *pestis* one final time, now marked as belonging to Catiline with a possessive adjective (*cum tua peste ac pernicie . . . proficiscere*," together with your disease and destruction, get out!; 1.33).

It is therefore in the course of Cicero's systematic characterization of Catiline and his co-conspirators as a disease afflicting the state that the viscera *rei publicae* appear. Up to this point, the idea that the republic possesses a body

3. For Cicero's orations, I follow the Oxford editions of Clark (1905, 1909, 1918) and Peterson (1911).

4. On Cicero's engagement with metaphors of disease, see Walters (2020). Disease was a prevalent metaphorical vehicle in historiography for expressing concerns about the health of the body politic (Woodman 2010).

has been an implicit feature of Cicero's medical metaphor.⁵ Once Cicero refers to the republic's *venae* (veins) and viscera, however, the image takes on an overt somatic character.⁶ This new figure merges the Lucretian treatment of veins and viscera as essential anatomical structures and the medical identification of the viscera as a site particularly vulnerable to harm with the preexisting metaphor of the body politic, applied to the context of a seditious political conspiracy. Cicero's invocation of the viscera of the republic thus integrates the word's anatomical and medical connotations into political discourse, expanding its semantic range to include the vital parts of a political body whose infection correlates with partisan conspiracy and corruption. This rhetorical move pathologizes the actions of Cicero's political rivals, construing their efforts to accumulate power into a disease gripping the state's vitals—neither visible nor fully knowable because of its interiority, and for that reason all the more dangerous.

Later in his career, Cicero extends this metaphor to suggest that the body of the republic is subject not only to political threats but also to financial exploitation. In his *In Pisonem* (55 BCE), as Cicero summarizes the manifold failures of Piso's consulship (violent roving gangs, an inactive senate and justice system, an arson attack on Cicero's own house), he levies the serious accusation of embezzlement, suggesting that Piso had arranged to receive "money snatched from the viscera of the republic" (*pecuniam ereptam ex rei publicae visceribus*; 28). The corporeality of the visceral political metaphor is often amplified in Cicero by proximity to other instantiations of the body politic, which is consistently infected or mutilated shortly before its viscera surface: in this case, Cicero had just framed his return from exile as Pompey's removal of a dagger from the republic's body (*de corpore rei publicae tuorum scelerum tela revelente*; 25). It is once again in the context of a conflict with political enemies at Rome, therefore, that Cicero invokes the viscera *rei publicae*: the gravity of Piso's larger attack on the body politic is emphasized by the configuration of the state's financial resources as its vital organs.⁷

This fiscal variation of the visceral body politic may have followed from

5. Cicero's ventriloquism of the state personified (1.27–29) lends it a voice ("si mecum patria . . . si cuncta Italia, si omnis res publica loquatur," if the fatherland . . . if all Italy, if the entire republic should speak with me; 1.27) if not an explicit physical form.

6. Cf. Cicero's use of veins and viscera in a medical analogy framing *avaritia* (greed) as a disease: "permanat in venas et inhaeret in visceribus illud malum existitque morbus . . . eique morbo nomen est avaritia" (that evil penetrates into the veins and clings to the viscera and a disease ensues . . . called greed; *Tusc.* 4.24).

7. Among the major lexica, only Walde-Hofmann foreground viscera's capacity to refer to material resources. Another financial usage of viscera in Cicero appears in a letter to Quintus, as he laments that his financial dependance from exile has left his brother to pay debts "from your and your son's viscera" (*de visceribus tuis et filii tui*, *Q. fr.* 1.3.7).

Cicero's apparent invention, two years previously, of the financial body metaphor *viscera aerari* (viscera of the treasury). In *De Domo Sua* (57 BCE), as Cicero critiques the abuse of the religious consecration of buildings for petty political reasons—especially the malicious dedication of his own property, while he was in exile, as a temple to *Libertas*—he reviles the villa-building program of Gabinius, framing him alongside Clodius as having stolen wealth from an embodied public treasury (*Dom.* 124):

cur ille gurges, helluatus tecum simul rei publicae sanguine, ad caelum tamen exstruit villam in Tusculano visceribus aerari,⁸ mihi meas ruinas, quarum ego similem totam urbem esse passus non sum, aspicere non licuit?

Why did that spendthrift [Gabinius], having fed with you upon the blood of the republic, nevertheless build up to the heavens a Tuscan villa with the viscera of the public treasury, while I was not permitted to gaze upon my [home's] ruins, which I did not allow the entire city to resemble?

After figuring the *res publica* as embodied by giving it blood (*rei publicae sanguis*), Cicero repositions viscera as the state's financial core, so that Clodius and Gabinius are framed as draining the body politic of its most vital resources. As Kenty (2018) has demonstrated, there were pressing political stratagems at work beneath Cicero's attempt to persuade religious officials to deconsecrate the site of his former home; Cicero's overarching goal was to associate Clodius with "all that is problematic about Roman politics in this period" (247) and to correlate his own well-being with "the welfare of the state as a whole" (258).⁹ Given that the conflict at the core of this case originated from Cicero's exile, which was predicated on the actions he had taken to punish the Catilinarian conspirators, there is logical consistency in Cicero's return to the figure of the

8. Cf. *Dom.* 23: "pecuniam . . . reptam ex visceribus aerari" (money seized from the viscera of the treasury). The reading *ex visceribus* is a conjecture with no attestation in the MSS, however, so I do not afford it the same explanatory weight as previous examples.

9. Cicero may have further deployed viscera in service of these goals at *Dom.* 137 (though, as in the previous note, the word is an editorial conjecture rather than a manuscript reading): "in visceribus eius qui urbem suis laboribus ac periculis conservasset monumentum deletae rei publicae conlocaris" (do you erect a monument to the republic's destruction on the viscera of that man who by his own efforts and at his own peril had preserved the city?). Here the viscera are Cicero's own; "the connections drawn here and elsewhere between Cicero's body and the body politic reinforce the personal nature of this trauma while articulating the notion that his and the republic's welfare were largely indistinguishable" (Walters 2020, 73).

visceral body politic in order to characterize the men who exiled him as threats to its political and financial health.

This pattern of deploying the word viscera for the prosecution of personal and political rivalries holds even as Cicero redirects the political reach of visceral metaphor to encompass the Roman *populus* (people). In *Philippicae* 1 (44 BCE), as Cicero berates Antony with evidence of the people's obvious disapproval, he brings up the implicit hostility of the crowd at the Apollinarian games. Those who, like Brutus, were barred from the event for their enmities with Antony, Cicero insists, nevertheless sustained a symbolic presence there: "o beatos illos qui, cum adesse ipsis propter vim armorum non licebat, aderant tamen et in medullis populi Romani ac visceribus haerebant" (Oh happy are those men who, when it was not possible for them to be present in person because of force of arms, were present nevertheless and were clinging to the marrow and viscera of the Roman people; 1.36). In parallel with *medullis* (marrow), Cicero frames these viscera as a symbolic site for heightened patriotic feeling, especially in the face of internal civic discord.¹⁰ We can observe here a blending of the metaphorical body politic with the actual bodies of Rome's citizens, each of whom possessed *medulla* and viscera of their own; the paradoxical absent-presence of Antony's enemies, underscored by Cicero's wordplay with the verb *adesse* (to be present),¹¹ allocates itself in the abstract to the concrete bodies of individual Romans and, as an even further abstraction, to the collective Roman body. Cicero's appeals to the *viscera Romani populi* thus recenter the political figure around its corporeal core, fusing the theoretical concept of a citizenry's vital parts with the concrete anatomy of the individuals who make up this population.

Cicero returns to the figure in the final extant speech of his *Philippicae* (43 BCE), once again modifying the parameters of the visceral metaphor to amplify its proximity to the real vitals of the republic's citizens—himself included. As he explores Rome's painful recent histories of civic strife and wonders aloud what should make one hesitate to address a successful leader by the title *imperator*, he gestures toward Octavian's defense of the republic from Antony's cruelty (*Phil.* 14.25):

10. On marrow as seat of emotion, see Rosenmeyer (1999). Cicero elsewhere pairs *medulla* and viscera in characterizing a philosophy that prizes strong bodily health as the greatest good: "omne bonum in visceribus medullisque condideris" (*Tusc.* 5.27); he uses the formulation of ideas clinging to the viscera in a letter to Atticus, in which he assures his friend that he has not forgotten his encouragements (sed noli me putare ἐγκλεῦσμάτα illa tua abiecisse, quae mihi in visceribus haerent; *Att.* 6.1.8).

11. Ramsey (2003, 151) observes that "the indicative reveals that the *cum*-clause is strictly temporal, heightening the antithesis between *adesse* and *aderant*, which produces the oxymoron 'they were present at the very time of their enforced absence.'"

Caesarem, deorum beneficio rei publicae procreatum, dubitemne appellare imperatorem? qui primus Antoni immanem et foedam crudelitatem non solum a iugulis nostris sed etiam a membris et visceribus avertit.

Should I hesitate to call [Octavian] imperator, he who was brought forth for the republic by the generosity of the gods? He first warded off Antony's vicious and foul cruelty not only from our throats but also from our limbs and viscera.

The appearance of viscera in this list of body parts vulnerable to Antony's violence, given the historical recency of civil conflicts with significant Roman casualties and the looming threat of further hostilities, renders the somatic force of these body words especially potent.¹² As Cicero identifies the threatened viscera as belonging to the Romans present in his audience, he strategically uses the first-person plural possessive adjective (*nostris visceribus*, our viscera) to implicate himself into this host of vulnerable bodies. The cruelty from which Octavian is said to have protected these viscera maintains close contextual affinities with the very real violence that had been done to Roman bodies in the recent past. In this way, a political figure that began its life in Cicero's hands as a novel feature of the expansive metaphor of the body politic has now reified into a representation of the vital parts of citizens living through civil war.¹³

Vergil and the Viscera of the Fatherland

Vergil tends to use the word viscera when bodies experience physical harm, sometimes in association with wounded human beings, but also frequently as part of sanctioned religious ritual.¹⁴ After establishing the frequency with which Vergil deploys viscera in unmarked sacrificial contexts, I explore the

12. This speech was delivered on April 21, 43 BCE and concludes with a call for Antony to be declared an enemy of the state (*hostis*). On the swift publication and circulation of Cicero's *Philippicae* after their delivery, see Kelley (2008).

13. Final analysis of Cicero's invention of this metaphor appears in the final section of this chapter, "Visceral Politics in Late Republican Contexts." I note here Schneider (2004), an exploration of how Cicero frames himself implicitly as a "haruspex" to comment on (and prognosticate) the decline of the republic; although the phrase "viscera of a deceased body politic" appears in its subtitle, Schneider's monograph concerns itself entirely with *exta* rather than viscera and does not ever address the Ciceronian phrase *viscera rei publicae*. Given the republican distinction between the two terms in ritual contexts (viscera are cooked and consumed, not examined—see chapter 1), it is not surprising that Ciceronian viscera are not implicated in metaphors of augury; Schneider's subtitle seems informed by a slippage in English between "entrails" and "viscera."

14. For Vergil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, I use the edition of Mynors (1969).

more unsettling violence inflicted upon human viscera in his epic landscapes. Although viscera in Vergil are not generally invested with overt political symbolism, I emphasize a notable exception in *Aeneid* 6, where the emergence of a new metaphor (“the viscera of the fatherland”) recalls the Ciceronian figure of the visceral body politic and affirms its affiliation with civic strife.

The fatal division or penetration of body parts consistently attached to Vergilian viscera, reminiscent of the word’s associations in early Latin with animal butchery, is not necessarily horrific, since its applications in sacrificial and feasting contexts connote a form of physical severing that is perfectly pious (see chapter 1). The majority of Vergilian viscera, in fact, denote the flesh of sacrificial animals. In the *Georgics*, the word twice refers to the innards of the *vitulus* (calf) selected for the *bougonia* (a ritual sacrifice purporting to produce a new colony of bees)—first when the animal’s viscera are beaten to a pulp within the intact hide (4.302) and next, once the process is complete, when the bees buzz through the animal’s *liquefacta viscera* (liquefied viscera; 4.555) before erupting from its corpse.¹⁵ The *Aeneid*, meanwhile, uses viscera for the meat of the seven stags that Aeneas and his crew consume when shipwrecked on the shores of Libya (1.211), of the various animals slaughtered for Anchises’ funeral rites (5.103), of the bulls sacrificed to enable Aeneas’ entrance to the underworld (6.253),¹⁶ of the bulls slaughtered and served at Evander’s reception feast for Aeneas (8.180), and finally of the animal victims slain to seal the pact between Aeneas and Latinus (12.214). On each of these occasions, the viscera are specifically the parts of the slaughtered animals that are stripped and cooked.¹⁷ The ritual procedures in these scenes are performed correctly and auspiciously, with no indications of divine displeasure or ill omen; when men feast on the meat, it offers physical nourishment to their bodies and solidifies their political agreements.

15. The only other instance in the *Georgics* (3.559) appears when the narrator describes the impossibility of purging the viscera of animals that died from plague. See Gardner (2019, 139–40) for the unusual violence of the *bougonia* and its linguistic affinity with scenes of plague. On the extent to which the *bougonia* can be properly classified as a sacrifice, see Habinek (1990), who emphasizes that the ritual as described should be distinguished from standard sacrifices specifically because the animal’s flesh is abandoned to rot rather than cooked and distributed for consumption.

16. The viscera in this case are described as *solida*, which we can take to mean “whole” or “entire” based on Servius’ note *ad* 6.253: “viscera sunt quicquid inter ossa et cutem est . . . ergo per solida viscera holocaustum significant” (viscera are whatever is between bones and skin . . . therefore the phrase “per solida viscera” indicates a whole burnt offering).

17. *Viscera nudant* (they strip the viscera; 1.211); *viscera torrent* (they toast the viscera; 5.103); “solida imponit taurorum viscera flammis” (they place upon the flames the whole viscera of bulls; 6.253); *viscera tosta* (toasted viscera; 8.180); “viscera vivis / eripiunt, cumulantque oneratis lancibus aras” (they pull out the viscera from living beasts and pile up the altars with loaded platters; 12.214–15).

Elsewhere in the *Aeneid*, however, viscera signify the grievously wounded bodies of dead or dying men.¹⁸ When Achaemenides relates the ordeal in Polyphemus' cave, his language emphasizes the anthropophagous horror of a situation in which men become meat: "visceribus miserorum et sanguine vescitur atro" (He feeds upon the wretched men's viscera and dark blood; 3.622). In the underworld, the vulture who implements Tityos' eternal torment pecks out both his *iecur* (liver) and his *fecunda . . . poenis / viscera* (viscera fertile for punishments; 6.598–99).¹⁹ The shield of Aeneas includes a scene depicting the death of Mettus, his body torn apart by chariots and his viscera scattered in punishment for his cowardly scheming during the conflict between Rome and Veii (8.642–45). A simile likening Mezentius to a predatory lion brings images of carnivorous feasting to the battlefield: "haeret / visceribus super incumbens; lavit improba taeter / ora cruor" ([The lion] holds fast to the viscera, leaning over [his prey]; foul blood bathes his wicked mouth; 10.726–28). In fact, the only viscera in the *Aeneid* which remain unspilled are those belonging to Amata; they are far from intact, however, as the madness inflicted upon her by Allecto snakes its way *penitus . . . in viscera* (deep into her viscera; 7.374). Throughout Vergil's corpus, therefore, the inner parts of a living being typically only become visceral once they have been penetrated or displaced by an external force. The Vergilian model of viscera is inherently violent in a way that Lucretian viscera are not, especially when applied to human bodies.²⁰

Metaphorical applications of viscera are infrequent in Vergil but noteworthy when they do occur. The formulation *viscera montis* (viscera of the mountain; A. 3.575), for example, engages with an already existing tradition figuring the earth and its geological formations as personified bodies.²¹ Most politically salient, however, is the entreaty of Anchises' shade in Book 6 to the future leaders of Rome (that is, Caesar and Pompey) not to bring about a terrible civil war: "ne, pueri, ne tanta animis adsuescite bella / neu patriae validas in viscera vertite viris" (Do not, boys, do not accustom your minds to such great wars nor turn your vigorous powers against the viscera of your fatherland; 6.832–33).²²

18. Adams (1980, 53) determines that Vergil avoids specificity in identifying the lower inner organs of human bodies, preferring instead more general terms like *fibrae*, *praecordia*, *exta*, *medulla*, and *viscera*.

19. Poetic visions of Tityos in the underworld often make use of visceral language, e.g., Tib. 1.3.76, Ov. *Met.* 4.457, Ov. *Ib.* 180.

20. It is telling that the word *viscera* never appears in Vergil's *Eclogues*, whose treatment of war is concerned less with its immediate violence than with the upheaval of pastoral tranquility entailed by resettlements in its aftermath (Coleman 1977, 30–32).

21. This is the first extant instance of *viscera* being used to describe the earth's interior; see chapter 3.

22. Yardley (1997) identifies this line as the *fons ultima* for the concept in Latin of "stabbing one's own vitals." O'Hara (1990)—a work dedicated to examining the misleading and inconsistent information evident in most of the *Aeneid*'s prophecies—tellingly labels this "one of the more real-

In this passage, Vergil appears to invent the figure of the *viscera patriae*, a political formulation that resonates clearly with the Ciceronian *viscera rei publicae*. Vergil reconstitutes the political body in question into the broader signifier of the patria, incorporating the most significant goal of Aeneas' labors—to find and establish a new homeland for the Trojan refugees—into the powerful rhetorical figure of the visceral body politic. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that this fresh instantiation of the political metaphor is delivered as part of a prophecy forecasting the very civil conflict that, as Cicero had anticipated, would lead to the demise of the republic. In Cicero's hands, the *viscera rei publicae* had invoked a political body under grave threat from traitors within the ranks of its political elite; Vergil's adaptation of the metaphor demonstrates awareness of its existing rhetorical associations with civil discord but broadens the scope of the threatened political body from an outdated model of republican governance into a paternal territory whose citizens are united by cultural as well as ancestral kinship.

Read against Cicero's metaphors of the body politic, then, Anchises' forecast of visceral violence is planted firmly in the context of a crumbling republic whose strength of arms has turned inward upon itself and its own most vital parts.²³ Vergil imbues Anchises' prophecy (in historical retrospect, given the epic's composition in post-civil-war Rome) with a dreadful premonition of the same civic discord that Cicero had feared when he first invented the figure. We may therefore consider these lines from the *Aeneid* an example of semantic "conventionalization" within the Latin literary tradition,²⁴ through which Vergil affirms Cicero's entry of viscera into the symbolic field of political metaphor.

Traitors, Tyrants, and Territory in Livy

Further integration of viscera into metaphors of the body politic is apparent in Livy's extant historiographical corpus.²⁵ Indeed, four of the eight appearances of

istic prophecies of the poem" (51); see also 163–72 on the prophecy's role in Vergil's larger expressions of (qualified, perhaps illusory) hope that the Roman people of his time will not see further civil conflict.

23. See Quint (2010) for the thematic prevalence of Roman civil war throughout the epic's first six books.

24. On "conventionalization" as the affirmation of a lexical innovation by means of its reception and repetition by someone other than the innovator, see introduction.

25. Livy seems to have begun writing *AUC* within a few years after the Battle of Actium (31 BCE), around the same time that Vergil started the *Aeneid*; since all of the examples cited in this section come from later pentads, however, we may treat Livy's visceral body politic as a post-Vergilian phenomenon. On dating Livy's writings, see Burck (1992, 3–6); Burton (2000, 430n4 summarizes the vast bibliography on Livy's starting date); and Scheidel (2009).

viscera in *Ab Urbe Condita* imitate or adapt the viscera-of-the-state metaphor.²⁶ In Book 22, the consul Varro invokes the *viscera rei publicae* as he addresses troops about to engage with Hannibal's army at Cannae during the Second Punic War: "contiones . . . consulis Varronis multae ac feroces fuere denuntiantis bellum arcessitum in Italiam ab nobilibus, mansurumque in visceribus rei publicae si plures Fabios imperatores haberet" (The orations of the consul Varro were numerous and fierce, as he declared that war had been summoned into Italy by the nobles and would endure in the viscera of the republic if they had more commanders like Fabius; Liv. 22.38.6–7).²⁷ Varro's denunciation of the current state of the conflict centers on accusations that it was brought against Italy by its own elite citizens (*ab nobilibus*) and by a political rival who had exercised poor judgment in command. In invoking the *viscera rei publicae* to emphasize his claim that the war will linger on unless appropriate new leaders are selected, Varro echoes the Ciceronian metaphor which envisions the threat of war, especially arising from inappropriate behaviors among the republic's elite, as posing immediate harm to the vital functions of the state and its people.

While the viscera of the republic do not reappear in Livy's extant works, the historiographer does develop further adaptations of the figure by expanding the boundaries of territory and governance associated with its genitive modifier; these new expressions are all clustered within Books 32–34. In attempting to persuade his countrymen to support the Romans in the Second Macedonian War, the Achaean praetor Aristaenus characterizes the Roman people as having already endured the Punic War "velut intra viscera Italiae" (as though within Italy's viscera; 32.21.18), a geopolitical configuration that emphasizes the extent to which foreign armies had penetrated into the interior of Roman territory. He also frames the threat of naval attack on the coastal communities of the Peloponnese as a danger to all its cities, even the internal strongholds, by virtue of a visceral connection between the people and the urban spaces they occupy (32.21.27):

si centum tectae naves et quinquaginta leviores apertae et triginta Issaici
lembi maritimam oram vastare et expositas prope in ipsis litoribus urbes

26. Only two usages of viscera in Livy refer directly to violence against the human body: *viscera lanianda* (viscera to be torn to pieces; 9.1.9) and *viscera patentia* (viscera lying open; 31.34.4). The great majority of its appearances in Livy are figurative and explicitly signaled as such with indices like *velut* (just as), *haud secus quam* (not otherwise than), and *tamquam* (as though).

27. Editions of Livy: for Book 22, Briscoe (2016); for Book 28, Conway and Johnson (1935); and for Books 32–34, McDonald (1965). For the complicated political machinations ongoing in the rivalry between Fabius and Varro and the narrator's larger critiques of Varro's impulsivity, see Tipping (2010, 109–10).

coeperint oppugnare, in mediterraneas scilicet nos urbes recipiemus, tamquam non intestino et haerente in ipsis visceribus uramur bello?

If one hundred covered ships and fifty light uncovered ones and thirty cutters from Issa begin to lay waste to the coast and to attack cities exposed almost on the very shores, will we naturally withdraw into the inland cities as though we are not burned by war, internal and gripping our very viscera?

Aristaenus links the safety of allied communities to the welfare of the entire Achaean people by framing the Peloponnese as a political body whose vital organs will be threatened by attack to any of its parts, even its outermost ones. He likewise, in Ciceronian fashion, distills the broader metaphor of territorial viscera into the bodies of its citizens, using the first-person plural (*uramur*, we are burned) to implicate himself and his fellow Greeks as collective possessors of a shared body politic.²⁸ Here the metaphor has a unifying power suitable to the decentralized governance structures of the Peloponnese. Framing these politically independent communities as all part of a single body, such that harm to even the territorial extremities poses danger to the most vital parts, serves the rhetorical purpose of securing responsive allyship from those who could otherwise withdraw safely inland.²⁹

The tyrannical threat of the Lacedaemonian ruler Nabis motivates the development of further visceral bodies politic. In Book 33, legates reporting on the worrisome activities of King Antiochus describe Nabis as “another great evil clinging to the viscera of Greece” (*haerere et aliud in visceribus Graeciae ingens malum*; 33.44.8). Nabis’ tyrannical ambitions threaten the freedom of the entire Greek world: as the legates suggest, he is “tyrant of the Lacedaemonians for now, but soon, if he is allowed, of all Greece” (33.44.8). In the following book, an audience of Greek ambassadors (*omnium civitatum legationes*, 34.48.3) gathered at Corinth lose enthusiasm for Titus Quinctius’ speech celebrating Rome’s liberation of Greece when they are reminded of the continued

28. The collocation of viscera with the vocabulary of burning invokes a suggestive overlap between the anatomical phenomenon of sensation and the sacrificial burning of animal entrails; those parts of sacrificial victims burned as offerings (rather than cooked and consumed) should properly be designated as *exta* (see chapter 1), but see chapters 6–7 on the increasingly porous boundary between *exta* and viscera.

29. Briscoe 1973 *ad* 32.21 identifies elements of Aristaenus’ speech (e.g., his use of *principes* to address his audience) that suggest Livy “is presenting the speech as if it were delivered before the Achaean equivalent of the Roman senate.”

existence of Nabis: “id minime conveniens liberanti Graeciam videbatur tyrannum reliquisse non suae solum patriae gravem sed omnibus circa civitatibus metuendum, haerentem visceribus nobilissimae civitatis” (It seemed not at all fitting for one liberating Greece to have left behind a tyrant who was not only troublesome to his own fatherland but to be feared by all surrounding states, clinging as he was to the viscera of a most excellent one; 34.48.6). These new configurations of the *viscera Graeciae* (viscera of Greece) and the *viscera civitatis* (viscera of the state) both resonate (as Cicero’s new metaphors did) with the medical analogy of disease gripping the viscera. Indeed, the resemblance is robust enough that I would attribute Livy’s language here to an inheritance from Cicero, rather than Polybius, as has been suggested.³⁰ These expressions likewise adapt the visceral body politic (as Aristaenus had) to a Greek context, which calls for the introduction not only of Graecia as a territorial modifier but also of the *civitas* to account for a network of independent city-states more loosely connected than Rome’s centralized *res publica*.

Each of Livy’s receptions of the political figure occurs in a rhetorical context, as orators and their audiences recognize serious threats to the health of various units of political life: whether the viscera belong to Italy, Greece, the Roman republic, or the Greek city-state(s), the figure expresses grave concern about how the security and freedoms of a political body can be destabilized by the behaviors of its own citizens. Varro insists that Fabius and the Roman nobles bore responsibility for bringing the Punic War to Italian soil, a war which the Greek Aristaenus later characterizes as inflicted upon Italy’s viscera; Aristaenus likewise uses the figure to critique the cowardly impulse of the internal strongholds of the Peloponnese to abandon their coastal allies; Nabis’ continued tyranny in Sparta threatens the freedoms of all surrounding Greek communities, as he clings like a disease to the viscera of a single *civitas*. Even in the contexts of foreign wars, the visceral body politic is deployed almost exclusively for the expression of anxieties about problems that originate from within; Livy’s extension of the metaphor to Greek contexts demonstrates both its adaptability to different political systems and its continued relevance for associating traitorous or tyrannical behavior with harm to the most vital parts of a political body.

One final application of viscera to contexts of civic strife occurs in Book 28, when Scipio compares his painful decision to execute the Roman instigators

30. Briscoe 1973 *ad* 33.44.8 asserts that the phrase *haerere . . . in visceribus* derives from a Polybian model; his only citation of similar language in Polybius, however (Pol. 18.43.6: ὁ δὲ Φίλιππος μένη παρὰ πλευράν), uses the πλευρά (“rib” or “side”) as a body part projection meaning “on the flank” with no explicit formulation of the body politic or apparent relation to the thematics of disease.

of the rebellion at Sucro to the ease with which he would punish the foreign mutineers of Ilergetia (28.32.1–5):

Scipio . . . contione advocata multis verbis in perfidiam rebellantium regulorum invecus, nequaquam eodem animo se ire professus est ad vindicandum id scelus quo civilem errorem nuper sanaverit. tum se haud secus quam viscera secantem sua cum gemitu et lacrimis triginta hominum capitibus expiasset octo milium seu imprudentiam seu noxam: nunc laeto et erecto animo ad caedem Ilergetum ire. non enim eos neque natos in eadem terra nec ulla secum societate iunctos esse.

Scipio . . . with an assembly called, having inveighed with many words against the treachery of the petty rulers in rebellion, declared that by no means did he approach the punishment of that crime with the same spirit as when he recently healed the civil betrayal. At that time [he declared], with groaning and tears, hardly otherwise than one cutting out his own viscera had he expiated with the heads of thirty men the ignorance or offense of eight thousand: now, with happy and upright spirit he went to the slaughter of the Ilergetes. For these were neither born in the same land nor joined with him by any alliance.

The capacity of viscera to index close political ties is amplified here by the additional bonds that arise between members of a shared fatherland. That Scipio's execution of his fellow Romans is as excruciating and unnatural as stabbing himself in his own vital organs—and that he openly feels no such qualms about the punishment of foreigners—situates viscera firmly within the contexts of civic strife. Scipio's imagined deflection of physical harm against Romans onto his own vital organs grows from an understanding that a shared birthplace unites them into a single body, and so the viscera of a land's natal citizens find their most salient expression not when foreign enemies attack but in situations where countrymen must harm each other.³¹ As in Cicero and Vergil, Livy's body politic sharpens under conditions of material civil violence into a referent for the most vulnerable vital parts of citizens at war with each other.

31. Hay (2018, 6) situates this moment among a larger aesthetics of body horror in Livy's third pentad: "This repeated identification of the body politic with the actual human body, and in particular a violated body (as Scipio graphically describes), shows how attention to materiality and corporeality is such an important aspect of the work's aesthetic mode; it is a messy narrative of blood and guts, of bodies rather than abstractions."

Visceral Politics in Late Republican Contexts

Viscera's political metaphorization occurred in parallel with the heightened (and ultimately justified) anxieties about civil war that attended Roman politics and political discourses throughout the 1st century BCE. The gradual collapse of republican governance had, of course, begun long before Cicero uncovered the Catilinarian conspiracy, as formerly strict term limits and other policies meant to restrict the excessive acquisition of political capital by individuals grew weaker by the year.³² The threat of Roman civil war had recently manifested in the gruesome conflict between Marius and Sulla in the 80s BCE, not to mention the Social War between Rome and her Italian allies (91–87 BCE) and the more distant political violence surrounding Saturninus (100 BCE) and the Gracchi (133, 121 BCE).³³ These events provide an important backdrop for the emergence of the visceral body politic in the late 60s, as Cicero evaluated the potential for a seditious conspiracy to amplify into a civil crisis, and justify its recurrence in his oratory up to and including the 40s, as he saw Rome plunged into the very civil war that he had been anticipating for decades. After the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, Cicero suddenly found himself having to “persuade a reluctant Roman elite that civil war was necessary to restore the traditional order of the state” (Stevenson and Wilson 2008, 9); the *Philippicae*, in particular, represent an active intervention into the contemporary politics of civil war.³⁴ They were composed and delivered in the midst of “an internal political crisis, the magnitude of which was unparalleled at Rome” (Evans 2008, 78).

We therefore observe the earliest instantiations of the visceral body politic developing within one statesman's rhetorical agenda during moments of progressively urgent crisis in Roman political history.³⁵ Cicero invoked the figure

32. The lifetime one-term limit on the consulship, for example, was a distant memory by Cicero's time, especially after Gaius Marius' seventh election to the office (in 86 BCE).

33. For a thorough explication of how Roman civil war indicated the breakdown of republican principles of governance in addition to eventually ensuring their demise, see Flower (2010), who identifies Sulla's dictatorship as an essential turning point in the fall of the republic. Lange (2024) traces the emergence of a new conceptual framework of civil war at Rome during an antebellum period beginning with the end of the Second Punic War.

34. “Cicero's *Philippics* were both attempts to intervene in history and literary records of those historical interventions,” through which he “sought to harness the power of being both the participant in history and the recorder of history, both *actor* and *actor*” (Stevenson and Wilson 2008, 7–8). These circumstances position Cicero well to engage in the active interventions of semantic innovation.

35. For the development of the seemingly related concept *bellum intestinum*, “internal war,” under similarly urgent conditions of changing warfare at Rome, see Lange (2024, 95–110), who argues (*contra* Jal 1963, 32–35) that the phrase *bellum intestinum* ought not to be conflated with civil war, but refers specifically to rebellion and conflicts against allies occurring within Roman territory but not involving violence between Roman citizens. To conflate the two based on the

for the prosecution of personal rivalries, but these nearly always coincided with the documentation of truly grave threats to the republic, as he attacked political enemies like Catiline, Clodius, and Antony for their allegedly treasonous conduct.³⁶ Cicero seems primarily to cultivate this political metaphor in order to strengthen his audience's allegiance to the leaders and values with whom he currently aligns himself. These values, of course, grow more complex over time; the clarity and ease of condemning the leader of a self-contained conspiracy gives way, especially in the wake of Caesar's assassination, to uncertain jockeying for political capital in a system whose adherence to republican principles of governance had long since begun to fail. Cicero could, however, have been gesturing simultaneously toward something much bigger than his personal enmities with other politically ambitious statesmen. Of Cicero's proclamation that even after Catiline's removal the disease would cling to the veins and viscera of the republic, Batstone (1994, 263) emphasizes Cicero's implication "that there was something bigger than Catiline, more durative but hidden in the body politic . . . the real danger was not just a possible resurgence of revolutionary efforts; it was the state's inability to cohere in speech, judgment and action for the public good."

Even as he deploys the word in rhetorical attacks on his political adversaries, Cicero consistently nuances viscera into a diagnostic instrument for larger symptoms of civic disharmony. The viscera of the state and of its people are imagined consistently as vulnerable to political threats from within, while the public rejection of state enemies is embodied in the lingering presence of loyal statesmen within the viscera of the people. This decades-long evolution of viscera as political metaphor ultimately imbues the word with indelible ties to civil discord and abuses of state power, from a conspiracy to overturn a legitimate election to the misappropriation of state funds to the surfacing of true physical dangers posed to real Roman citizen bodies by civil war. Cicero appears to invent and elaborate the political metaphor in order to censure those who, as he sees it, fail to respect the principles of republican governance or selfishly exploit the weaknesses in the system; his activation of the word's "somatic tinge"³⁷ emphasizes the vulnerability of the republic to internal threats and presents the Roman people as both possessing and embodying the vital organs of the state.

apparent body metaphor in *intestinum* (a word which can denote the lower internal organs), Lange emphasizes, "incorrectly flattens different types of conflict in Rome" (97).

36. Evans (2008) has pointed out that Catiline and Clodius dominate the *Philippicae* "in a way unique to Cicero's *corpus*" (62), as the orator draws pointed parallels between Antony and these former enemies. I would suggest that the recurrence of the visceral body politic constitutes yet another rhetorical link between the three.

37. I borrow this phrase from Ruth Padel (see introduction).

In correlation with the new developments in Roman political life that followed Octavian's final victory at Actium (31 BCE), Vergil incorporates the *viscera patriae* into a prophecy of civil strife to come; although figured into the discourses of a distant, legendary past, this expanded vision of Rome's body politic nevertheless speaks directly to the civil wars of the author's own lifetime. In writing his histories of the Punic and Macedonian wars, Livy adapts the metaphor to enumerate the central importance of the body politic at other levels of governance (the *civitas*, *Italia*, and *Graecia*, in addition to the *res publica*), as well as the crucial bonds between members of these shared units of political life. Livy and Vergil demonstrate a broader literary acceptance of Cicero's semantic innovation and the primary contexts in which it appears: the viscera of a political entity surface most effectively in reaction to internal conflict, where they represent the vulnerable inner workings of an endangered civic body. Through the rhetorical, poetic, and historiographical interventions of these authors, the word *viscera* becomes not merely a political symbol, but a meaningful signifier of civic discord.

PART 2



Reproduction

CHAPTER 3



Womb Words and Kinship Metaphors

Viscera's expansion into the semantic domain of reproduction, where it acts as a referent for both wombs and children, first appears in the extant record in literature of the Augustan era. Both new figures, which I refer to as the “visceral womb” and the “visceral child,” seem to be Ovidian innovations. The frequency and distinctiveness of these reproductive metaphors as they surface throughout Ovid’s corpus are remarkable; if he did not invent the figures himself,¹ he undoubtedly played a dominant role in their entry into the Latin lexicon of fertility. While several Ovidian commentators have remarked on individual examples of these metaphorical viscera, observing that they appear in “charged contexts” or “for shock effect,”² a systematic reading of their appearances in Ovid has not yet been undertaken.³

Through a detailed study of the innovative reproductive valences of viscera in Ovid, I propose in the following three chapters a more nuanced interpretation of the word’s significance within Latin’s vocabulary of procreation. My comprehensive examination of Ovidian viscera confirms a forceful pattern of usage: wombs and children in Ovid that are represented by the word viscera appear exclusively in contexts of horrifying domestic and civic violence, involving the violation of both physical boundaries and familial bonds. Violence between immediate family members—the absolute taboos of matricide, patricide, fratri-

1. Bömer (1976, 173) dismisses claims that Ovid derived the images from rhetoric or common vernacular; given the incomplete state of the record, however, we can never be entirely certain (see introduction).

2. Knox (1995, 272) and Fantham (1998, 133), respectively.

3. Bömer (1976, 173) notes the figure’s originality and plasticity, but also characterizes it as not entirely tasteful, taking its repetition throughout Ovid’s oeuvre as evidence of the author’s self-satisfaction with his own wit. Jacobson comes closest to a fuller thematic reading of Ovidian viscera, though his remarks appear only in a footnote: in response to Palmer (1898) “casually cit[ing] a series of instances” where viscera means son or daughter, Jacobson suggests that Palmer “misses the essential character of this usage.” After pointing out that each of Palmer’s citations refers to a parent killing or sleeping with their child, Jacobson suggests briefly that “the use of viscera, ‘one’s own flesh and blood,’ is deliberately and cogently pointed” (1974, 171n36).

cide, and filicide—consistently attend the appearance of these new metaphors. I argue that the semantic expansion through which viscera become a comprehensible vehicle for denoting reproductive bodies, appearing precisely under such conditions of intrafamilial bloodshed, yields an unmistakable correlation between reproduction and domestic discord. Building on viscera's Ciceronian association with violence and civil conflict, I contend, Ovid's reconfiguration of the word into a reproductive metaphor is constructed in pointed resistance to the pro-fertility, post-civil-war discourses of Augustus' nascent empire.

Before examining these Ovidian figures in detail, I must first demonstrate how these innovative metaphors could have been legible to Roman readers. I therefore explore in this chapter the other Latin words that were used, figuratively or otherwise, to denote wombs and children, including conceptualizations of the earth as a generative mother and possible Greek precedents for reproductive viscera. While Ovid was not the first to employ body metaphors for reproductive organs and kinship relations, I emphasize that his particular brand of visceral imagery is predicated on violent connotations that are absent from previous Latin figures of speech taking the womb and children as their primary referents.

Latin Designations for the Womb

Uterus would have been the so-called *vox propria* for the womb and seems to have been the preferred term in Latin before Ovid; other Latin words in common usage for the womb include *venter* and *alvus*, both of which are applied with regularity to male bodies (for the “belly”) and therefore frequently appear in conjunction with lexical indices of pregnancy and motherhood when they are meant to refer specifically to the womb.⁴ *Uterus*, *alvus*, and *venter* are the most common selections in high-register poetry.⁵ *Vulva*, which is the term of choice in medical texts,⁶ appears also in some epigram and satire (e.g., Mart. 11.61.11, Juv. 2.32). Indeed, Adams (1982, 101–2) suggests that while *vulva* “came into rivalry with *uterus* as the specialised word for the womb in the early

4. Adams (1982, 100–109). These indices include adjectives like *gravidus* (pregnant), *gravis* (heavy), *maternus* (maternal), *maturus* (ripe, as for delivery), and *tumidus* (swollen); nouns like *onus* (burden) and *pondus* (weight); and possessors like *matris* and *genetricis* (both meaning “of the mother”).

5. Adams (1980, 54) compares relative usages of these terms in Latin epic and satire.

6. For both Scribonius Largus and Celsus, *vulva* outnumbers *uterus* by a considerable margin. Other instances of *vulva* for womb in scientific writing include Sen. *Nat.* 3.25.11 and Plin. *Nat.* 23.152.

Empire,” there remained “stylistic distinction” between the two, such that *vulva* never appeared in formal prose or the upper poetic registers. The term *matrix* at some point extended its original meaning, “breeding animal,”⁷ to make reference to the human womb, but like *vulva* its usages were limited to genres pulling from technical or colloquial vocabularies (Adams 1982, 105–6).

The above summary of Latin designations for the womb leans heavily on Adams’ *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, which contains the most comprehensive treatment available in the scholarship. It is tremendously significant that Adams omits viscera entirely from his catalogue of words for the womb.⁸ Perhaps we can attribute this omission to the abundance of attestations available for words like uterus, venter, alvus, vulva, and matrix, which allows Adams to document the origins and evolving meanings of these terms across registers. That meaningful quantity of textual evidence does not exist for viscera as a referent for the womb, especially since this usage does not emerge until the Augustan period. Ovid’s transformation of viscera into a designation for the womb, I emphasize, is a marked departure from lexical precedent across all registers of the textual record.

The scarcity of extant medical texts in Latin means our evidence for viscera’s precise anatomical referents is limited, but we can confirm that medical and technical writers who discuss the womb do not use the word viscera to identify it.⁹ Given that Ovid (b. 43 BCE) and Celsus (b. 25 BCE) were contemporaries, it is worth noting that Celsus’ medical treatise explicitly distinguishes the womb from the viscera (4.1).¹⁰ Other discussions in Latin of medical processes involving the womb appear in sources like Pliny the Elder, who engages on a superficial level with technical medical language but does not claim specific authority as a medical writer. Pliny sticks to the *vox propria*, including in contexts where the womb is physically violated: infants born via incision rather than vaginal birth, for example, emerge from the mother’s vivisected *uterus* (*a caeso matris utero*, *Nat.* 7.47).

Like venter and alvus, the word viscera typically designates an area of the body that is in close proximity to, but does not necessarily include, the womb. Ovid’s semantic innovation therefore relies on the mechanism of metonymization, based on the anatomical proximity of the uterus to the vital organs and,

7. OLD s.v. *matrix* 1 includes animal species both mammalian and oviparous; cf. TLL s.v. *matrix* I.A.1.a and I.B.

8. André (1991, 188–93) also examines anatomical vocabulary for the womb; like Adams, he omits viscera from this discussion.

9. See chapter 1.

10. Celsus’ avoidance of viscera for the womb is also notable in the context of his persistent avoidance of any figurative designations for female sexual organs; see Von Staden (1991, 291), who suggests that “Celsus’ version of the female body is noteworthy . . . for so consistently muting its metaphorical noise level?”

perhaps, the conceptual nexus between the integrity of existing life and the creation of new life.¹¹ This refinement of meaning produced by Ovid's use of viscera to represent the womb is likewise informed, as I argue in chapters 4 and 5, by an inextricable association with domestic and civic violence.

Visceral Topography and Mother Earth

An important step toward the semantic connection between viscera and the womb seems to have occurred when representations of the earth as generative mother interacted with newer topographical metaphors framing the inner parts of the earth as its viscera. Before Ovid's time, the fertile earth had long been imagined in Greco-Roman cultures as a reproductive female body.¹² This concept dates back at least to archaic Greek theogonies which frame Gaia as divine mother,¹³ with deeper roots in more ancient Indo-European myths of creation.¹⁴ In the Latin tradition, references to Mother Earth (*terra mater*) appear as early as the 2nd century BCE and probably derive from Greek models.¹⁵ Lucretius employs the metaphor in his description of the processes by which nature generates new life (1.250–53):

postremo pereunt imbres, ubi eos pater aether
in gremium matris terrai praecipitavit;
at nitidae surgunt fruges ramique virescunt
arboribus, crescunt ipsae fetuque gravantur.

Afterward the rains pass on, when father air has precipitated into the lap of mother earth; but rich fruits arise and branches flourish on the trees, which themselves grow and are weighed down by their produce.

11. André (1991, 256–58) discusses the widespread phenomenon of transference in anatomical words, which often results from spatial or conceptual contiguity, as it surfaces in Latin. He includes the use of *venter* for the womb among his examples.

12. Dieterich (1925, 36–72 for Greek evidence, 73–81 for Roman evidence), and see esp. 75 for prevalence of the figure in Latin funerary inscriptions.

13. E.g., Hes. *Theog.* 45–46; Hes. *Op.* 563 (γῆ πάντων μήτηρ, “Earth, mother of all”); *Hom. Hymn* 30 (to Gaia).

14. West (2007, 175–78) reconstructs Indo-European traditions of earth as divine mother through evidence from Hittite, Vedic, Greek, Anatolian, Armenian, Germanic, Celtic, and Slavic cultures. Note that the concept of an earth mother goddess is not limited to Indo-European cultures—e.g., the Hawaiian goddess Papahānaumoku or the Akan goddess Asase Yaa.

15. See Weinstock's comprehensive entry for *Terra Mater, Tellus* in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Band V.A1, 791–806); after careful disentanglement of *Tellus* and *Terra* in religious contexts (with correction of their uncritical conflation in previous scholarship), Weinstock concludes that “*Terra mater* ohne das griechische Vorbild undenkbar ist” (801). See also Keith (2000, 36–64).

Lucretius later explores the figure's origins in more ancient cultural practice. After affirming that “[the earth] alone has been called the great mother of the gods and the mother of wild beasts and the mother of our body” (*magna deum mater materque ferarum / et nostri genetrix haec dicta est corporis una*; 2.598–99) because it contains the ingredients from which all things grow (2.589–97), he connects this language to the Phrygian worship of Cybele and the common practice of using the names of divinities as metonyms for tangible objects (as in Neptune for the ocean or Bacchus for wine). In the end, Lucretius emphasizes the conceptual usefulness of the metaphor, so long as one remembers that religion is false: “*concedamus ut hic terrarum dictitet orbem / esse deum matrem, dum vera re tamen ipse / religione animum turpi contingere parcat*” (Let us concede that one may assert the earth to be the mother of the gods, so long as in reality he still spares his mind contact with foul religious superstition; 2.658–60).¹⁶

The word *viscera* seems first to enter the lexicon of topography in Vergil's *Aeneid*, as Aeneas describes his first impressions of Sicily's rather explosive landscape (3.571–76):

sed horrificis iuxta tonat Aetna ruinis,
interdumque atram prorumpit ad aethera nubem
turbine fumantem piceo et candente favilla,
attollitque globos flammarum et sidera lambit;
interdum scopulos avulsaque viscera montis
erigit eructans.

But Aetna thunders nearby with dreadful quakes and sporadically expels a dark cloud into the air, smoking in a pitch-black whirl of glowing ash, and it lifts high spheres of flame and licks the stars; intermittently it rises, belching forth boulders and the torn away viscera of the mountain.

From this initial metaphorical framework (the mountain is a body, and so its inmost parts are its viscera),¹⁷ the body-part projection expands into the

16. For Lucretius' use of the “Mother Earth” image as allegory/metaphor, see Gale (1994, 39–41) and Taylor (2020, 64–69). Nugent (1994, 183–86) emphasizes the “fundamental conjunction” in Lucretius “between this *terra/mater* figure and childbearing” (183).

17. Servius (*ad* 3.575) compares the expression *ossa terrae* (the bones of the earth). The personification of earth as mother produced numerous distinct body metaphors, as in the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, who are instructed to throw the *ossa magnae parentis* (bones of the great parent; *Ov. Met.* 1.383) behind their backs to repopulate the earth after the flood. Deucalion interprets: “*magna parens terra est; lapides in corpore terrae / ossa reor dici; iacere hos post terga iubemur*” (Our great parent is the earth; I believe that stones are called the bones in the body of the earth; we are ordered to cast these behind our backs; *Met.* 1.393–94.)

broader concept of the *viscera terrae* (viscera of the earth), which eventually becomes a standard expression used to denote the earth's inner depths.¹⁸ Mining for precious metals becomes an entry into the earth's viscera, as in Ovid's account of the declining ages of man (itum est in viscera terrae, *Met.* 1.138).¹⁹ In *De Re Rustica*, Columella frames agricultural tools as injuring the earth's body (10.69–73), including her viscera:

pellite nunc somnos et curvi vomere dentis
iam virides lacerate comas, iam scindite amictus.
tu gravibus rastris cunctantia perfode terga,
tu penitus latis eradere viscera marris²⁰
ne dubita.

Now drive off sleep and with the curve-toothed ploughshare now tear her green hair, now rip her cloak. You, with heavy rakes dig through her resistant back, you, do not hesitate to scrape away her viscera deep within with broad mattocks.

Some form of cross-pollination between the primordial personification of earth as fertile mother and this newer pattern of representing strata beneath the earth's surface as viscera seems to have contributed to the figure of the *viscera terrae* [*matris*] ("the viscera of [mother] earth"): not quite explicitly a womb, but certainly entangled with generative motherhood. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when the world's rivers and lakes flee the boiling heat of Phaethon's chariot ride, they withdraw *in opacae viscera matris* (into the viscera of their dark mother, 2.274); as Keith (2000, 52) notes of this passage, Ovid "deploys imagery drawn from human anatomy . . . and specifically female reproductive anatomy (*viscera matris*) to map the physical features of an anthropomorphic mother Earth." In narrating the Earth's generation of new life after the flood, Ovid even constructs an analogy between soil and womb: "fecundaque semina rerum, / vivaci nutrita solo ceu matris in alvo, / creverunt" (and the fertile seeds of things, nourished by living soil as though in a mother's womb, grew; *Met.* 1.419–21).

18. The popularity of this phrase appears to peak in the Flavian period, with frequent use by Statius, Silius Italicus, and Pliny the Elder.

19. Later descriptions of mining integrate reference to the earth's generative relation to humans (e.g., "in parentis viscera intravit suae / deterior aetas. eruit ferrum grave / aurumque," A worse age entered into the viscera of their own parent. They dug up heavy iron and gold; [Sen.] *Oct.* 416–18).

20. Note the alternate reading *matris* for *marris*, which appears in several manuscripts but seems unlikely given the narrator's previous repudiation of the earth as mother to the current race of men ("nescia plebs generis matri ne parcite falsae. / ista Prometheae genetrix fuit altera cretae; / altera nos enixa parens," Common folk ignorant of your own race, do not show mercy to the false mother. She was the mother of Promethean clay; a different parent bore us; Col. 10.58–60).

Three related concepts coalesce here—*terra mater*, *viscera terrae*, *viscera matris*—none of which independently posits the metaphor *viscera* = womb, but which in combination provide a legible foundation for that figure’s development. While the antiquity of *terra mater* is clear, the relative chronology of the latter two ideas is muddy, especially since they both appear first in Ovid. These and other examples of the earth’s visceral motherhood will be elaborated at length in chapters 4 and 5; for now, it is sufficient to note that the prevalence of “Mother Earth” in the Roman imagination paved the way for Ovid’s linking of the word *viscera* to maternal generation.

Figurative Children

The Roman preoccupation with lineage and kinship is reflected in a great wealth of designations in Latin for children and descendants. In addition to *voces propriae* like *filius/a* (son/daughter), *liber* (child), *natus/a* (son/daughter), *nepos* (grandchild or nephew), *proles* (descendant), and *progenies* (lineage),²¹ Latin makes copious use of metaphor to describe progeny and future generations, as in the words *pignus* (pledge), *stirps* (root), *saeculum* (generation), and *spes* (hope).²² Most relevant for my purposes are two metaphors based on the fluids of the corporeal body: *sanguis* (blood) and *semen* (seed). The connection between essential, life-giving products of the body (blood and semen) and lines of descent, and in particular the genetic ties between parents and children, builds a significant foundation for the development of the Ovidian *viscera-as-child* metaphor.

Sanguis is a common metaphor for family relations (“blood” relations, as the comparable English expression goes) which often applies in a narrower sense to children and descendants.²³ It appears for a parent as early as Ennius

21. These terms are inevitably more complex than in-text English glosses can show; Wiedemann (1989, 32–34) covers the nuanced differences between them. On Latin kinship terminology (including for extended kin), see Bush (1971).

22. *OLD* s.v. *pignus* 4: “applied to children as the guarantee of the reality of a marriage”; *stirps* 5: “a person’s offspring or posterity”; *saeculum* 8: “(pl.) future ages, posterity”; *spes* 5b: “applied to offspring as the embodiment of one’s hopes for the future.” By unfortunate alphabetical coincidence, *pignus* is the only of these terms yet covered by the *TLL*, whose relevant subdefinition for *pignus* (II.A.2.b) reads “qui cari sunt, imprimis de liberis . . . fort. ita nominantur, quia homines eis amandis constringuntur, maxime parentes” (Those who are dear, especially used of children . . . perhaps they are designated in this way because people are bound by loving them, especially parents).

23. *OLD* s.v. *sanguis* 10: “A person or persons standing in blood relationship, (usu.) offspring, progeny.” Cf. s.v. 8: “Blood regarded as running through a family, race, etc., and expressing relationship, parentage, or descent” On the importance of blood to kinship ties in Rome, esp. the concept of *consanguinitas*, see Guastella (1985); see also Moreau (2006) and Harders (2013). On blood in ancient medical theory and its relation to reproduction, see Gourevitch (1993).

("o pater, o genitor, o sanguen dis oriundum," Oh father, oh begetter, oh blood arisen from the gods; *Ann.* 108 Skutsch) and is picked up by both Vergil and Horace.²⁴ Sanguis is used of children also in republican prose. In *De Finibus*, for example, Cicero's interlocutor Torquatus frames the violence of his ancestors against their own children as a form of cruelty "in liberos atque in sanguinem suum" (against their children and their own blood; 1.34). He refers to two fathers who harshly punished their offspring, one who beheaded his son (1.23) and another who repudiated his son for accepting bribes (1.24). It is evident that sanguis, treated here as parallel to liberi and invoked as corporeal metonym for offspring, can serve as a rhetorically charged figure in contexts of intrafamilial conflict. Because blood invokes the intimate connection between parent and child that is grounded in shared lineage, to characterize a child as his parent's sanguis renders episodes of violence or betrayal between them all the more dreadful.

Semen, too—generative seed, or more precisely (in human or animal terms) the bodily fluid responsible for generation—can appear as a metaphor for offspring, referring to kin relations as specific as one's immediate descendants or as broad as an entire shared lineage.²⁵ Vergil, for example, describes lion cubs as "saeva leonum / semina" (the savage seeds of lions; *G.* 2.151–52); Seneca presents Hercules madly misidentifying his own children as "the progeny of an enemy king, the unspeakable seed of Lycus" (*proles regis inimici . . . / Lyci nefandum semen*; *Her. F.* 987–88); Cicero broadens *semen* to encompass the entire Roman bloodline: "virtus . . . quae propria est Romani generis et seminis" (manly character, which is the peculiar possession of the Roman race and seed; *Phil.* 4.13).²⁶ Since *semen*, like sanguis, marks biological or cultural kinship, children are frequently designated as their parents' or ancestors' "blood" and "seed"—but it is not until Ovid that they become their parents' viscera.

Greek Precedents

Although cross-linguistic comparisons are not the focus of this monograph, the semantic field of viscera has a near enough equivalent in the Greek word σπλάγχνα to deserve some attention here. Like viscus, σπλάγχνον appears pri-

24. Verg. *A.* 6.835: "proice tela manu, sanguis meus" (cast the weapons from your hand, my blood), in this sense applying broadly to Anchises' descendants; note the proximity of this line to the *viscera patriae* (6.833) discussed in chapter 2. Hor. *Carm.* 2.20.5–6: "ego pauperum / sanguis parentum" (I am the blood of humble parents).

25. *OLD* s.v. *semen* 5b: "offspring, seed: a race, breed."

26. N.b. Fedeli 1982 reads *nominis* (name) for *seminis*.

marily in the plural and refers concretely to interior parts of the body or the edible flesh of sacrificial animals.²⁷ Ovid's innovative application of viscera to the womb does have a correlated precedent in Greek, though this usage is comparatively rare and not universally connected to domestic violence. Pindar uses *σπλάγχων* twice with unmistakable reference to a pregnant womb. In *Olympian* 6, the infant Iamos is born from the *σπλάγχνα* of Euadne; that *σπλάγχνα* stands in for the womb is evident from its pairing with birth pangs (ὕπο σπλάγγων ὑπ' ᾠδίνος τ'; 43). The same formulation appears in *Nemean* 1 of Herakles' birth from Alcmene (*σπλάγγων ὑπο ματέρος*; 35).²⁸ The metonym is clear in both cases, dependent on the same anatomical proximity between uterus and interior organs that makes viscera a legible stand-in for the womb, with the additional modifier *ματέρος* ("of the mother"; cf. *viscera matris*) further clarifying the word's association with female reproductive organs. In these passages, there is no clear association between *σπλάγχνα* as womb and the contexts of familial violence that trigger the visceral wombs of Ovid.

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, *σπλάγχνα* appear to refer to male generative organs, as Tiresias informs Creon that his son ("one from your own *σπλάγχνα*," τῶν σῶν αὐτὸς ἐκ σπλάγγων ἔνα) will soon die (1066).²⁹ Responsibility for Haemon's death can be traced to his father's behavior; indeed, the play ends with Creon's exclamation that his son's death was the fault of his own, not Haemon's, poor decisions (ἀπελύθης, / ἐμαῖς οὐδὲ σαῖσι δυσβουλιαῖς; 1268–69). The image from line 1066, then, which frames the relationship between Creon and Haemon as one of generative organs, prefigures the Ovidian triangulation of viscera, violence, and reproduction. Since Ovid's visceral language gravitates toward generation from the female body rather than the male,³⁰ the characteristic Ovidian womb metaphor may be understood as combining the sense of *σπλάγχνα* as womb (as it appears in Pindar) with the violent context that justifies its appearance in Tiresias' warning.

27. On the specific contours of *σπλάγχνα* in sacrificial contexts, especially in relation to other words for animal entrails (ἔντερα, ἔγκατα), see Vernant (1979, 45n1); despite this word's semantic overlap with viscera, the two are not perfect equivalents, nor do the distinctions between viscera and exta in Latin correspond with any precision to those between *σπλάγχνα* and other words for entrails in Greek.

28. Braswell (1992 *ad N.* 1.35) suggests that ὑπο is the appropriate preposition for childbirth performed in a kneeling or seated position.

29. Griffith (1999, 306) calls this connection between male generation and *σπλάγχνα* "novel and striking." Müller (1967) translates "von deinem Fleisch und Blut" (231); Blondell (1998), "a child of your own flesh and blood" (64); Belloni (2014), "un morto delle tue viscere" (161). *OLD* s.v. *viscus* 3c identifies the potential for reference to the testicles, but citations for this meaning are sparse.

30. Or at least from a womb-like structure rather than a phallus or testicles; see chapters 4 and 5 on Ovid's treatment of the male belly-as-womb for Tereus and Saturn.

Also relevant is the adjective *ὁμόσπλαγχνος* (of the same *σπλάγχνα*), a poetic term roughly equivalent in meaning to *ὁμογάστριος*. Like *venter* and *alvus*, *γαστήρ* (properly, “belly”) could designate the womb by virtue of anatomical proximity; those who were *ὁμογάστριοι* were thus blood kin, because born of the same body. The descriptor *ὁμόσπλαγχνος*, though exceedingly rare, operates in the same way, evidently through a similar logic of spatial contiguity. In Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*, as the chorus laments the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices at each other’s hands, the two brothers are described as pierced through “sides that shared a womb” (*ὁμοσπλάγχμων . . . πλευρωμάτων*; 889–90).³¹ The heroine of Sophocles’ *Antigone* uses the same adjective in her declaration that “there is no shame in honoring one’s siblings” (*οὐδὲν γὰρ αἰσχρὸν τοὺς ὁμοσπλάγχμους σέβειν*; 511). The appearance of this compound form of *σπλάγχνα* in association with the Theban saga, especially in moments that reflect on the deadly fraternal discord between Oedipus’ sons, offers another significant precursor to Ovid’s play with viscera, where shared wombs become visceral in the context of fratricide.

An instance of *σπλάγχνα* as womb appearing on a (post-Ovidian) *cippus* presents evidence that the figure of speech in its Greek form may eventually have circulated in Rome.³² The funerary verse inscription, in iambic trimeter,³³ commemorates a stillborn infant and its mother who died in childbirth:

Ῥουφίνα Κέλερος ἐξ Ἄριστεί | νης τ’ ἔφυν, | ζωὴ δὲ πλείων μητρὸς ἐν
| σπλάγχμοις ἐμή· | ὠδεῖνα λύπης δ’ ἠ τεκοῦσ’ ἠλλάξατο. | πρώτην
ὁδὸν δὲ στέλλο | μαι πρὸς Αἶδαν, | κλῆρον δὲ μητρὸς τῶιδε | κληρουχῶ
τάφωι· | στήληι δὲ φωνῶ ἀνταγωνίας βίου.³⁴

I was born Rufina, child of Celer and Aristeina, but my entire existence was in the *σπλάγχνα* of my mother, and when she gave birth she exchanged birth pangs for suffering. I set out on my first journey to the house of Hades, and I share with this tomb the lot of my mother, and I voice with this stele the adversity of life.

31. Müller (1967, 127) identifies the adjective as the product of “aischyleische Neubildung” motivated by the author’s desire for an iambic equivalent to *ὁμογάστριος*. Hutchinson (1985, 194) calls its usage here a “graphic epithet.”

32. The *cippus* itself does not survive, but a line drawing from the late nineteenth century preserves the inscription. Peek (1955, 288) dates it to the 1st–2nd century CE.

33. With the exception of the first line which, not unusually for verse inscriptions, breaks metrical convention to allow for an unmetrical name. See Petrovic (2016, 365–67).

34. *IGUR* III 1322. Printed here is Kaibel’s 1878 edition. The reading of the final clause is contested.

Here, σπλάγχνα appears for the womb in a context where the infant's birth and the mother's life have been interrupted by death. This use of σπλάγχνα, which links reproduction to destruction rather than generation, may have its earliest roots in Aeschylus and Sophocles, but the later date and the Roman context of this cippus means that the inscription could also have been influenced by Ovid's innovations.

Though Greek epinician and tragedy allow for the word σπλάγχνα to refer specifically to the womb, this usage is not clearly attested in the extant Greek-language gynecological texts, despite their hyperfocus on the anatomy of the female reproductive system, for which they generally prefer technical terms like μήτρα and ὑστέρα or euphemisms like τὰ γεννητικὰ μόρια ("the generative parts"; see, e.g., Galen's remarks on terminology at the beginning of *De uteri dissectione*). This fact is of particular importance for my purposes, since many of the medical texts circulating at Rome were written in Greek.³⁵ Soranus' *Gyn-aikeia*, a detailed source on women's medicine that covers fertility, pregnancy, and childbirth, does not use σπλάγχνα to designate the womb. Soranus does, however, in his discussion of the various terminologies for the womb, identify a spatial proximity and perhaps even a broad categorical connection between womb and σπλάγχνα (1.6):

Ἡ μήτρα καὶ ὑστέρα λέγεται καὶ δελφύς· μήτρα μὲν οὖν, ὅτι μήτηρ ἐστὶ πάντων τῶν ἐξ αὐτῆς γεννωμένων ἐμβρύων, ἢ ὅτι τὰς ἐχούσας αὐτὴν μητέρας ποιεῖ, κατὰ δὲ τινὰς, ὅτι μέτρον ἔχει χρόνου πρὸς κάθαρσιν καὶ ἀπότεξιν· ὑστέρα δὲ διὰ τὸ ὕστερον ἀποδιδόναί τὰ ἑαυτῆς ἐνεργήματα, ἢ διὰ τὸ ἐσχάτην κεῖσθαι πάντων τῶν σπλάγχνων, εἰ καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἀκρίβειαν ἀλλὰ κατὰ πλάτος.

[The uterus] is called *mētra* and *hystera* and *delphys*: *mētra* because it is the mother [*mētēr*] of all embryos born from it, or because it makes those who possess it into mothers, and for some because it holds the measure [*metron*] of time for menses and birth. It is called *hystera* because it produces its labors later [*to hysteron*], or because it lies at the last extremity of all the *splanchna*, in broad if not precise terms.

It is not entirely clear whether Soranus means to identify the uterus as a constituent part of the σπλάγχνα or merely to indicate its spatial proximity to them. The subsequent "more or less" style qualification (εἰ καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἀκρίβειαν

35. Among them a great volume of works by Soranus and Galen, dating to the 2nd century CE.

ἀλλὰ κατὰ πλάτος) also undercuts any precision implied by the previous clause. Though Soranus offers no further clarification,³⁶ his reference to σπλάγχνα in connection with terminologies for the womb at least affirms an association—even if only a spatial one—between the uterus and the organs included within the semantic field of σπλάγχνα.³⁷

Since the tragic dimensions of Ovid's mythmaking suggest close reading of Greek dramatists like Aeschylus and Sophocles,³⁸ while some allusions to Pindar within his corpus recommend his familiarity with the poet,³⁹ it is very likely that Ovid encountered these reproductive usages of σπλάγχνα and that they served as semantic stepping stones toward the development of the Ovidian visceral womb. The evidence for σπλάγχνα as children, on the other hand, is both more sparse and less ancient, leaving open the possibility that visceral children were a uniquely Ovidian invention. The earliest extant example of the word σπλάγχνα standing in for children survives, in fact, in the firmly post-Ovidian author Artemidorus. According to his *Oneirocritica*, a second century CE work on dream interpretations, a dream of one's own dissection, in which one views his own insides in the proper arrangement, can be symbolic of children. To support this point, Artemidorus adds that "children are called σπλάγχνα, that is, entrails" (οἱ παῖδες σπλάγχνα λέγονται ὡς ἐντόσθια; 1.44).⁴⁰ It is unclear to what sources this generalizing λέγονται refers.⁴¹ It may be the case that the metaphor was common folk-knowledge or widespread in oral communication.

36. A later translation into Latin of Soranus' text reformulates the grammar to clarify that the womb is a constituent part of the category in question, but notably translates with *intestina* rather than viscera: "Grece etiam ystera appellatur, id est novissima, eo quod novissima omnium in intestinis iaceat" (Drabkin and Drabkin 1951, 3). The surviving corpus of medical texts written in Greek is vast, but generally speaking σπλάγχνα does not appear in proximity to nomenclature for female anatomy, as one might expect it to do if the word maintained a strong semantic connection to the womb. Rufus of Ephesus, for example, who in a treatise on naming the body aims to articulate a comprehensive terminology for human anatomy, never mentions σπλάγχνα in his thorough catalogue of women's reproductive parts (*Onom.* 109–12; 186–96; 229–32).

37. The medical theory of the wandering womb also refrains from engaging with the term σπλάγχνα. Medical writers tend to quote Plato on this subject, for whom the womb is called μήτρα or ὑστέρα even as it wanders "like an animal, desirous of child-making, all throughout the body" (ζῶον ἐπιθυμητικὸν ἐνὸν τῆς παιδοποιίας . . . πλανώμενον πάντη κατὰ τὸ σῶμα, *Pl. Ti.* 91c).

38. For Ovid's reception of Greek tragedy, see e.g., Keith (2002b, 258–68) and Curley (2013).

39. See e.g., Hardie (2002, 295–96) on Ovid's play with Pindar in *Tristia* 3.4a.

40. Harris-McCoy (2012, 445) calls this passage "a sort of metaphorical dissection of the body."

41. Kasprzyk (2010) discusses Artemidorus' dependence on gnomic wisdom.

CHAPTER 4



Abortion and Domestic Violence in Ovid

Throughout the Ovidian landscape, *viscera* materialize persistently to displace *uterus* and *filius* in confluence with an irrepressible inclination of natal relations toward bloody domestic conflict. This chapter surveys instances of reproductive viscera in the Ovidian corpus that manifest in response to, or anticipation of, intrafamilial violence. Visceral wombs, I demonstrate, tend to appear when family members inflict injury upon each other, whether this violence is immediate or fated for the distant future. Ovid's numerous representations of abortion emphasize through visceral vocabulary the precise brand of parental violence that his narrators considered inherent to the act. Viscera are also invoked consistently when parents and grown children violate each other's bodies, especially when such violence is intensified by other social taboos. Fathers cannibalize and commit incest with their visceral children, while conflicts between mothers and sons generate a disturbing convergence of womb and wound.

Case Study: Canace in *Heroides* 11

The eleventh epistle of the *Heroides*, which features a memorable combination of the visceral womb and visceral child metaphors, illustrates the clarity with which Ovid had already developed these figures and attached them to contexts of domestic violence even in the early stages of his career.¹ In this letter, Canace pens a desperate farewell to her lover and brother, Macareus, after their father, Aeolus, has discovered their affair and commanded the exposure of their newborn child. The siblings' relationship is explicitly marked from Canace's perspective as transgressive, both for the violation of familial boundaries ("cur

1. For the date and context of the single *Heroides*, see Thorsen (2014, 9–38). Ovidian authorship is generally accepted for the eleventh epistle. I use the edition of Knox (1995). See Martorana (2024, 114–40) for a recent and compelling explication of this letter in terms of motherhood and the abject body.

umquam plus me, frater, quam frater amasti, / et tibi, non debet quod soror esse, fui," "Why did you ever love me, brother, more than a brother should, and why was I to you what a sister ought not to be?"; 23–24) and for the conception of an illegitimate child ("tumescebant vitiatum pondera ventris," the weight of my violated belly was swelling; 37). The pregnancy, conceived outside the bounds of paternally-approved marriage and within the confines of blood kinship, renders Canace's womb *vitiatus*—an adjective suggesting that her body has been spoiled, corrupted, or deflowered.² When Canace and her nurse try to terminate the pregnancy, their attempt is characterized as an effort to extricate it from her viscera (11.39–42):

quas mihi non herbas, quae non medicamina nutrix
attulit, audaci supposuitque manu,
ut penitus nostris (hoc te celavimus unum)
visceribus crescens excuteretur onus?

What herbs, what drugs did my nurse not bring to me and insert with bold hand, so that from deep within my viscera (this alone I concealed from you) the growing burden might be dislodged?

Herbae and *medicamina* (39) refer to abortifacient substances, while the kinetic bearing of the prefix in *supposuit* (40) suggests the insertion of a pessary.³ That the abortion is attempted in secret (*hoc te celavimus unum*; 41) and boldly (*audaci manu*; 40) discloses a general apprehension about the endeavor.⁴ The identification of the pregnancy as a *furtivum onus* (a "secret/stolen burden," 38) suggests that primary concern is rooted in the violation of patriarchal rights implicit in the siblings' affair: it is Aeolus' prerogative to select a husband for his daughter and oversee the production of legitimate heirs. *Furtivum* moreover evokes elegiac *furta* (thefts), which conventionally denote unsanctioned erotic affairs.⁵ The elegiac framing of this illicit relationship comes into conflict with

2. *OLD* s.v. *vitiatio* 1–3. On the possibility that *vitiatus* carries connotations of sexual violence (a theme made explicit in variations of the same myth), see Reeson (2001, 59–60); cf. Knox (1995, 263), for whom Ovid "pointedly rejects the version of the myth in which Macareus forces himself upon his sister."

3. *OLD* s.v. *suppono* 2b; Reeson (2001, 62). Detailed discussion of methods of abortion in antiquity appears in the next section, "Visceral Abortions."

4. Verducci (1985, 214) identifies *hoc te celavimus unum* as a signpost that this plot point (the abortion) is Ovid's own innovation. For the politics of abortion in Rome, see the next section in this chapter. I emphasize that discussions of abortion in this book are focalized through ancient Roman perspectives and ideologies.

5. E.g., Catul. 68.140, Verg. G. 4.346, Tib. 1.2.36, Prop. 2.30.28.

its mythical framework, since the victim of this amatory theft is not a jilted rival but a father furious about his daughter's unauthorized reproductive activity.⁶

Whatever ideological systems inform Canace's judgment of herself and, in turn, the audience's judgment of Canace, this is a pivotal moment for the word viscera: Canace's womb is rendered visceral only once she poses a threat to the child growing within it. Directly after the proposed egress from the womb is imagined as occurring "from deep within [Canace's] viscera" (41–42), the improbable survival of the fetus is framed as a successful military defense: "a, nimium vivax admotis restitit infans / artibus et tecto tutus ab hoste fuit" (Ah, too much alive, the infant withstood the stratagems advanced upon it and was safe from its hidden enemy; 43–44). Canace describes the unborn child as the victim of an attack, explicitly situating herself as *hostis* (enemy), a word with weighty political implications stressing the gravity of the imagined conflict between parent and child. There is an unmistakable correspondence, in Canace's own words, between the attempted abortion and extremes of physical violence. The severing of the connection between mother and fetus, framed as a sort of proto-filicide, appears to activate the visceral potential of her womb, drawing the word's established affiliations with violence and civil strife into the domestic battlefield of Canace's body.

Because the abortion fails, Canace must conceal the remainder of her pregnancy, the difficult birth, and then the newborn itself. Though Macareus has offered to marry her and so render her motherhood legitimate ("illius, de quo mater, et uxor eris," you will be the wife of the one who made you a mother; 62), Canace still understands that the child, as evidence of their extramarital sex, must be hidden from their father ("crimina sunt oculis subripienda patris," our crimes must be stolen away from our father's view; 66). Aeolus' subsequent discovery of his illegitimate grandchild and command that it be exposed (83–84) produce the conditions for Ovid's first visceral child (11.87–90):

quid mihi tunc animi credis, germane, fuisse
 (nam potes ex animo colligere ipse tuo),
 cum mea me coram silvas inimicus in altis
 viscera montanis ferret edenda lupis?

6. Scholars disagree about whether incest is a relevant moral concern for these Ovidian characters. Reeson (2001, 49–51) suggests that Aeolus' rage is directed rather at the damage to his daughter's honor and the circumvention of his paternal authority. Other versions of the myth in which Aeolus freely orchestrates marriages between his daughters and sons (Hom. *Od.* 10.5–7, Euripides' *Aeolus*) suggest that the prospect of sibling incest did not traditionally disturb him. Verducci (1985), however, argues that "Ovid goes to some lengths . . . to suppress the fact that in the *Aeolus* Canace's crime was not, in her father's eyes, incest" (229); see Verducci (1985, 190–234) for a broader analysis of incest narratives throughout the Ovidian corpus.

What do you think was my state of mind, then, brother (for surely you could gather it from your own), when before my eyes an enemy carried my viscera into the depths of the forest to be devoured by mountain wolves?

Canace has previously referred to her child as *onus* (burden; 38, 42, 64), *crimen* (crime; 64, 66), and *infans* (infant; 43, 67, 73); only now, as she imagines the deadly outcome of the newborn's exposure, does she designate it as *mea viscera* (89–90). The threat of violent death at the hands of a new *inimicus* (enemy; 89) transforms Canace from *hostis* to ally—closer even than an ally, since she suddenly conceives of the child as an extension of her own vital organs at the precise moment that she describes its evisceration (90). The extreme displacement of the possessive adjective *mea* from viscera echoes the separation of mother from child; the vast distance between them underscores the process of metaphorization underlying her identification of the infant as her own viscera. The reader is encouraged at once to imagine the vital organs of the dying infant, spilled as it is devoured by carnivorous predators, and to recall the echo of its stubborn prenatal occupation of Canace's visceral womb (42–44). The child's vulnerability as a body separate from its mother, but still belonging to her, reconfigures it as the viscera to which it once clung.

Canace remains fixated on the child as she laments that she cannot properly mourn or bury him, once again claiming ownership over the infant's viscera with the plural possessive adjective *nostra* (11.115–18):

non mihi te licuit lacrimis perfundere iustis,
 in tua non tonsas ferre sepulcra comas.
 non super incubui, non oscula frigida carpsi:
 diripiunt avidae viscera nostra ferae.

I was not permitted to weep for you with righteous tears, nor to lay shorn locks on your grave. I did not lie above you, did not steal cold kisses: greedy wild beasts are tearing apart our viscera.

While the poetic plural for first-person possessives is common enough in Ovid,⁷ it serves here to reincorporate into the mother's body the body of her

7. *Noster* (our) for *meus* (my) appears in the *Heroides* more than twenty times before the eleventh epistle. One of these instances is Penelope's invocation of *viscera nostra* (1.90), paired with *tuae opes* (your wealth) to refer to the resources of Odysseus' Ithacan estate consumed by greedy suitors. Perhaps there is room to interpret the suitor's desire to inherit that estate via marriage to

child, who has been the second-person addressee since line 111. It once grew within and refused expulsion from her viscera; although childbirth disconnected their bodies, the mother still feels the impending death of her newborn as an attack upon the same viscera; now, as the child is being ripped apart, those viscera become a shared possession of dying child and grieving mother.⁸

The evolution of viscera in triplicate within this early Ovidian text illuminates the conditions under which the poet applies these unprecedented reproductive usages. Canace's visceral womb emerges precisely when she attempts an abortion that she herself characterizes as a hostile attack on the fetus. The child, as both former inhabitant and externalization of that womb, is then made visceral in its own right by postpartum violence on the orders of its own grandfather. Canace herself is under pressure from her father to end her own life—she concludes the letter with the clear intent to die by suicide at his behest. The viscera in this poem are thus intimately connected to the thematics of domestic discord: pregnant mother against unborn child, grandfather against grandchild, father against daughter. In this way, Ovid's reproductive viscera appear in conjunction with acts of violence occurring at the intersection of physical bodies and abstract boundaries. The word's two new significations, wombs and children, develop in close contact with each other, working productively around a constellation of reproductive and destructive contexts to denote bodies under attack by their own blood relations.

Visceral Abortions

Ovid consistently frames abortion as a violent act perpetrated by mother against unborn child, whether that mother is a mythical divinity, an elegiac beloved, or a proto-Roman wife.⁹ The poet's incorporation of viscera into descriptions of feticide, a perceived violation of the Roman social contract guaranteeing pater-

Penelope (and, presumably, the production of a new heir) as an abstract attack on Penelope's viscera as womb, but that shade of meaning is far less readily apparent than in Canace's letter.

8. The thematic doubling of Canace and her child has already appeared in this epistle, when Macareus urges his sister to survive childbirth because her death would destroy "two in the body of one" (*nec unius corpore perde duos*; 60). Canace revisits this doubling at the letter's conclusion when she requests a shared tomb (*socio . . . sepulcro*; 123); "let a single urn, however small, contain the two of us" (*urnaue nos habeat quamlibet arta duos*; 124). Cf. Ovid's similar treatment of "two-in-one" deaths elsewhere: Coronis (*Met.* 2.609), Narcissus (*Met.* 3.473), Pyramus and Thisbe (*Met.* 4.108).

9. I emphasize again that my discussions of abortion are contextualized against the political and moral ideologies of Ovid's contemporary world; any characterizations of abortion as violent or immoral (including references to the fetus as an "unborn child") reflect the language of the texts I analyze and not my own views.

nal control over female fertility and protecting potential heirs from the violent impulses of their mothers, affirms the word's development into a semantic substitute for wombs and children designed to attend the transgression of familial boundaries.

In Ovid's Rome, the politics of abortion seem to have hinged primarily on the legitimacy of the pregnancy.¹⁰ Augustan moral legislation was designed to promote marriage and boost reproduction among the urban elite;¹¹ to abort a fetus conceived by legally married citizen parents was ideologically indefensible, unless done to preserve the health and fertility of the mother and with the father's full permission.¹² Indeed, social disapproval of upper-class abortions had to do with the violation of a father's rights: Roman men had parental claim to unborn heirs and unsanctioned abortions threatened to disrupt patrilineal structures of inheritance.¹³ Cicero cites a case in his *Pro Cluentio* where a Milesian woman was executed for having accepted bribes from secondary heirs to abort a rival fetus. His Roman audience would presumably have found this penalty plausible, agreeing that the woman's actions were a violation of the deceased father's right to pass on property to his offspring. Cicero suggests that an abortion under such circumstances also threatens domestic stability and the continuity of the entire state, framing it as a destruction of "the parent's hope, the memory of their name, the family's support, the household's heir, a designated citizen of the republic" (*spem parentis, memoriam nominis, subsidium generis, heredem familiae, designatum rei publicae civem*; Cic. *Clu.* 32). This acute emphasis on paternal permissions for abortion, along with contemporary legal incentives for married citizens to produce numerous children, seems to have cultivated an atmosphere in which upper-class, married women seeking abortions invited suspicion of adulterous affairs.¹⁴

10. There is unresolved conflict among medical writers in antiquity regarding methods of abortion, stemming from an ambiguity in the Hippocratic oath on whose interpretation readers both Roman and modern disagree—does the oath forbid all abortions or only those administered via pessary or suppository? See Riddle 1992, 7–10.

11. See the final section of chapter 5.

12. Soranus, for example, approves of abortions only when performed to protect a mother's health (*Gyn.* 1.60). For Roman law and ideology on abortion, see Nardi (1971, esp. 199–299 on the 1st century BCE–1st century CE); Watts (1973); Dixon (1988, 71–103); Hirt (2004). Extant Roman writing on the subject provides us with elite male perspectives (primarily disapproving, e.g., Plin. *Nat.* 10.172, Juv. 6.595–97) but little evidence for actual practice or the attitudes of women.

13. "The sole legal grounds for punishing a woman who sought abortion in Rome was the violation of the father's patriarchal rights over all his family, born or potential, whether legal *personae* or not" (Watts 1973, 92). In later centuries, unauthorized abortion became an actionable offense: a rescript of Septimius Severus prescribed temporary exile for a woman who aborted a pregnancy because, according to the jurist Marcian, she "cheated her husband of children" (*eam maritum liberis fraudasse*; *Dig.* 47.11.4).

14. Dixon (1988, 94): "ancient sources tend to assume that only adulteresses resorted to clan-

On the opposite end of the socio-sexual spectrum, medical knowledge of effective abortifacients seems to have been commonplace among sex workers, whose necessarily non-reproductive sexual occupation justified contraceptive and abortive practices that would have been frowned upon, if not prohibited, for citizen women.¹⁵ It was, at the very least, a familiar practical consideration that pregnancy and childbirth diminished a woman's beauty. The didactic persona of *Ars Amatoria* 3, as mouthpiece for the desires of male clientele, assumes that the avoidance of full-term pregnancy is a priority for women who depend upon recreational sex for their livelihoods.¹⁶ He emphasizes that "childbirth shortens youth" (*partus faciunt breviora iuventae / tempora*; *Ars* 3.81–82) and urges women who have given birth to assume a sex position that conceals stretch marks from the view of male lovers: "tu quoque, cui rugis uterum Lucina notavit, / ut celer aversis utere Parthus equis" (You also, whose belly Lucina has marked with wrinkles, make use of backward horses like a swift Parthian; 3.785–86).¹⁷

Even so, the Ovidian elegiac narrator complicates the apparent ideological delineation of abortion according to socio-sexual status with his open displeasure at Corinna's clandestine abortion in *Amores* 2.13 and 2.14. Finding himself in the position of a potential father whose offspring has been aborted without his knowledge or consent, the *amator* (the genre's "lover-poet" persona) casts harsh judgment on Corinna, even though her professional dependence on maintaining physical perfection, emphasized by his consistent and intense focus on her appearance, means that pregnancy would jeopardize her means of living.¹⁸ That his accusatory reaction to her secretive abortion adheres persis-

destine abortion." Since Soranus approves of medical practitioners who refuse abortions for the purpose of protecting beauty or concealing adultery (*Gyn.* 1.60) and suggests that wicked midwives might accept bribes in exchange for such services (1.4), we may presume that abortions performed for these socially unacceptable reasons were not entirely unheard of.

15. Dixon (1988, 95–96) outlines the legal and social distinctions governing the fertility of courtesans (and any woman not bound by *conubium* to a Roman man). There is circumstantial evidence for a body of contraceptive folk knowledge passed among medical practitioners and their patients, especially those unmarried or unmarriageable women for whom family planning was a necessity (Riddle 1992, 1–65 *passim*). We also know through Pliny that there were female medical writers in antiquity whose texts addressed fertility and abortion (see e.g., his refutation of Lais and Elephantis at *Nat.* 28.81, with discussion in Richlin [1997, 209]).

16. On the audience of the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid's disavowal of married women as readership, and the problem of the social status of elegiac *puellae*, see Gibson (2003, 25–37) and James (2003, 35–68).

17. The avoidance of stretch marks is likewise identified in Ovid's *Amores* as a primary reason for women to terminate pregnancies (*Am.* 2.14.7). Cf. Prop. 2.15.22, where childbirth is a source of shame (*peperisse pudet*) and a reason for women to cover their bodies. For the Latin texts of Ovid's *Ars*, *Amores*, and *Remedia*, I use the edition of Kenney (1994).

18. On stretch marks as a serious threat to an elegiac *puella*'s livelihood, see James (2003, 174–76).

tently to the lexicon of warfare and weaponry—vocabulary usually reserved for the elegiac trope of *militia amoris* (the warfare of love)—fosters the contention that women do shocking violence to their bodies when they attempt to terminate pregnancies.

Like Canace's child, Corinna's pregnancy is an *onus ventris* (burden of the belly) and Corinna herself is rash (*temeraria*) for having resorted to abortion (*Am.* 2.13.1). The amator assumes a position similar to that of Macareus, the unwitting father from whom the pregnancy and abortion are concealed (*clamme*, 2.13.3). While the majority of *Amores* 2.13 is devoted to the amator's prayer for Corinna's safety, he turns in 2.14 to a larger condemnation of women who seek abortions. The poem begins with an evaluation of abortion in terms of the perils of war, where the instruments of abortion are wound-inflicting weapons and the act itself is akin to combat. "What good does it do for girls to be exempt from battle," he begins, "if without war they endure wounds from their own weapons?" (*quid iuvat immunes belli cessare puellas / . . . si sine Marte suis patiuntur vulnera telis*; 1, 3). The association of abortion with violence persists throughout the poem's 44 lines: the act is a crime (*vitium*; 10) akin to warfare (*militia*: 6) and murder (*necare*; 15) and a rash violation (*temerare*; 17) performed by a cruel hand (*crudelis manus*; 24). A woman who aborts her pregnancy is, like the murderous mothers Medea and Procne, stained by the blood of her children (29–30).¹⁹ The entire poem is pervaded by analogies to battle and bloodshed, elaborating the mother-as-hostis metaphor first articulated by Canace (*Her.* 11.44).

The amator mentions two methods of abortion: the dislodging of a fetus through the insertion of a tool and the medicinal termination of pregnancy through the ingestion or topical application of abortifacients.²⁰ The second

19. Unlike Medea or Procne, the amator notes, Corinna has no reason (i.e., a Jason or a Tereus) to kill her child (*Am.* 2.14.31–34). The myths of Medea and Procne both receive visceral treatment elsewhere in Ovid; see the next section in this chapter, "Visceral Children."

20. We have an abundance of evidence for the substances and procedures by which pregnancy was terminated in the ancient world, including abortifacients and emmenagogues; Riddle (1992, 74–86) catalogues and investigates the scientific efficacy of recorded treatments from antiquity. Our best Roman source is Soranus' *Gynaikēia* (1.60–65), which contains recipes for abortifacients administered orally and via pessary, as well as recommendations for strenuous physical exercise (with the caveat at 1.60 that contraception is preferable to abortion). Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* identifies plant life with contraceptive and abortive properties (*passim*; drug affinity is not the primary organizational criterion). There is some limited discussion of such materials in Pliny (*Nat.* 14.110, 14.116, 16.110, 20.226, 24.29), included as warnings to women hoping to preserve fertility, but on Pliny's general moral distaste (e.g., at 25.25) for the topic, see Richlin (1997, 208–10) and Beagon (1992, 216–20). Scribonius Largus opposes abortion in his *Compositiones* (2.20–25 in Sconocchia's 1983 edition of the preface) but does mention a compound for treating vaginal pain following birth or abortion/miscarriage (*ex partu abortuve*; 121). Galen's *SMT* includes a variety

method should remind us of Canace, who admitted to trying *herbae* and *medicamina* (“herbs” and “drugs”; *Her.* 11.39); for the amator, such substances are “terrible poisons” (*dira venena*; *Am.* 2.14.28). The visceral wombs in this poem, however, belong to those women who perform manual dislocations, which, as the amator would have it, amounts to “dig[ging] out [their] own *viscera* with weapons thrust up from below” (*vestra . . . effoditis subiectis viscera telis*; 27). This martial language, particularly the identification of abortive tools as weapons (*telis*), entangles the process of manual abortion with the eviscerative imagery of a battlefield injury. All these characterizations of abortion are, of course, focalized through the indignant voice and artificial poetics of the Ovidian amator. Whether these accusations are meant in earnest or are merely convenient talking-points for an emotionally and rhetorically charged argument, the poem’s indictment of Corinna is accentuated by consistent affirmations that abortion is a violent act. The amator’s choice to integrate visceral language into his accusations thus strengthens the word’s association with serious harm to both physical and social boundaries.

Since Ovid’s narrator suggests that women must attack their offspring, and by extension their own bodies, in order to end pregnancies, the semantic displacement of *viscera*’s referent from “vital organs” to both “womb” and “child” is both comprehensible and richly suggestive. The thematic parallel between the *viscera* under attack in line 27 and those “not yet born” (*non-dum natis*) to whom poisons are administered in line 28—both victims of maternal violence—generates an affiliation between the fetus and the womb that defines abortion as a convergence of domestic and self-inflicted injury. Following the model of Canace, whose womb became visceral when she attempted abortion and whose infant became visceral at the moment of its death, the implied success of these abortions allows this instance of *viscera* to serve as a polysemic metaphor: we are encouraged to imagine these women performing violence against their own wombs and their own children as a single visceral entity.²¹

Ovid addresses abortion again in Book 1 of the *Fasti*, as his narrator relates a mytho-historical tale about Ausonian *matronae* (wives) who, denied the honor of riding in carriages, collectively refuse to carry on their husband’s fam-

of recipes with abortifacient properties throughout (e.g., 6.8, 7.10–11). Celsus, while he does not address voluntary abortion, describes methods of surgical extraction for a late-term miscarriage (*Cels.* 7.29). Further literature on abortion in antiquity includes Waszink (1950), Nardi (1971), Den Boer (1979, 272–88), Carrick (1985, 99–124), Keller (1988), Kapparis (2002), Baccari (2012).

21. As noted by McKeown (1998, 307).

ily lines.²² All of the women refuse to conceive, while those who are already pregnant perform abortions (*Fast.* 1.621–24):

mox honor eripitur, matronaque destinat omnis
 ingratos nulla prole novare viros,
 neve daret partus, ictu temeraria caeco
 visceribus crescens excutiebat onus.²³

Presently the honor was withdrawn, and each mother resolved not to renew her ungrateful husband with offspring, or, so that she might not give birth, rashly with hidden blow was she dislodging the growing burden from her viscera.

The Ausonian wives' abortions (*visceribus crescens excutiebat onus*) are a near-quotation of Canace's attempt to do the same (*visceribus crescens excuteretur onus*, *Her.* 11.42). The aborting matrona is *temeraria* (rash) just like Corinna (*Am.* 2.13.1), while the description of the act itself as a hidden blow (*ictu caeco*) recalls the martial imagery of both *Amores* 2.14 and *Heroides* 11. Ovid therefore revisits in the *Fasti*, late in his poetic career, his very first experiments with reproductive viscera, so that his reflexive linguistic allusions to Canace and Corinna reemphasize abortion's function as a trigger for the visceral womb.

Throughout Ovid's poetic corpus, viscera stand in for the womb as the site of violence against offspring and sometimes concurrently for the offspring contained within that violated womb; both uterus and fetus become visceral when the pregnant mother is imagined to attack the unborn child. By associating the abortive womb with martial violence and characterizing it in terms usually reserved in such contexts for a gravely wounded soldier, Ovid associates the removal of a fetus with situations in which vital organs are forcibly severed or expelled. In establishing an evocative connection between the termination of a pregnancy and the dealing of a mortal blow, the poet exerts pressure on the word viscera so that its new figurative extensions link reproduction with intrafamilial violence.

22. The social status of these matronae makes their resolve to end legitimate pregnancies without the consent of their husbands the most ideologically disturbing instance of the act in Ovid's corpus. For a discussion of this episode in relation to Ovid's general approach to narrating abortion, with consideration of the context of Augustan legislation promoting childbirth, see Green (2004, 284–86).

23. For Ovid's *Fasti*, I use the edition of Bömer (1957).

Visceral Children

Like visceral wombs, visceral children appear to be generated consistently by domestic violence. While these children belong to no fixed age group or social category, their classification as viscera necessarily depends on their relationship to a parent, since the figure is predicated upon a parental claim of ownership over the body of the child; for this reason, the kinship metaphor is most apparent when the word is paired with a possessive adjective.²⁴ The possessive quality of the metaphor represents danger to the child's body as a threat to the vital organs of the parent, even though it is frequently the case that the parent in question is directly responsible for the endangerment of the child. In these contexts, the displacement of harm onto the parent's body (my child is in danger = my vital organs are in danger) frames the agent of violence as its primary victim. Indeed, one major implication of the visceral child metaphor is that parental violence against offspring is a mode of self-harm, even after they have exited the womb.

Medea, the archetypal exemplum of aberrant familial violence, is a natural candidate for Ovid's reproductive figures. In the *Remedia Amoris*, she appears in a catalogue of mythological women who could have benefited from the narrator's instruction in healing the wounds of love. Her act of filicide is described in the following terms: "nec dolor armasset contra sua viscera matrem, / quae socii damno sanguinis ulta virum est" (nor would grief have armed against her own viscera the mother who took vengeance on her husband at the cost of shared blood; 59–60). The careful structure of these lines exemplifies the fluidity of the metaphor and the word's potential to invoke multiple layers of meaning at once. While the reference to Medea is, in the end, unmistakable, she remains unnamed. Until the information in line 60 clarifies her identity, the viscera retain a marked plasticity as new details generate fresh possibilities for their construal. At first, context indicates only that a mythological woman ruined by love is under consideration, as these lines follow the exempla of Phyllis (55–56) and Dido (57–58). The reader is presented with subject (*dolor*, grief), contrafactual verb (*armasset*, would have armed), and prepositional phrase (*contra sua viscera*, against her own viscera), with the direct object delayed to the end of the line. According to this order of presentation, the word *viscera* must be understood first in the context of violence, without knowledge of the human agent (armed by grief against her own viscera) to which the third person reflexive possessive adjective *sua* refers.

24. I.e., *mea* (my) or *nostra* (our) viscera in the voice of a parent and *tua* (your), *vestra* (your, pl.), or *sua* (his/her/their) viscera from an outsider's perspective.

I should note here that the combination of possessive adjective with viscera need not always refer to children; when no parental relationship is at stake, in fact, it rarely does.²⁵ A reader in progress, primed by the exemplum of Dido and the parallelism implied by the conjunction *nec* (59), might naturally conclude that “*armasset contra sua viscera*” describes suicide, where the viscera refer without abstraction to the vital organs. The resolution of line 59 with *matrem* (mother), however, activates the potential for *sua viscera* to denote children: with motherhood at stake, the word’s referent expands suddenly from vital organs to encompass violated offspring. With the revelation in line 60 that the mother in question is one “who took vengeance on her husband at the cost of shared blood,” the situational semantics of *sua viscera* snap into focus: this is not suicide but murder, which renders children visceral in the context of maternal filicide. Yet that initial impression of self-harm, with its evocation of wounded internal organs, is not fully effaced. In fact, these polysemic viscera interact with the gruesome nature of the children’s deaths to intensify the violent imagery: when Medea kills her own children, the “somatic tinge” of viscera still invites us to imagine *her* body being eviscerated.²⁶ The meticulous arrangement of this couplet ultimately produces a kaleidoscope of violent images which progressively mutate meaning, merge the somatic with the symbolic, and thereby affirm the author’s innovative use of the word viscera to explore the essentially violent nature of natal relationships.

Ovid’s representation of Tereus’ unwitting consumption of his son, Itys, combines the viscosity of the violated child with the social taboo of cannibalism. In Book 6 of the *Metamorphoses*, the narrator writes that Tereus, unaware that the meal his wife has served him contains the remains of his murdered son, “eats and gathers his own viscera into his belly” (*vescitur inque suam sua viscera congerit alvum*; 6.651).²⁷ The repetition of the reflexive possessive adjective (*suam sua*) emphasizes Itys’ status as a physical extension of his father’s body and so frames Tereus as self-cannibalizing: by consuming his son, he in turn consumes himself.²⁸ Indeed, his initial reaction to the revelation of the true content of his meal is a desire to tear open his own body and expel the half-eaten viscera (*et modo, si posset, reserato pectore diras / egerere inde*

25. See, e.g., discussion later in this section on Polyphemus’ consumption of human viscera (*Ov. Met.* 14.203–4).

26. See the introduction for Ruth Padel’s concept of “somatic tinge.”

27. Recall the potential for *alvus* to designate the womb (see chapter 3); McAuley (2016, 137) calls this a moment of “inverted penetration and parturition.” For Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, I use the edition of Tarrant (2004).

28. Anderson (1972, 234) notes that when “Tereus seems to be eating himself . . . the vicious circle of *impietas* has now been completed.” Cf. Rosati (2009, 348).

dapes semesaque viscera gestit; 6.663–64). All distinction between Tereus' vital organs and the dismembered pieces of his son has disappeared as viscera are absorbed into viscera. The incorporation of the child's body into the parent's, a process experienced symbolically by other visceral children, thus finds its literal manifestation in Tereus' cannibalism.²⁹

Viscera often play a prominent role in scenes of cannibalism, given their necessary entanglement with butchery of the human body. Another episode of cannibalistic consumption in the *Metamorphoses* confirms, however, that specific contexts of domestic violence are crucial to the interpretation of viscera as children. In Book 14, as Achaemenides describes the terror of witnessing Polyphemus devour his fellow crewmen, he reports anticipating a similar fate for himself: "iam nunc mea viscera rebar / in sua mersurum" (then I was imagining that he would submerge my viscera into his own; 14.203–4). The implied doubling of viscera paired with the possessive adjectives emphasizes this monstrous violation of the social taboo against consuming human flesh. While the absorption of dismembered viscera into viscera is a horrifying prospect that closely echoes Tereus' ill-fated feast, it is essential that the ownership of these viscera—the speaker's (*mea*, "my") and Polyphemus' (*sua*, "his own")—remains separate. Because there are no reproductive relationships involved, both *mea viscera* and *sua viscera* contain only the word's standard corporeal connotations; while it is shocking that Polyphemus consumes human flesh,³⁰ at least his meals bear no blood relation to him. The construction *mea/sua viscera*, therefore, does not always stand in for a child; when it does, parenthood and intrafamilial violence are necessarily at stake.

Indeed, Procne's and Tereus' relationship to their own parenthood is an essential factor in Itys' death, for he dies at the hands of his mother *only* because he is his father's son. He is the victim of violence from both parents: the intentional and premeditated dismemberment performed by his mother Procne,³¹ as well as the unintentional but equally transgressive cannibalistic ingestion by his father. Despite Tereus' horror at his son's death, he is not without responsibility, for it was his rape, imprisonment, and mutilation of Procne's sister

29. Reeson (2001) adduces the example of Itys along with Andromeda (*Ov. Met.* 5.18) and Canace's infant (*Her.* 11.118) to suggest that the word viscera is selected "because in each case the child provides flesh for feeding upon" (89). This reading, while valid, does not cover the full range of contexts where viscera stand in for offspring; the consumption of human flesh is part of the horror, but not the sole justification for the word's appearance in these episodes (see my discussion of Andromeda in chapter 5).

30. Polyphemus himself has a taste for visceral language (in the sense of destroyed human bodies), e.g., when he threatens to eviscerate Galatea's lover (*Met.* 13.865) and Ulysses (*Met.* 14.194).

31. Note his pathetic dying cries of "mother, mother!" (*mater, mater!*) at 6.640. For tragic *contaminatio* and the mother-son relationship in this episode, see Curley (1997).

Philomela that inspired their plot to murder the child. Itys' status as a visceral child therefore reflects a triad of troubling circumstances: the butchery of his body, the taboo of cannibalism, and the social disruption of filicide instigated by a physical violation of sexual boundaries. In the landscape of Ovidian myth, it is conventional that a child perishing under such conditions is rendered a visceral body.

A similarly transgressive paternal cannibalism occurs in the *Fasti*, as Ovid stretches the capacity of the visceral womb even beyond the perimeters of the female body through Saturn's swallowing of his children (4.199–202):

ille suam metuens, ut quaeque erat edita, prolem
 devorat inmersam visceribusque tenet.
 saepe Rhea quæsta est totiens fecunda nec umquam
 mater et indoluit fertilitate sua.

[Saturn], fearing his own progeny, as each one is born consumes it and holds it submerged in his viscera. Frequently Rhea complained, so often pregnant and never a mother, and grieved her own fertility.

Rhea's distress over her exclusion from the role of mother despite her fertility (totiens fecunda nec umquam / mater; 201–2) emphasizes Saturn's usurpation of that role via the consumption of their offspring; indeed, his choice to deprive Rhea of the fulfillment of her pregnancies by imprisoning the fruits of her womb within his own belly results in a brand of symbolic impregnation.³² The forcibly supplanted womb embodies the violence perpetrated by father against children, while the established viscera-as-womb metaphor applied to a male body further emphasizes the abnormality of this cannibalistic impregnation.³³

The social transgression of incest is also grounds for the formation of a visceral child. In Book 10, when Cinyras and his daughter Myrrha initiate a sexual relationship, the narrator frames it as “the father receiv[ing] his own viscera into his obscene bed” (accipit obsceno genitor sua viscera lecto, 465).

32. Episodes in Ovid involving symbolic or literal male pregnancy (Saturn, Tereus, Jupiter) are all sourced from Greek myth; Leitao 2012 examines the symbolic importance of male pregnancy in Greek literature: “we may have an echo of oral parturition in the myth of Cronus swallowing and then disgorging his children” (174). A brief reference to Thyestes in Ovid's *Ibis* echoes this framework for paternal cannibalism as the father's appetitive appropriation of the womb, in one of many horrendous modes of death wished upon the curse poem's target: “referas exempla Thyestæ / inque tui caesus viscera patris eas” (May you follow the model of Thyestes and go slaughtered into your father's viscera; 543–44). See chapter 6 for Thyestes' implication in the visceral lexicon in Seneca.

33. This episode is explored in more detail with reference to representations of dynastic struggle in chapter 5.

The violation of Myrrha's body is both physical (the act of sex itself) and social (the sexual perversion of familial ties).³⁴ Cinyras, like Tereus, is ignorant in the moment of the true nature of his transgression, but upon learning the truth his immediate impulse is towards violence: "nitidum vagina deripit ensem" (he snatches his shining sword from its sheath; 475).³⁵ Had Myrrha not immediately fled, her father would have violated her body anew. Also like Tereus, Cinyras bears at least a partial responsibility for the violation of his daughter's body. Though he does not know the identity of his sexual partner, he is informed that her age is equal to Myrrha's (441) and, in a moment of either surreal irony or subconscious recognition, he addresses her as *filia* (daughter; 467) in the bedroom.³⁶ In addition, he participates enthusiastically in a prolonged affair while his wife, Myrrha's mother, is observing ritual celibacy for the festival of Ceres (431–36); the narrator frames her absence specifically in terms of marital legitimacy ("legitima vacuus dum coniuge lectus," while the bed was unoccupied by a lawful spouse; 437).³⁷ As he welcomes his own viscera into his bed, Cinyras is framed as both agent and victim of a form of sexual violence. Read in light of Tereus' consumption of his own son, Cinyras' affair with Myrrha—his amatory consumption of her body—is demarcated as a form of sexual cannibalism. As his body is physically joined to his daughter's, her body disappears entirely; she is, at a moment of sexual passivity, reduced to the vital organs of her father. The conditions of visceral characterization in Ovid thus go beyond gory forms of violence. Even the symbolic defilement of proper familial boundaries is enough to render a child into its parent's viscera.

Womb and Wound

A distinctive convergence of significations arises in the context of violence between mothers and full-grown sons, where the metaphor creates an unsettling ambiguity in the womb as both site and source of violence. In *Amores*

34. Anderson (1972, 514) cites *sua viscera* here as a phrase meant to underscore familial *impietas* (impiety).

35. The sexual innuendo is hard to miss; for the physical punning in this line and its relationship with a similar line in the *Aeneid*, Smith (1997, 71–74).

36. Though I do not engage with psychoanalytic theory, Oliensis (2009) and McAuley (2016) offer cogent demonstrations of its utility for this and other Ovidian passages.

37. Most of Book 10 is narrated by Orpheus, whose song programmatically celebrates the punishment of women for supposed sexual deviancy ("canamus / . . . inconcessisque puellas / ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam" let us sing of girls struck by forbidden desires who deserved punishment for their lust; 10.152–54); on the influence of this internal narrative voice on the judgments cast upon women for their sexual behavior, see Barchiesi (2006, 284–94).

1.10, for example, amid complaints about an elegiac beloved who is too greedy for gifts, the amator illustrates his point through the mythological exemplum of Eriphyle. To punish his mother for her betrayal of his father, Eriphyle's son "pierced with iron the viscera from which he had been born" (e quibus exierat, traiecit viscera ferro / filius; 51–52). Grammatically, the word viscera is both object of the son's violence (traiecit viscera . . . filius) and antecedent to the relative clause indicating the origins of his birth (viscera e quibus exierat). Viscera stand in so clearly for Eriphyle's womb here that we are encouraged to imagine Alcmaeon driving his sword directly into her uterus.³⁸ This corporeal nexus between her death and her son's birth blurs the boundaries between womb and wound, as the deadly blow pierces the same viscera that bore the matricidal son. Because Eriphyle produced a child who would one day bring violence upon her, both life and death find their source without clear differentiation in the same viscera. This temporal flexibility marks the fertile womb as perpetual host to the potential for such violence, once again inducing the word viscera to link the production of children to the looming specter of mortality.

The death of Meleager in the *Metamorphoses* also illustrates the intricate shades of meaning that enable the word viscera to create a disconcerting bridge between womb and wound. After Althaea has kindled a fire in which she intends to burn the piece of wood to which her son's life is supernaturally bound, she declares "rogus iste cremet mea viscera" (Let that funeral pyre burn my viscera; 8.478). Like many other Ovidian parents, Althaea verbally displaces violence against her child onto her own body, even though she is the agent of that violence. Since Ovid emphasizes the internal conflict between Althaea's domestic roles (pugnat materque sororque, "mother and sister clash"; 463), it is significant that neither of her brothers, despite their own violent ends, is described in visceral terms. It is only Meleager, as the child that will die at his mother's hands, whose body is appropriated for a metaphorical expression of her suffering.

Once Althaea has cast the splinter of wood into the fire, Meleager immediately begins to die (8.515–17):

inscius atque absens flamma Meleagros ab illa
 uritur et caecis torreri viscera sentit
 ignibus ac magnos superat virtute dolores.

38. Cf. Tacitus' account of the death of Agrippina, who demands with symbolic flair that the fatal blow delivered by her son's assassins be aimed directly at her womb: "protendens uterum 'ventrem feri' exclamavit" (Extending her belly, "Strike the womb," she cried; *Ann.* 14.8.5).

Unaware and far from that flame, Meleager is burning and feels that his viscera are being scorched by hidden fires and bravely conquers the extreme torment.

Meleager's death offers a reminder that the visceral child's body is not merely a metaphor for the anguish of the parent, but an entity unto itself. Though Althaea has claimed Meleager as the embodiment of her viscera, the agony of Meleager's death surfaces within the viscera of his own body.³⁹ The child's pain is localized to the same region of the body where his mother claims to feel the violence that she enacts against him; the mother's viscera have viscera of their own; we have begun to spiral into a visceral *mise en abyme*.

The spiral continues: when Althaea dies by suicide, she aims her fatal blow so that it pierces through her viscera: "nam de matre manus diri sibi conscia facti / exegit poenas acto per viscera ferro" (For the mother's hand, aware of its dreadful deed, exacted punishment for itself by means of iron driven through the viscera; 8.531–32).⁴⁰ The layered instances of viscera here enrich the symbolic value of Althaea's death. She dies by a wound inflicted upon the viscera that she appropriated from her son, the same viscera where her son felt the pain of her filicide, the same viscera, in fact, from which that son had been born. Since Althaea elects to transform womb into wound as suitable punishment for maternal filicide—and the deliberate selection of this site for the fatal blow is evident from the cognizant guilt (*conscia*) of the hand that deals it—her death is both a revision of the Ovidian abortion narrative (in which the mother's womb becomes visceral because she kills her own child) and an inversion of the death of Eriphyle (whose womb becomes visceral because her own child kills her). This final occurrence of viscera in the Meleager episode, when triangulated with its other usages in the same passage and its echoes of similar Ovidian treatments, invokes in a single moment an assortment of imbricated meanings: vital organs, the butchered child, and the violated womb.⁴¹

39. This usage recalls the Lucretian identification of viscera as a seat of sensation (see chapter 1). The association of heat and fire with the viscera in Lucretius is characteristic of animals that are quick to anger—much like Meleager in this episode, who kills his maternal uncles in a violent rage (*tumida . . . ira*; 8.437). The doubled acts of burning here (the fire burning the wood, Meleager's burning pain) may also be suggestive of sacrifice, perhaps exerting pressure on the typical distinction between *exta* (what is burned) and *viscera* (what is cooked and consumed) in ritual contexts.

40. Kenney (2011, 356) comments on the masculine style of Althaea's death as typical of female heroines in the *Metamorphoses*, but I would emphasize that this third repetition of viscera draws pointed attention to her feminine womb as site of the death blow. Cf. Niobe's transformation following the death of her children (for which she is indirectly responsible), which concludes with the incursion of stone among her viscera (*Ov. Met.* 6.309).

41. McAuley (2016, 139) describes this final appearance of viscera as "completing the circularity of womb-as-tomb."

In this way, reproductive viscera persistently inflect Ovid's portraits of domestic conflict, as shades of meaning new and old collide and converge into a fragmented but thematically unified image. These metaphors emerge under consistent conditions: family members who bring violence upon each other, despite (or because of) their blood relationship, are marked by the visceral lexicon. The viscera of Canace, Corinna, the Ausonian matronae, Medea, Tereus, Saturn, Cinyras, Eriphyle, Meleager, and Althaea are each invoked as grotesque corollaries of violence between blood relations. The methodical interjection of these metaphors into reproductive contexts imbues Ovidian viscera with a vibrant hybridity. Even as abstractions, the visceral womb and visceral child retain echoes—or the “somatic tinge”—of their corporeal referent. The womb produces a flash-forward to a child drenched in natal blood; the child is a mass of blood-and-guts, an evisceration of its parents. In these ways, the symbolics of familial violation trail persistently in the wake of Ovid's reproductive viscera, forecasting carnage for the inhabitants of visceral wombs and grief for the parents of visceral children.

CHAPTER 5



Civil War and Dynastic Struggle in Ovid

Ovid's reproductive *viscera* operate on a local scale as markers of familial violence. In the cases discussed thus far, the violence that attends visceral wombs and visceral children is restricted to conflicts between immediate blood relations. This chapter examines passages in which visceral bodies act even beyond their capacity as signifiers of domestic violence to mark impending civil war. While the threats of civic strife signposted by these metaphors in the *Metamorphoses* remain firmly rooted in the foreign mythological landscapes of Africa and the East, visceral bodies in the *Fasti* presage instances of civil conflict essential to the religio-cultural aetiologies of Rome. Whether the players are foreign, divine, monstrous, or mortal, these are the episodes in which empires are at stake. The presence of these reproductive viscera in civil war narratives grants us access to a key ideological substrate of Ovidian mythography, as the linking of reproduction to civic self-destruction develops under a new Augustan dynasty founded on civil war but intent on restoring civic harmony through policies of enforced fertility.

Dynastic Struggle

Saturn's cannibalistic suppression of his children's births, as it appears in the *Fasti*,¹ is on an immediate level a violation of paternal duty to offspring and an apt illustration of the visceral womb's potential to mark instances of familial violence (*Fast.* 4.199–202):

ille suam metuens, ut quaeque erat edita, prolem
devorat inmersam visceribusque tenet.

1. As discussed in chapter 4.

saepe Rhea questa est totiens fecunda nec umquam
mater et indoluit fertilitate sua.

[Saturn], fearing his own progeny, as each one is born consumes it and holds it submerged in his viscera. Frequently Rhea complained, so often pregnant and never a mother, and grieved her own fertility.

Because Saturn is no ordinary father and Jupiter no ordinary son, however, this narrative is also entangled in the cycle of divine regicide that ultimately determines the power structure of the Olympian pantheon. Though Rhea's maternal distress emphasizes the injustice of her children's fates on a domestic scale, the stakes of Saturn's reproductive appropriations extend much further: the victor in this conflict will rule the cosmos.

This power struggle for divine control is one of the oldest narratives in the extant Greek literary canon. Zeus' ascent to power via the violent overthrow of his father, itself an echo of Kronos' succession to the throne following the castration of *his* father, features prominently in early works of mythology and enjoys a long life of allusions in later literature.² Ovid was no doubt heavily influenced by Hesiod's *Theogony* and the myriad adaptations that followed and could reasonably presume a readership well-versed in the canonical treatments of that particular myth.³ The aetiology for the hierarchy of divine power that structured Romans' religious, political, and cultural lives is drenched in patricidal and regicidal blood;⁴ it is therefore consequential that Ovid selects a visceral metaphor to characterize Saturn's filicidal efforts to suppress the king-killing and father-killing that he anticipates will be his son's path to succession.⁵

In Ovid's telling, Saturn's reason for consuming and imprisoning his children is explicit: he fears them (*suam metuens . . . prolem*; *Fast.* 4.199). This conflict between father and potential heirs is a natural outgrowth of the paranoia experienced by a ruler who ousted his own father from power; the elimination of his own offspring becomes necessary for the preservation of his unchallenged sovereignty. The fact that these children will nevertheless succeed in overthrowing him despite this prophylactic violence amplifies the import of the

2. The treatment of this myth best known to us is Hesiod's *Theogony*; there was also the now-fragmentary 8th- or 7th-century BCE *Titanomachia* (see West 2002, 110–18).

3. For Ovid's reception of Hesiod, see Keith (2002b, 250–51), Fletcher (2005), Ziogas (2011), and Ziogas (2013).

4. For recent perspectives on Jupiter's primacy in Roman religion, see North (2000) and Rüpke (2001).

5. He knows this not only from experience, but also from prophecy (Hes. *Theog.* 461–65; cf. *Ov. Fast.* 4.197–98).

visceral language used to characterize their imprisonment. Indeed, the viscosity of Saturn's misappropriated womb anticipates Jupiter's eventual assault on his throne, supported by the siblings who have been swallowed and submerged within those paternal viscera. That the narrative of Saturn's overthrow is cut short—the focus of this episode is instead the din of the Curetes and Corybantes as they protect the infant Jupiter on Mount Ida—means that these viscera hint at an impending violence that the text never produces.⁶ This destabilization of expectations is perhaps most effective for readers who have already been conditioned to identify Ovidian reproductive viscera as harbingers of such brutal violence.

The entrapment of Saturn's offspring—an un-birthing that transplants them immediately postpartum into the belly *qua* womb of the father—thus operates on two levels to mark immediate domestic harm and impending dynastic struggle. In the canon of cosmogonic and theogonic narrative, the intergenerational conflict of the Titanomachy is a fundamental exemplum of civil war, in which all of the warring parties are closely related by blood and every act of violence is also necessarily a violation of kinship ties.⁷ The stakes could not be higher than those in a struggle between divine generations, while the threat of patricide and filicide as the fundamental tragedies of civil conflict could not be more evident. It seems not merely suitable but inevitable, at this point in the Ovidian corpus, for a narrative of violence at the intersection of kinship and kingship to receive such visceral treatment.

Domestic conflicts whose stakes are entangled with questions of dynastic rule are not limited to the divine realm. In Book 5 of the *Metamorphoses*, King Cepheus of Ethiopia laments the horrible fate from which his daughter Andromeda has narrowly escaped, describing the monster sent to devour her as “*quae visceribus veniebat belua ponti / exsaturanda meis*” (the sea-beast which was coming to gorge itself upon my viscera; 5.18–19). Even as Cepheus imagines the consumption of his daughter's body as a direct attack upon his own vital organs, Andromeda's viscosity extends beyond the immediate limits of the

6. The *Fasti* had previously mentioned the conflict between Saturn and Jupiter in Book 3, but the details of that struggle are merely a backdrop for the aetiology of the constellation Milvus (3.793–808), which features a prophecy that whoever burns the entrails of an earthborn bull-snake hybrid will achieve the power to conquer the gods (“*viscera qui tauri flammis adolenda dedisset / sors erat aeternos vincere posse deos*”: 3.803–4). Note the apparent slippage of viscera into the semantic domain of *exta* (especially given that *exta* appears at 3.806 as synonym for the same referent)—on the technical distinction between the two words and its progressive disintegration, see chapters 1 and 6–7, respectively.

7. According to the *Theogony*, Saturn's siblings (the Hecatoncheires and the Cyclopes; 501–6, 617–735) also fight to overthrow him; the threat of fratricide joins patricide and filicide as a further strand of domestic conflict implicated in this divine struggle.

domestic violence that so dependably accompanied the metaphors discussed previously in chapter 4. In fact, she becomes visceral only after she has been rescued, when an attempted coup invites Cepheus to revisit the circumstances of his daughter's near-demise. Only in this moment does the ruler invoke his own viscera-as-child in an appeal to a brother who threatens violence against his chosen successor. Andromeda's transformation into her father's viscera extends the standard conditions for the metaphor by marking not only the rupture of familial bonds but also the outbreak of civil war—a reasonable extension, since the necessity of violence between blood relations is what makes civil war such a horrifying prospect to Roman audiences.⁸

Neglect of familial duties—in this case the parents' obligation to protect the child from the consequences of their own mistakes—is still implicated in Andromeda's transformation into viscera, for she is condemned to die as scapegoat for the hubris of her boastful mother: "immetitam maternae pendere linguae / Andromedan poenas iniustus iusserat Ammon" (unjust Ammon had ordered innocent Andromeda to pay the penalties for her mother's tongue; 4.670–71). She herself, as the text emphasizes, is undeserving of punishment (*immetitam*, 4.670) and, when Perseus inquires why Andromeda is in chains, she places the blame squarely on her mother's "maternae . . . fiducia formae" (confidence in maternal beauty; 4.687). Meanwhile, the complicity of both of Andromeda's parents in her sacrifice is emphasized in their tacit approval of the exchange demanded by Jupiter Ammon, since they willingly trade their daughter's life for the protection of the larger kingdom. On the expected occasion of her death, they are present and mournful (*genitor lugubris et una / mater adest, ambo miseri*; 4.691–92), identified specifically by their parental relationships to the victim, but they conspicuously bring her no aid (*nec secum auxilium . . . / ferunt*; 4.693–94). For all their public displays of grief ("dignos tempore fletus / plangoremque ferunt vinctoque in corpore adhaerent," they bring weeping and wailing worthy of the occasion and cling to her bound body; 4.693–94), they do not move to unchain her, for doing so would violate the terms of the oracle that established Andromeda's sacrifice as the only method of placating the gods.

The king's and queen's responsibility for, and complicity in, their daughter's sacrifice correlates with the symbolic absorption of Andromeda's vulnerable body into her father's viscera. As with Ovid's other visceral children, the mor-

8. Vergil in particular highlights the familial relationships at stake in civil conflict; see Cairns (1989, 85–108). For the *Aeneid's* depiction of the war in Italy as a civil and fratricidal war, see Pogorzelski (2009, 261–63) with accompanying bibliography. See the final section of this chapter, "Visceral Reproduction in Augustan Contexts," for discussion of Rome's relationship to civil war as both literary theme and political reality.

tality of the child is envisioned as a physical burden to be borne by the parent, such that the child's death is a direct blow to the parent's vital organs. Though Andromeda manages to survive, the mere memory of her potential evisceration leads her father to posit a symbolic danger to his own viscera. But even as he recalls with horror a bygone threat to his child, there exists an immediate danger to his actual vital organs at the hands of his own brother. Phineus' revolt against Cepheus and Perseus is itself a quasi-fratricide, as he attempts to overthrow his brother and to kill that brother's new son-in-law; the immediate conflict of brother against brother, played out on the scale of dynastic struggle, forces the entire cast of Ethiopian nobles to engage in bloody warfare with members of their own race. It is significant that the invocation of Andromeda as her father's viscera takes place as Cepheus processes the consequences of the impending civil war and attempts to dissuade his brother from proceeding. As he scolds Phineus for his ungrateful attitude, emphasizing that he has lost Andromeda not to Perseus but to the Nereids, to Ammon, and to the sea monster (5.17–19), Cepheus' reference to her as *mea viscera* invokes both the past danger to his daughter's body and the present threat to his own.⁹ These viscera thus operate on two planes to mark the disruption of immediate blood bonds—parent and child, brother and brother—where fraternal conflict outspreads to compel the violation of kinship ties amongst the citizens of an entire kingdom.

The bloody war that erupts next, pitting Phineus' supporters against those who remain loyal to Cepheus,¹⁰ is consistently characterized by the ill-fated familial relationships and dishonorable violence that define civil conflict. The blood kinship shared among the Ethiopians is given primacy in the opening exposition of Book 5: as guests of the wedding feast listen to Perseus narrating his exploits, his audience is described as an *agmen Cephenum* (a crowd of Cepheus' relations; 5.1–2), a unified race labeled with a patronymic derived from the name of their king. All those who will engage in the impending battle (or be caught in the crossfire), with the exception of Perseus, are members of the same state and civic family, rendering the war over Andromeda by definition civil according to the common demographics of its warriors.

The conflict itself is characterized in terms both fratricidal and criminal, with particular blame applied to the inciting faction. Once Cepheus under-

9. Cepheus' additional rebuke that Phineus did not help Andromeda though he was both her uncle and betrothed (*et nullam quod opem patruus sponsusve tulisti*, 5.23) reveals an additional dimension of failed familial obligation—Phineus' to Andromeda—and acknowledges that it is an important duty of close relations to preserve the safety of their kin.

10. The battle imitates Odysseus' conflict with the suitors in Book 22 of the *Odyssey* as well as several episodes in the *Aeneid*; see Keith (2002a), who demonstrates that Ovid's Perseid is a sensitive and precise recasting of Vergilian martial poetry.

stands what Phineus is attempting, he addresses him immediately as brother (*germane*, 5.13), confronting him in the vocative with the fraternal bond that he threatens to rupture. The omniscient narrative voice confirms the injustice of the coup throughout the episode: Phineus is *belli temerarius auctor* (5.8), the “rash instigator of a war” that he will later acknowledge, at least internally, as unjust (*iniustum*, 5.210).¹¹ The uproar (*clamor*) that attends the earliest rumblings of discontent is identified as the sort which portends *fera . . . arma* (savage arms; 5.4) and once the battle begins the pious onlooker Emathion, too elderly to fight, denounces these arms as *scelerata* (criminal; 5.102).¹² Despite the foreign setting and foreign players, Roman household deities feature in the battle narrative, adding emphasis, by virtue of their corruption (*pollutos . . . Penates*; 5.155), to the violation of domestic bonds inherent to this dynastic struggle.¹³ The supporters of Phineus are conspirators (*coniurata . . . agmina*; 5.150–51) who fight “pro causa meritum impugnante fidemque” (for a cause that itself battles against due treatment and loyalty; 5.151). Cepheus, in contrast, is associated with justice (*ius*), fidelity (*fides*), and the gods of guest friendship (*hospitii dei*), swearing by these authorities that he does not approve of the rebellion (*testatus iusque fidemque / hospitiique deos ea se prohibente moveri*; 5.44–45). In remaining loyal to Perseus, Cepheus is also described as *frustra pius* (dutiful in vain; 5.152), a descriptor that emphasizes through its implied opposite the *impietas* (impiety) of unjust civil wars.¹⁴

As Keith (2009, 269) has demonstrated, this episode typifies narratives of male heroic mastery over feminized landscapes, especially the Roman “association of marriageable (foreign) women with (Roman) territorial conquest.” Andromeda, as a marriageable (and fertile) daughter, is transferrable property. Ownership of her body consistently represents control over her father’s territory. The pre-approved terms of her rescue guarantee for Perseus both marriage to Andromeda and the kingdom of Ethiopia as dowry (*regnum dotale*; 4.705). Phineus, meanwhile, emphasizes that he is not motivated by greed for

11. Cf. the frequent appearance of *temerarius* (rash, reckless) for feticidal mothers in Ovidian abortion narratives (see chapter 4).

12. The progression of the ages of man in Book 1 of the *Met.* had distinguished men of the Bronze Race, whose tendency to arms was savage but not criminal (*ad horrida promptior arma, / non scelerata tamen*; 126–27), from those of the Iron Race, with whose criminality the *non scelerata* of line 127 clearly contrasted and whose distinguishing features included strife between family members (145–48).

13. Phineus’ disrespect for the gods is evident from his use of an altar to shield himself (5.36–37); see Keith (2002a, 118).

14. Those who follow *impia arma* (impious arms) are given their own special place in the underworld of *Aeneid* 6 (612–13); Latinus calls the war he wages against Aeneas on Turnus’ behalf *impia* (12.31). Roller (1996, 321–22) offers a cogent picture of the inevitable relationship between *impietas* and civil war in the Roman imagination.

the kingdom (“non nos odium regnive cupido / compulit ad bellum,” neither hatred nor desire for rule drove us to war; 5.218–19) but fights on behalf of his promised spouse (pro coniuge movimus arma; 5.219). Even as he affirms his commitment to his betrothed as a noble *causa belli*, his explicit disavowal of the enticements of kingship nevertheless concedes that spouse and territory go hand in hand. His simultaneous denial that *odium* (hatred) inspired his actions is yet another evasion of responsibility for civil discord.¹⁵

The identification of Andromeda as her father’s viscera is therefore a clear and appropriate harbinger of the civil discord that threatens her kingdom, instigated by a conflict over her body as representative of the territory her husband will inherit from her father. As a visceral child, she highlights the parental negligence that enabled the endangerment of her body and underscores the fratricidal civil conflict that will soon be waged over it. The appearance of this metaphor just before the outbreak of violence, in the mouth of a character expressing distress at the near loss of his daughter and disapproval of an internal (and fraternal) threat to his sovereignty, presages the tragic consequences of the ensuing conflict for both family and state: civil war is born of fratricide and fratricide is compelled by civil war. The mutually guaranteed violation of kinship ties and civic loyalties is naturally, for Ovid, an irresistibly visceral occasion.

The indelible links between fratricide and civil war continue to accompany the appearance of these figures, even such microcosmic examples as the quick and tragic lives of the earthborn soldiers that Jason encounters in Colchis in Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*. The narrative contains a memorable simile comparing the rapid development and emergence from the earth of the soldiers sown from dragon’s teeth to the human process of gestation and childbirth (7.125–30):

utque hominis speciem materna sumit in alvo
perque suos intus numeros componitur infans
nec nisi maturus communes exit in auras,
sic ubi visceribus gravidae telluris imago
effecta est hominis, feto consurgit in arvo,
quodque magis mirum est, simul edita concutit arma.

15. *Odium* features prominently in Vergil’s representation of the Fury Allecto’s powers to incite civil wars: “tu potes unanimos armare in proelia fratres / atque odiis versare domos” (You are able to pit like-minded brothers against each other in battle and to overturn households with hatred; Verg. A. 7.335–36).

And just as an infant takes on the shape of a human in its mother's belly and is assembled within piece by piece and does not go out into the common breezes until it is fully developed, thus, when the form of a human has been created in the viscera of the pregnant earth, it rises in the fertile field and—what's even more miraculous—brandishes weapons as soon as it has been born.

The “viscera of the earth” and her association with fertility and reproduction are well-developed topoi in the *Metamorphoses*. In recounting the ages of man in Book 1, the narrator imagines the discovery of mining as a journey into the *viscera terrae* (1.138). During Phaethon's disastrous ride in the chariot of the Sun, the world's rivers attempt to escape by burying themselves “in opacae viscera matris” (into the viscera of their dark mother [Earth]; 2.274). While this latter instance primarily draws on an understanding of *viscera terrae* as referring to the same depths of the earth where mining would take place (and so a natural place for rivers to find refuge from the scorching heat of Phaethon's ill-fated ride), the earth's representation as mother also frames the rivers' withdrawal into her depths as a sort of return to the womb.¹⁶

The detail with which Ovid develops the imagery of a pregnant earth is particularly striking during the episode of the earthborn soldiers. The correlative structure of the simile (*ut . . . sic*) encourages the reader to imagine the conception and birth of these warriors as a mimesis of human reproduction. The varied repetition of the formulations *species hominis* (the shape of a human; 125) and *imago hominis* (the form of a human; 128–29) for unborn children ties together human womb (*materna alvus*; 125) with pregnant earth (*gravida tellus*, 128). Indeed, *gravidus* is a marked poetic term for pregnant bodies.¹⁷ Its pairing with *tellus* (earth) in her role as birthing mother defines the gestation of personified earth in terms of pregnancies experienced by human women.¹⁸ Yet it is remarkable that the human womb of the simile is signified by the word *alvus* (125), while the womb of Tellus is composed of viscera (128).¹⁹ The

16. See previous discussion of Mother Earth and visceral topography in chapter 3.

17. Commonly in Roman Comedy of pregnant girls (e.g., Plaut. *Cist.* 617, *Truc.* 90; Ter. *Ad.* 475). Of herd animals, Verg. *G.* 2.150, 3.139; of human women, Lucr. 4.1275; Ov. *Her.* 6.61, 6.120, 16.44; *Am.* 2.13.1, 2.14.17; *Met.* 10.505; *Fast.* 2.451.

18. Anderson (1972) suggests that “Ovid makes no more extensive use of the simile, as Vergil might have, for example, to suggest the *difference* [Anderson's emphasis] between the helpless infant and the fearsome warrior” (258). Indeed, Ovid's interest lies in the similarities that bind together human reproductive processes with the supernatural impregnation and birth of these warriors from their earth-mother: their immediate instinct when newly-born to take up weapons fits neatly with their gestation in a visceral womb and reflects that potential for violence implicitly back upon their human counterparts.

19. See chapter 3 for *alvus* as a term for the womb.

distinction is significant and traceable to Ovid's consistent conditions for the visceral womb: the earthborn brothers form within the viscera of their mother because they will destroy themselves in a fratricidal civil war.²⁰ Once Jason has confused the soldiers by casting a rock in their midst, they turn instantly upon each other and die at each other's hands: "terrigenae pereunt per mutua vulnera fratres / civilique cadunt acie" (The earthborn brothers perish through mutual wounds and fall in civil combat; *Met.* 7.141–42). That these soldiers were generated by the viscera of the earth anticipates the intrafamilial violence *cum* civil discord that is emphasized in the narration of their deaths: *fratres* (brothers; 141), *mutua vulnera* (shared wounds; 141), *civilis acies* (civil conflict; 142).²¹

This civil war, unlike those presaged by Cepheus' or Saturn's viscera, is limited in scope. For the soldiers in this battle, there is no kingdom at stake, no succession struggle, and no coup for control of the divine order. While the *terrigenae fratres* (earthborn brothers) are few in number and their lives are brief, their fraternal conflict illustrates succinctly the great tragedy toward which every civil war necessarily tends: the extinction of a race of men at its own hands. Though these soldiers are more supernatural than human, the simile describing their creation in human terms frames their experience as reflective of mortal behavior. They are born and they die in the manner of humans; humans themselves are no less susceptible to the terrible consequences of inter-necine violence.

Beyond the scope of this self-contained civil war, a further narrative of intrafamilial violence looms. Medea watches Jason from the crowd (*Met.* 7.134–38), herself the indirect instigator of the earthborn conflict, having provided him with the magic spells and stratagems to overcome the impossible challenges set by her father.²² Though the *Metamorphoses* omits the narrative of their dramatic escape from Colchis, any reader familiar with Medea's myth knows that the Colchian princess will murder her own brother and scatter his dismem-

20. Note also in the phrase *concutit arma* (brandish[ing] weapons) the reappearance of the verb stem *-cutio* alongside a visceral womb, which Ovid uses elsewhere in the context of abortions (*Her.* 11.42, *Fast.* 1.624).

21. Cadmus' encounter with the soldiers sown from dragon's teeth in Book 3 of the *Metamorphoses* is a natural point of comparison for this episode; their conflict is similarly marked as a fratricidal civil war: *civilibus bellis* (civil wars; 117), *cadunt . . . per mutua vulnera fratres* (the brothers fall through shared wounds; 123), *fraternaeque fidem pacis* (an agreement of fraternal peace; 128). Though the earth is twice marked as their mother (*terrigenis fratribus*, "earthborn brothers," at 118 and *sanguineam matrem*, "their blood-stained mother," at 125), she has no human or human-like characteristics (and no womb) in this passage. Indeed, the soldiers' birth is marked primarily by agricultural language: the seeds are scattered on unpersonified soil (*humi*; 105), the soldiers rise from furrows (*de sulcis*; 107) and are themselves a *seges* (crop; 110).

22. She is, when Jason flees Colchis with Fleece in hand, described as the *actor* (creator, originator) of his spoils and an additional spoil herself (*Met.* 7.157).

bered body in order to delay her father's pursuit. The birth of the soldiers from the earth's viscera, then, reflects their immediate fratricidal conflict, staged in gory detail in the text itself, and gestures toward the domestic bloodshed that will arise as part of the larger narrative surrounding their birth. There *is* something larger at stake in the earthborn soldiers' civil war, after all: their total self-destruction is a violent turning point in a series of betrayals that will conclude with Medea's own act of fratricide. And, as Ovid's readers surely knew, Medea will hesitate in the future neither to violate sacred domestic bonds nor to upend entire dynasties.

Rome's Fratricidal Origins

While each of the narratives discussed above is far removed from Rome—these conflicts take place in distant locations (Ethiopia, Colchis, Olympus) and their combatants are distinctly othered by their ethnicity, monstrosity, or divinity—Ovid does not, in the end, shy away from incorporating his visceral characterization of civil discord into a distinctly Roman context. The narrative of Romulus and Remus, and in particular the fraternal bloodshed which stains the story of Rome's foundation, aligns neatly with Ovid's terms of engagement for these reproductive metaphors. In what has by now become a recognizable Ovidian pattern, the viscera of this foundational fratricide appear not merely as an immediate marker of familial violation, but also as an early portent of violence fated for the distant future.

The viscera in Ovid's account of Rome's founding twins emerge at the moment of their conception, when Rhea Silvia awakens from the deep sleep cast upon her by Mars to discover that she is pregnant: "somnus abit, iacet illa gravis, iam scilicet intra / viscera Romanae conditor Urbis erat" (Sleep departs, she lies pregnant, already the founder of the Roman city was within her viscera; *Fasti* 3.23–24).²³ Note that Romulus already overshadows and displaces his twin within the womb, since *conditor* (the founder; 24) is pointedly singular. Indeed, the *Fasti* has already made several references to Remus' death (2.134, 143, 485–86), and will stage it in detail in Book 4 (837–56). Since the competition between these brothers forms a common thread in the foundational myths

23. Ursini (2008) observes the phonetic effect of viscera in these lines and suggests that the expression *intra viscera* can appear "inutilmente cruda ad una sensibilità moderna" (87); I would argue that the crudeness of the imagery is an essential feature of the metaphor's texture that communicates to the careful reader of Ovidian mythography the looming threat of violence.

that compose a large portion of the *Fasti's* content,²⁴ their conception within a visceral womb affirms the figure's continued association with domestic conflict. This account of Rhea Silvia's pregnancy is thus defined in clear reference to the fraternal discord that will inflect the lives of her twin sons in the future.

I argued in chapter 4 that the visceral womb reflects a violated relationship (past, present, or future) between sharers of the same body: this is nearly always the link between mother and child (Canace in *Heroides* 11, Corinna in *Amores* 2.13–14, the Ausonian women in *Fasti* 1, Eriphyle in *Amores* 1.10) and sometimes, via male appropriation of the womb, between father and child (Saturn in *Fasti* 4, Tereus in *Metamorphoses* 6). Rhea Silvia's womb is a marked departure from that pattern because she enacts no violence against her sons. Nevertheless, the disputing parties still grow within the same body: the fact that Romulus and Remus are twins makes it possible for a visceral womb to denote fraternal, rather than filial-maternal, conflict. Sharers of the same womb who are fated to kill each other are excellent candidates for gestation within maternal viscera: think again of the earthborn soldiers of *Metamorphoses* 7, whose fraternal violence is presaged by the viscosity of the chthonic womb from which they were all simultaneously born. This characterization of Rhea Silvia's pregnancy, then, acts not as an indicator of parental threat against child but as a harbinger of fraternal violence to come.

While conflict over future empire is certainly indexed by Rhea Silvia's visceral womb, the question of more immediate kingship is also relevant to the twins' birth and unusual upbringing. The paranoid jealousy of Rhea Silvia's uncle, the usurper king Amulius, embroils Romulus and Remus even as infants in a dilemma of rightful succession. It is at Amulius' command that they are abandoned to drown in a river (3.51) and grow up unaware of their true bloodline. As young men, they seek to reestablish the rightful order by killing their great-uncle and restoring their grandfather to the throne ("Romuleoque cadit traiectus Amulius ense, / regnaque longaevo restituuntur avo," Amulius falls skewered by Romulus' sword and the kingdoms are restored to their aged grandfather; 3.67–68). The constant struggle for succession that marks the familial conflicts surrounding Rome's foundation is therefore skillfully signaled by the viscera of a woman caught between generations of warring brothers.

In each of the ways explored above, Ovidian viscera have the capacity to

24. See Littlewood (2006, lxvii–lxviii). Note that the *Fasti's* account of Remus' death takes direct agency out of Romulus' hands. Instead, it is Celer, whom Romulus has instructed to protect the walls, who strikes the fatal blow. Romulus' command to kill anyone who crosses the boundary (4.839–40) makes him indirectly responsible for his brother's death. The thematics of civil strife suffuse Romulus' subsequent characterization of his brother as an enemy of the state: "sic . . . meos muros transeat hostis" (thus may the enemy cross my walls; 4.848).

signify forthcoming violence at the crossroads of familial and dynastic struggle. When Phineus revolts against Cepheus for control of the Ethiopian kingdom, the king invokes his daughter's visceral body in direct response to his brother's betrayal. The earthborn soldiers whom Jason must face in Colchis drive themselves to extinction through a fratricidal civil war that is foreshadowed by their birth from the viscera of mother Earth. Saturn's imprisonment of his children within his own viscera prefigures the impending conflict for control over Olympus—a struggle whose outcome is of paramount importance for Jupiter's position at the head of the divine hierarchy of Roman gods. In like manner, the gestation of Rome's founding brothers within a visceral womb heralds the doubled fratricidal conflicts that define the city's origins.

In the wake of these persistent associations between reproductive viscera and domestic and civic disharmony in Ovidian myth, we come to the speech of Pythagoras in the final book of the *Metamorphoses*, who offers an outline of the stages of human life (15.216–20):²⁵

fuit illa dies, qua semina tantum
spesque hominum primae matris latitavimus alvo.
artifices natura manus admovit et angi
corpora visceribus distentae condita matris
noluit eque domo vacuas emisit in auras.

There was the day on which we, merely the seeds and hope of men, were hidden in the womb of our first mother. Nature applied her skillful hands and did not wish for bodies buried in the viscera of a stretched mother to be compressed and she sent us out of that home into the empty breezes.

This passage presents the development of the human body as evidence in Pythagoras' larger argument for the inevitability of change in the natural world. While the viscera here refer unequivocally to a pregnant womb, there is no immediate or explicit link to violent intrafamilial or civil strife.

It is nevertheless significant that the very first change that humans undergo—from seeds (*semina*) to bodies (*corpora*)—entails a transformation of the mother's womb from alvus to viscera. The juxtaposition of alvus and viscera immediately recalls the childbirth simile from Book 7 (125–30), with the two

25. There has been a great deal of scholarly debate about Ovid's portrayal of Pythagoras, the soundness of his representation of Pythagorean philosophy, and the extent to which it is intended as satire. For fairly recent discussions, see Miller (1994) and Hardie (1995).

words appearing in the same case and metrical sedes in both passages. In Book 7, the distinction between *alvus* and *viscera* separates the womb of the mortal human woman from that of the personified Tellus. In this case, however, *alvus* and *viscera* embody two stages of the same womb. In Pythagoras' account, the womb as *alvus* contains what is small enough to lie hidden (*latitavimus*; 217); when those *semina* (seeds; 216) become *corpora* (bodies; 219), nature must step in to relieve the pressures—compressive (*angi*; 218) and expressive (*distentae*; 219)—that render the womb visceral. This metamorphosis is presented as natural and human; childbirth is a process guided by nature, who releases infants from the womb (as domestic space: *e domo*; 220) out into the world. In isolation, then, this speech suggests that the visceral womb is a necessary and inevitable step in the generation of human life, a product of the internal pressures exerted by and on a pregnant body which nature works to release.

Before exploring this passage further, we should consider two other significant instances of *viscera* within the same speech—neither one so explicitly connected to reproductive metaphor but nevertheless illuminating. Early in his speech, Pythagoras invokes the visceral lexicon to describe what his philosophy considers the cannibalistic consumption of reanimated human souls (15.88–90):

heu quantum scelus est in viscere viscera condi
 congestoque avidum pinguescere corpore corpus
 alteriusque animans animantis vivere leto.

Alas, how great a crime it is for viscera to be buried inside viscera and for a greedy body to grow fat upon a digested body and for a living thing to survive by the death of another living thing.

This description of the absorption of viscera within viscera most immediately recalls Achaemenides' horrified account of Polyphemus' man-eating habits in the previous book (14.203–4); the emotional impact of cannibalism clearly constitutes a great part of Pythagoras' persuasive tactics here. But his choice of vocabulary in this rejection of interpersonal violence, especially the pairing of viscera with the verb *condere* (to bury) and his emphasis on the disruption of boundaries between bodies (*corpore corpus*), may very well color our reading of his later description of gestating fetuses as “*corpora visceribus . . . condita matris*” (bodies buried in the mother's viscera; 15.219). At the conclusion of Pythagoras' lengthy speech, he offers a final entreaty for men to discontinue consuming meat (15.459–62):

corpora, quae possunt animas habuisse parentum
 aut fratrum aut aliquo iunctorum foedere nobis
 aut hominum certe, tuta esse et honesta sinamus,
 neve Thyesteis cumulemus viscera mensis.

Let us allow those bodies, which can contain the souls of our parents or of our brothers or of those joined to us by some pact or at least of human beings, to be safe and whole, and let us not pile up viscera on tables like Thyestes.

Here the invocation of cannibalism is both more explicit and more explicitly connected to deliberate domestic violence: the consumption of others' souls becomes the worst crime imaginable when they could easily belong to parents and brothers, since to pile up viscera on the feasting-table like Thyestes can mean nothing other than to consume one's own kin.

Pythagoras' viscera are therefore broadly concerned with questions of domestic violence implicated in, as he frames it, familial cannibalism. Even reading the speech in isolation, the visceral womb at 15.219 is imbued with some measure of unease by virtue of its connection to these reiterations of the word. But Pythagoras' speech cannot be read in isolation: Myers (1994, 133–34) has argued, in fact, that Pythagoras' speech is a microcosm of the poem as a whole. Appearing as it does at the conclusion of Ovid's sweeping mythological epic, this particular womb bears the weight of all the viscera that have come before it. The poet's readers are fully conditioned by now to associate such wombs with horrifying violations of physical and social boundaries. They have witnessed feticidal mothers tearing out their own wombs; cannibalistic fathers consuming their children; and murderous relatives stabbing, burning, dismembering, and otherwise violating the bodies and boundaries of their kin. There can be no neutral reading of viscera now, no return to its impersonal anatomical sense in Lucretius or to anything like the unmarked medical classification that survives for us in Celsus. By this point in the epic, Ovid has systematically and insistently stained the word viscera with the collective bloodshed of myth's most unspeakable crimes.

So far in the Ovidian landscape, visceral wombs and visceral children have inhabited a mythological world. This is a world where murder, cannibalism, and incest are common occurrences, where ill-fated mortals frequently transform into animals, plants, and stars. The poetics of viscosity and reproduction developed thus far are troubling, to be sure, but firmly rooted in a fictional plane. When Pythagoras inserts the visceral womb into his narrative of human generation, his application of viscera to a real and universal process thrusts Ovid's

charged representation of reproduction firmly into the realm of the human, the possible, and the repeatable: gestation is a visceral activity and everyone is implicated by virtue of being born. In light of all the reproductive viscera that Ovidian texts have generated, then, and the specific conditions of their viscosity (feticide, infanticide, filicide, matricide, patricide, fratricide, cannibalism, incest, civil war), Pythagoras' suggestion that every productive womb necessarily tends toward a visceral state creates an unsettling link between familiar human experience and those horrific narratives of impiety which seemed distantly and safely mythological. If all humans grow before birth within visceral wombs, and if visceral wombs are a consistent symptom of violations of familial and civic duty, then inward-turning violence—domestic and civil—is an inherent risk of reproduction.²⁶

The Visceral Text as Offspring

Though viscera appear only once in Ovid's *Tristia*,²⁷ this single occurrence is a significant experiment in metapoetics that demonstrates the poet's self-conscious authorial engagement with his own visceral game. In the first book of his *Tristia*, the exilic narrator reports that when he was forced to depart Rome he decided to cast his copy of the *Metamorphoses* into the fire. In doing so, he compares himself to Althaea (1.7.17–20):

utque cremasse suum fertur sub stipite natum
 Thestias et melior matre fuisse soror,
 sic ego non meritos mecum peritura libellos
 imposui rapidis viscera nostra rogis.

Just as Althaea is said to have burned her own son in the guise of the log and to have been a better sister than mother, so I placed my little books, undeserving [of punishment]—my viscera, about to perish along with me—on consuming funeral pyres.

26. Relevant once again is Green (2004, 284–86) on the tension between Ovidian representations of fertility and the Augustan legislation that encouraged reproduction.

27. In fact, the word viscera is comparatively rare in Ovid's exilic corpus, occurring only once in the entirety of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*. There are viscera spattered all over the *Ibis*, however, referring primarily to the spilled (and/or cannibalized) inner organs of a mangled human body, which is not surprising given the narrator's preoccupation with cursing his enemy. Krasne (2012) proposes that the addressee is not a historical nemesis but a stand-in for the Muses who inspired his poetry; this interpretation suggests that the poetics of the visceral text discussed below remain relevant to the *Ibis*. For the *Tristia*, I use the Latin edition of Owen (1915).

Ovid here represents his poetic texts—*viscera nostra* (20)—as his children, rendered visceral by the prospect of material destruction at the hands of their creator. His claim at 1.7.19 that the burning texts will perish “along with [him]” (*mecum*),²⁸ recalls those mythological parents who characterize the deaths of their children as a form of physical harm to their own bodies. That these textual viscera are affiliated with offspring is clear both from Ovid's self-identification with the filicidal Althaea and from his continued assumption of a parental relationship to his texts.²⁹ By interweaving this author-parent analogue with his visceral child metaphor via a narrative of filicide, Ovid activates a series of intertextual references that confirm the efficacy of his reproductive figures as vehicles for the expression of anxieties about (re)production and destruction.

The judicious reference to Althaea in *Tristia* 1.7 recalls Ovid's emphatically visceral representation of Meleager's death in *Metamorphoses* 8,³⁰ where Althaea declares, just before burning the piece of wood to which her son's life is bound, “*rogus iste cremet mea viscera*” (let that funeral pyre burn my viscera; 8.478). As Meleager begins to die, “he feels his viscera burn with unseen fires” (*caecis torreri viscera sentit / ignibus*; 8.516–17) and Althaea finally dies by suicide, “driving a sword through her viscera” (*acto per viscera ferro*; 8.532). The viscera-as-child metaphor first serves as a symbolic displacement of violence against the child onto the parent, a theme familiar from other Ovidian instances of the same figure. Meleager then experiences the pain of his own death in the same body part that his mother just appropriated—and so Althaea's viscera (as offspring) have viscera (as vital organs) of their own. Althaea then dies by a wound inflicted upon her own viscera (as womb), a site of injury meant to underscore her betrayal of motherly duty. Within this brief episode, then, Ovid deploys viscera with particular elasticity of meaning: vital organs, the figurative child, the wounded womb.

And so, at *Tristia* 1.7.17–20, in the pseudo-filicidal act of burning a physical copy of the *Metamorphoses* imagined as his own viscera,³¹ Ovid burns also

28. On Ovid's characterization of exile as death, see Claassen (1996) and Grebe (2010, with further bibliography collected at n3).

29. He describes his writings later in this same poem as “*orba parente suo . . . volumina*” (books bereft of their parent; 1.7.35); he had also suggested in the collection's first poem that the *Ars Amatoria* could be accused of parricide (1.1.114). The association between author and parent is a common figure in Ovid's exile poetry, even outside the context of destruction: see Davisson (1984). On the Greco-Roman metaphor of text-as-offspring, see Zanker (2016, 129–41).

30. As discussed previously in chapter 4. Hinds (1985) touches upon the nexus between these passages in respect to Ovidian self-referentiality, while Knox (2016, 179–81) identifies viscera as an important piece of connective tissue between these two episodes.

31. Farrell (1999, 140–41) translates the viscera of *Trist.* 1.7.20 as “my own flesh and blood.”

the numerous instances of viscera contained within that text, including the many wombs and children in the epic narrative stained by domestic and civil bloodshed; most significantly, it includes the tangle of referents in Book 8 to which this simile directly alludes. As Meleager's viscera burn with a hidden flame (*Met.* 8.516–17), as Althaea agonizes over the murder of her child (*Met.* 8.478) and pierces her own womb in evocative punishment (*Met.* 8.532), so the material volume on which their story is inscribed burns around them, itself conceptualized as the viscera (*Trist.* 1.7.20) of its creator. We are pulled back into that visceral *mise en abyme*, even as we are encouraged to imagine the destruction of the text that contains it. The immolations of Meleager's splinter of wood and of Ovid's texts are linked inexorably to the destruction of offspring at the hands of their creators, underscored by a symbolic parental appropriation of children's suffering.

This text, among the last of the metaphorical viscera that Ovid ever published, contains a weighty implication about the hazards of (sexual or textual) reproduction. In tying authorship to parenthood, Ovid's textual viscera suggest that composition makes an author vulnerable in the same way that reproduction makes parents vulnerable. The act of poetic production is thus entangled in the systems of violence that mar so many of the parent-child relationships of Ovidian myths. Whether one produces a child or a text, to produce is to expose a part of the self. Texts are as much an external manifestation of an author's most vital parts as children are of their parents'. It is presented as a dangerous inevitability that the parent-poet will cause harm to his creation and, by extension, to himself. Ovid's willful act of destruction in *Tristia* 1.7, in keeping with the experience of all the filicidal parents in his corpus, is also a form of self-harm. His visceral texts bear with them, and within them, the weight of all the troubled domestic relationships whose horrific violations he has authored.

These interlocking metapoetic and intertextual components in *Tristia* 1.7 and *Metamorphoses* 8 exemplify the intricate machineries of Ovidian viscera. The self-referential moment in the exile poem activates a mutually dependent triangulation of wordplay. Ovid's metamorphic representation of Althaea's filicide thus becomes a proleptic refraction of his troubled authorial relationship with poetic production. This final elaboration of reproductive viscera in the Ovidian corpus, imbued with particular meaning through its appearance in a poignant pseudo-autobiographical episode—where the narrative voice represents the author himself, or as near as we can possibly approach an author obscured by the film of literary conceit—punctuates the prolonged process by which the author used the word viscera to link production to destruction. In

the end, Ovid's final self-conscious expansion of the figure clarifies the most significant contention of his new reproductive metaphors, which saturate and stain narratives of familial violation and civic discord, only to be saturated and stained in return: all roads in the Ovidian landscape lead toward discontinuity and destruction, originating with the act of production itself.

Visceral Reproduction in Augustan Contexts

It is my contention that the rapid development of viscera into a charged reproductive figure was an Ovidian intervention into the postwar politics of fertility in Augustan Rome. In the laws, literature, and political discourses of Ovid's lifetime, there surfaced an insistent correlation between human fertility and state stability, where the rebuilding of a fractured community was presented as contingent upon the sustainability of the population. The values of peace (as earned through victory in war) and fertility (as necessary for the continuity of generations) were essential preoccupations in the political, cultural, and social environment of Ovid's day. In this section, I contextualize the domestic and civic violence attached to Ovid's reproductive viscera against the saturation of "peace" and "fertility" as parallel values in the Augustan cultural program. After reviewing the complex and evolving political situation at Rome during Ovid's lifetime, with special reference to the politics of civil war and reproduction, I offer a close reading of an illustrative piece of Augustan discourse that exemplifies the carefully curated imperial message intertwining fertility and peace: Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*. If, I argue, reproducing Rome was of utmost importance for achieving the stability promised under Augustan pax,³² then Ovid's reproductive viscera, designed to resonate specifically and systematically in contexts of domestic violence and civil war, generated a forceful confrontation with peace and fertility as ideals of continuity in Augustan culture.

In the course of his life (43 BCE–17 CE) and literary career, Ovid witnessed Rome's transition from a nominal republic to a nascent dynasty ruled by the Julio-Claudian family. Born in the year following Julius Caesar's assassination,³³ Ovid was twelve years old when Octavian's victory at Actium solidified his power (31 BCE) and nearly sixteen when Octavian was granted the title Augustus (27 BCE). Throughout his adult life, Ovid lived in an imperial metropolis in a constant state

32. I borrow the phrase "reproducing Rome" from the title of McAuley's (2016) monograph on motherhood in Latin poetry.

33. Ovid reports at *Tristia* 4.10.5–6 that he was born in the year "when both consuls fell by the same fate" (*editus hic ego sum . . . / cum cecidit fato consul uterque pari*); Hirtius and Pansa, the consuls of 43 BCE, died within a few days of each other in the course of military campaigns against Antony.

of rebuilding and reform, as the *princeps* promised to restore the city's glory and stability in the wake of devastating civil wars.³⁴ Ovid witnessed the methodical accumulation by a single man of an unprecedented measure of authority and the final dissolution of the *res publica* into an autocracy—a transition that hindsight can trace with clarity, though in the moment its permanence could not have been a foregone conclusion. And at last Ovid observed from afar, in exile, the peaceful transfer of power to Augustus' selected successor Tiberius in 14 CE that secured the continuity of Rome's new model of government.

The age of political uncertainty in Rome that followed that decisive victory at Actium, as Octavian-Augustus negotiated his authority as Rome's leading man, as a fragmented Roman populace worked to recover from the trauma of civil war, and as Ovid grew from child to youth to adult with a flourishing poetic career, was marked by a constellation of social pressures surrounding civic harmony, fertility, and familial *pietas* (dutifulness, devotion, loyalty). Rome's citizens, conditioned by decades of recurrent civil war and confronted by a new and unfamiliar model of government, were likely still on the alert for the next outbreak of internal strife. It was not merely the fresh memory of civil conflict between Antony and Octavian that plagued Ovid's Rome; the city had been destabilized for half a century by violent internal discord and short-lived periods of tenuous truce.³⁵ As discussed previously, a series of conflicts between Sulla and Marius had unsettled Rome throughout the 80s BCE; the Catilinarian conspiracy, though stifled before it began, drew much rhetorical (Ciceronian) attention to the dangers of internal threats to the republic in the late 60s; the political machinations of the first triumvirate and the aftermath of its dissolution rendered the 40s a decade of devastating civil strife.³⁶ Although the battle of Actium (31 BCE) marked an end to formal civil conflict, still the Roman people—and even Octavian himself—could not have foreseen that a long period of uncontested leadership would follow. It was, for this reason, the continuous project of Octavian-Augustus and his supporters to frame his governance as safeguarding the restoration of civic harmony,³⁷ especially as embodied in the complex Roman value of *pax*.³⁸

34. Crook (1996) outlines the most significant political changes of this period, emphasizing that Augustan institutions “need to be seen as arising, incomplete and tentative, out of the vicissitudes of a continuing political story” (70).

35. The scholarship on Roman civil war (as historical reality, literary theme, moral concern, and cultural preoccupation) is vast; see e.g., the fundamental works of Jal (1963) and Henderson (1998); most recently, Börm, Gotter, and Havener (2023) and Lange (2024).

36. See the final section of chapter 2, “Visceral Politics in Late Republican Contexts.”

37. See Gruen (1985) and Gurval (1995), who both emphasize that this ideological program is better characterized as gradual and diffuse than as a centrally directed and immediately coherent system of messaging; Severy (2003, 33–61) examines the Augustan restoration program in terms of civil war discourse, where the wars are blamed on “immoral disrespect for Roman traditions and boundaries” (47).

38. “Peace” is a necessarily imperfect translation, since the Latin concept of *pax* does not pre-

Just as Augustus was concerned with reassuring the Roman populace that a lasting resolution to civic strife had been achieved, his administration's enthusiastic promotion of marriage and child-bearing was built upon an understanding of population growth as a certain path toward community stability. A preoccupation with fertility was formalized in a legislative program keyed toward conservative family values among the upper class: female chastity, legitimate marriage, and plentiful children.³⁹ The *Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus*, passed in 18 BCE and revised in 9 CE in the form of the *Lex Papia et Poppaea*, enacted political, economic, and social advantages for parents who married legitimately and produced a requisite number of children. Around the same time, the *Lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* confronted threats to reproductive legitimacy by making adultery a public crime. Motherhood, the success of which was measured by number of surviving offspring, became a means by which women of multiple classes could access unprecedented legal and economic independence.⁴⁰ Childlessness, on the other hand, was a dishonor subject to financial penalty.⁴¹ Though such laws were not formalized until a decade after Augustus received his title, some textual evidence has been taken to suggest that he proposed similar measures without success as early as 28 BCE.⁴² From the beginning of his principate—and the earliest years of Ovid's poetic career—Augustus was eager to push for measures to promote reproduction among a citizen body that was to some extent reluctant to comply.⁴³ These formal efforts to encourage fertility were implicitly and explicitly linked to the return of community stability.⁴⁴ Those legal measures were

sume a mutual exclusion with active war. Pax played a prominent role in numerous instantiations of Augustan power, including numismatic, architectural, sculptural, and literary programs: see Weinstock (1960, esp. 47–50), Stern (2015), and Cornwell (2017, esp. 121–86).

39. On the Augustan legislation governing marriage, children, and adultery, and the effects of this legal program on models of Roman womanhood, see McGinn (1998, 70–104, 140–215) and Grubbs (2002, 83–84); see also Cohen (1991), Treggiari (1991, 60–80), Galinsky (1996a, 128–140), Severy (2003, 52–56), and Langlands (2006, 219–26).

40. Elite citizen mothers who bore three surviving children to their husbands earned the right to freedom from guardianship; the same reward was granted to freedwomen married to *equites* who bore four children (Gaius *Inst.* 1.145, 194); see McGinn (1998, 76–78).

41. The unmarried and the childless faced tax penalties and were restricted from full rights to inheritance: see Wallace-Hadrill (1981) on the intricacies of inheritance under these laws and McGinn (1998, 72–75).

42. Prop. 2.7 is often cited as evidence for such a proposal; other potential references have been found at Tac. *Ann.* 3.25–28, Hor. *Carm.* 3.5 and 3.6, Vell. 2.89, Orosius 6.22.3, and Florus *Epit.* 2.34 (all of these identified first by Jörs 1894). James (2003, 229–31) refutes the claim of Badian (1985) that the law referenced in Prop. 2.7 merely concerned taxation.

43. For apparent opposition to Augustan moral policy: Suet. *Aug.* 34, Tac. *Ann.* 3.25–28, Cass. Dio 56.1; Cairns (1979), Raaflaub and Samons (1990), Treggiari (1991, 79–80), Grubbs (2002, 85–87).

44. As Wheeler-Reed puts it: “We might even imagine that the stickers on chariots accompanying the legislation would have read, ‘Want peace? Make babies!’” (2017, 7).

complemented by a strong imperial message identifying the fruitfulness of the Roman citizen body as the highest public good.

Pointed emphasis on fertility alongside assurances of internal peace feature heavily in Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*, a lyric poem composed for the revival of the *ludi saeculares* of 17 BCE, which scholars generally agree was an occasion for the assertion of Augustan primacy in the restoration of the traditional values that would return glory and stability to Rome.⁴⁵ In this poem commissioned by Augustus for performance at a public celebration of his achievements and composed by an author with strong connections to his court,⁴⁶ explicit prayers for successful reproduction and support for legislated fertility accompany a larger emphasis on stability and the continuity of generations. The speaking voices of the poem (a chorus of adolescent boys and girls)⁴⁷ address a series of divinities and entreat their good favor; four stanzas in, a generalizing prayer to the goddess of childbirth transitions into a surprisingly specific affirmation of the Augustan legislation on marriage and fertility (13–20):

rite maturos aperire partus
 lenis, Ilithyia, tuere matres,
 sive tu Lucina probas vocari
 seu Genitalis:
 diva, producas subolem, patrumque
 prosperes decreta super iugandis
 feminis prolisque novae feraci
 lege marita.

Protect our mothers, Ilithyia, gentle in your dutiful support of timely parturition, whether you would like to be addressed as Lucina or Genitalis: goddess, may you bring forth offspring and may you render prosperous the senatorial decrees on the yoking of our women and the marital law fruitful of new progeny.

45. Davis (2006, 28) suggests that the purpose of the revived games was “not to avert disaster, but to advertise success.” On the *Carmen Saeculare* and its formalized expressions of Augustan power see Davis (2001), Thomas (2011), and Cornwell (2017, 121–153). Tarrant (2020, 151) emphasizes that the performance of the *Carmen* was timed “as a capstone of the entire festival.” Crook (1996, 94) asserts that the *Carmen* “cannot be bettered as a compendium of the ideology set before the Roman people.”

46. On the ebb and flow of Horace's position as public poet affiliated with the Augustan court, see Lyne (1995), esp. 194–95 on the commissioning of the *Carmen Saeculare* as having prompted him to resume that role.

47. As indicated in the inscription which recorded the proceedings of the *ludi* of 17 BCE; see Schnegg (2020, 154–56).

While there is nothing particularly unusual about this prayer for safe childbirth,⁴⁸ the request for divine sponsorship of legislative matters feels quite incongruous, especially given the specific and transparent reference to the recently passed marriage laws.⁴⁹ The intervention of a policy position into the work of a poet otherwise known for his “fine sense of generic propriety” leads Tarrant (2020, 152) to conclude that “the impetus for this unfortunate idea probably came from Augustus or his advisors.” The identification of the law itself as *ferax* (fruitful, productive) offers a poetic displacement of the pressures and consequences of reproduction onto the body politic—a formal celebration of legislated fertility, affirming its efficacy as a secure path to prosperity.⁵⁰

Later in the poem, the generation of new Roman progeny (*proles*) appears again in a catalogue of boons requested from the gods (45–48):

di, probos mores docili iuventae,
 di, senectuti placidae quietem,
 Romulae genti date remque prolemque
 et decus omne.

Gods, grant upright character to teachable youth, gods, grant rest to peaceful old age, to the race of Romulus grant wealth and progeny and every glory.

The production of heirs is here presented as a concern of equal importance to economic success and imperial expansion; only Roman offspring are suited to inherit, manage, and increase ancestral property and prosperity. It is noteworthy that this request is structured in grammatical parallel with concerns about the diverse needs of younger and elder Romans—alongside wealth, children, and glory, the gods ought to keep the youth compliant and reward the elderly with rest. The generation experiencing *senectus* under Augustus, it should be noted, comprised exactly those citizens whose entire lives would have been disrupted by the civic turbulence that preceded and enabled his ascension to

48. Cf. Ovid *Fast.* 2.451–52: “parce, precor, gravidis, facilis Lucina, puellis, / maturumque utero molliter aufer onus” (I pray, gentle Lucina, be sparing to pregnant girls, and bring out the ripe burden gently from the womb).

49. Thomas (2011, 68) identifies *super iugandis feminis* and *lege marita* as a clear paraphrase of “Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus.”

50. The poem does not acknowledge the law’s restriction of legitimate childbearing to married citizens, though these distinctions of class were an important piece of the Augustan program; Pandey (2018a) asserts that the laws “betray a profound anxiety about the demographic vigor of the state in their heavy-handed attempt to foster reproduction among elites and discourage genetic intermingling with the lower classes” (482).

power. It can be no coincidence that this poem promises that specific demographic a future of the restful civic peace they were denied in their youths. Indeed, war in this poem is carefully circumscribed to the past as a tool through which current pax was achieved. Horace's picture of Roman prosperity relies on the restriction of disruptive conflict to a distant past and the promise of a restful future contingent upon the cooperation of youthful Romans in sustaining the population.

The hymn's broader focus on peace as an outcome reinforced by fertility is further clarified by the appearance of Pax personified in a catalogue of lost ancient values,⁵¹ whose reemergence in the present age is meaningfully accompanied by the appearance of personified abundance (57–60):

iam Fides et Pax et Honos Pudorque
 priscus et neglecta redire Virtus
 audet, apparetque beata pleno
 Copia cornu.

Now Loyalty and Peace and Dignity and traditional Modesty and forgotten Courage dare to return, and blessed Abundance appears with full horn.

Fertility and prosperity are joined together again at lines 66–68, where the speakers affirm that a benevolent Apollo would “extend the Roman commonwealth and fertile Latium always into another age and a better era” (*remque Romanam Latiumque felix / alterum in lustrum meliusque semper / prorogat aevum*). The word *felix*, operating on two levels to indicate both good fortune and fertility, is demonstrative of the close link between those two concepts: Rome's dominion can only be extended into the future if there are fresh generations to inherit it.

The poem concludes with the bearing home of a “good and certain hope” (*spem bonam certamque domum reporto*; 74); while this *spes* (hope) refers most immediately to an expectation of the gods' divine favor, the poem's emphasis on human fertility may inflect this word with further connotations of reproductive continuity.⁵² The *Carmen Saeculare* therefore offers us a con-

51. The association of peace with neglected ancestral values in the *Carmen Saeculare* is a studied reflection of the correlative relationship that the Augustan program consistently drew between pax and pietas, where peace is presented as an inevitable consequence of the duty fulfilled to gods, family, and community. On pax and pietas as “condensation symbols” of the Augustan program formed in response to a time of crisis, see Gottlieb (1998, 26–27).

52. *OLD* s.v. *spes* 5b: “a person or thing in which one's hopes are centred (applied to offspring

solidated vision of the broader ideological messages about fertility that were circulating in the Augustan period, as a piece of public, performative discourse promoting the central importance of reproduction to Roman citizen life.⁵³ The poem's emphatic characterization of fertility as crucial to the stability of Rome is as much a promise as it is a prayer, identifying generational continuity as a gift offered and sanctioned by a flock of patron gods, an uncomplicated ingredient in the recipe of Roman renewal.

The prominence of peace and fertility as interlocking ideological concerns of the Augustan era therefore provides formative context for the metamorphosis of the word *viscera* into a figure for reproductive bodies. I contend that the methodical manifestations of visceral wombs and visceral children in Ovidian episodes of domestic violence and civil conflict comprise a purposeful authorial reaction to the principles of continuity enforced by Augustan culture. Before Augustus ever formally consolidated his power, the word *viscera* had already accumulated charged connotations of internal strife, political violence, and a destabilized body politic (see chapter 2); by expanding *viscera's* semantic range into the domain of reproduction and attaching these new usages consistently to elaborations of domestic and civic strife, Ovid authorizes a sticky transference of the word's potential for meaty, disruptive, disturbing violence into the realm of fertility. Ovid's interventions do not merely expand the word's range, but actively stain the pristine thematics of Augustan fertility with irresistible connotations of violence and destruction. Maternity, paternity, childbearing, the rearing of legitimate heirs—all highly prized and rewarded duties of the Augustan citizen—are boldly twisted into dangerous endeavors that destabilize rather than bolster domestic and civic harmony. In this way, Ovid inscribes a systematic critique of Augustan intrusions into the private sexual and reproductive lives of Rome's citizens into an amplified poetics of flesh and blood.

as the embodiment of one's hopes for the future).'

53. Other instantiations of these discourses include, e.g., the Ara Pacis, whose east wall features a female figure surrounded by fertility imagery; relevant but less trustworthy forms of evidence include later reports of Augustus' focus on fertility in speeches delivered to the Roman public and senate (e.g., Suet. *Aug.* 89 and Cass. Dio 56.2–10).

PART 3



Succession

CHAPTER 6



Overdetermined Violence and Polluted Sacrifice in Seneca

I have now traced the expansion of Latin *viscera* into a sophisticated political metaphor during the late republic and a multivalent reproductive figure during the Augustan period. In chapters 6 and 7, I turn to the late Julio-Claudian period, exploring two consequential facets of the word's continued semantic development, especially as they manifest in the works of Seneca and Lucan. First, these two authors offer unmistakable evidence that Ovid's apparent invention of viscera as a referent for wombs and offspring had a decisive and lasting influence on Latin poetics; the abundance of such figures in their literary corpora affirm the "conventionalization" of the word's entry into the semantic field of reproduction. While their attention to Ovidian precedent in deploying these figures is unmistakable, both Seneca and Lucan make incremental adjustments to the environments of their usage, including periodic disarticulations from contexts of domestic violence and new affiliations with familial and civic loyalty taken to a self-destructive extreme. These contextual modifications, which could be connected to the peculiar thematic and generic priorities of each author's works, may also be indicative of a larger progression in cultural discourses about civil war, where Ovid's obsession with fertility is overpowered by a warranted preoccupation with questions of succession and the increasingly evident impermanence of Rome's fragile internal peace.

Second, I identify the emergence of an entirely new pattern of usage for the word in the poetics of the Neronian period: the persistent affiliation of viscera with profane or polluted religious practice, including the disturbing substitution of human for animal viscera in contexts of ritual slaughter, divination, and the sacrificial feast. Before this period, literary representations of the ingestion of human viscera were limited to extra-religious contexts or ethnographic narratives of foreign cannibalism.¹ The Neronian expansion of viscera's semantic

1. As of the Cyclops Polyphemus' taste for human flesh (Verg. *A.* 3.622; cf. Ov. *Met.* 14.194, 203, 208), Tereus' unwitting consumption of his son (*Met.* 6.651), and Pomponius Mela's brief accounts of the Scythian Anthropophagoi and certain peoples of India (Mela 2.14, 3.64). Human viscera are

connotations in ritual contexts relies upon a deliberate confusion of the human and animal components of sacrificial practice. These new contextual parameters for the word's religious usage hold so persistently and strikingly in Senecan and Lucanian poetics as to constitute a marked intervention into the word's semantic field. I ultimately suggest that these authors' consistent inclusion of viscera in scenes of ritual perversion correlates with a growing discomfort in the Neronian period with imperial abuses of religious custom, an anxiety exacerbated by the investment of centralized religious authority in a single office with insecure lines of succession.

Seneca's careful engagements with Ovid have long been recognized: he adapts and confronts his Ovidian models with thoughtful and imaginative attention, especially in his tragic corpus.² It comes as no surprise, then, that Senecan tragedy positively overflows with visceral wombs and children. A close examination of Senecan viscera affirms that the playwright observed the meticulous contours of Ovid's semantic interventions and adopted them with enthusiasm and ingenuity. In receiving these figures, I argue, Seneca does not merely replicate Ovid's integration of reproductive concerns with violence, but magnifies it, presenting them in overdetermined contexts of domestic strife. Moreover, Seneca uses viscera to construct new associations between inward-facing violence and violations of religious sanctity, linking the ominous reproductive connotations of the Ovidian figure to the word's formerly unmarked affiliation with sacrificial meat. By explicitly invoking the lexicon of ritual sacrifice alongside the horror of familial blood violations, Seneca amplifies the taboo violence that already attends the reproductive figures.

At the same time, Seneca effects a nuancing of viscera that permits an unexpected category of mothers (i.e., good ones) to participate in the larger network of visceral reproductivity. This new pattern of usage, in which viscera are invoked alongside devoted mothers, like Andromache and Helvia, suspends the Ovidian prerequisite of domestic conflict; while violence, or the threat of violence, remains central to the figure's surrounding contexts, Seneca allows for honorable mothers to shield their children from (rather than subject them to) this harm. In select moments, then, Senecan viscera become an unexpected

more frequently consumed by animals than by humans, as in Actaeon's dogs (*Ov. Met.* 3.249; but n.b. the variant reading *corpore*), screech owls with a taste for infant flesh (*Ov. Fast.* 6.137), and the colorful torments dreamed up by the narrator of Ovid's *Ibis* against the target of his curse (eaten by horses, 458; devoured by birds, 541). Cf. a 1st century CE curse tablet (*AE* 2007, 260) recording a violent wish for three-headed hellhounds to devour the viscera of one unfortunate Caecilia Prima.

2. According to Tarrant (1978), "Seneca's originality as a poet and dramatist can only be grasped in an Ovidian context" (263); other approaches to Ovid's influence on Seneca include Jakobi (1988), Hinds (2011), and Trinacty (2014).

focal point of maternal devotion. The final section of this chapter considers evidence from plays attributed to Seneca but not authored by him. Though scholarly consensus rejects Senecan authorship for the *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, their imitation of Senecan language, style, and theme offers insights about the patterns of usage—viscera included—which readers of his authentic corpus found notable and worthy of replication.

Filicide and Cannibalism

Seneca's Medea builds upon the foundations of her Ovidian predecessors (in the *Heroides*, *Remedia*, and, we must assume, the lost *Medea*) to commit crimes still more gruesome than what her earlier incarnations managed to achieve.³ In addition to the slaying of her two children, this Medea professes a bloodthirsty eagerness to abort any child of Jason's that may have taken hold in her womb. After the first murder, in response to Jason's plea to spare the other son ("one is enough punishment," *unus est poenae satis*; 1008), she declares (1009–13):

si posset una caede satiari manus,
nullam petisset. ut duos perimam, tamen
nimium est dolori numerus angustus meo.
in matre si quod pignus etiamnunc latet,
scrutabor ense viscera et ferro extraham.⁴

If my hand could have been satisfied by a single murder, it would have sought none. Though I kill two, still that number is too small for my grievance. If any child lies hidden even now within its mother, I will search the viscera with a sword and expel it with iron.

Medea's threat demonstrates an unflinching commitment to the visceral conflation of womb and wound, where an act of feticide necessitates a self-inflicted injury. Not content to employ the herbal abortifacients or manual instruments that could terminate the pregnancy without external penetration of her body, she envisions an abortion accomplished by the violent evisceration of her womb. This maternal resolve to abort a pregnancy as punishment for the

3. McAuley (2016, 207–54) discusses Medea's motherhood in Seneca with frequent reference to Ovidian precedent; on the dominant influence of Augustan literature on Seneca (even more so than that of Greek dramatists), see Tarrant (1978).

4. For Seneca's tragedies, I use the edition of Fitch (2018).

father's betrayal recalls the actions of the Ausonian matronae in Ovid's *Fasti* (1.621–24) and likewise incorporates the violent battlefield imagery (*ense . . . et ferro*; 1013) of Ovid's *Amores* 2.14.⁵ Medea embodies the *amator's* allegation that women performing abortions wield weapons against their own bodies, intensifying this symbolic conceit into a real threat.

In her willingness to wound herself to achieve revenge, Seneca's Medea pushes the boundaries of the violence threatened by her extant Ovidian counterparts.⁶ The Medea of Ovid's *Remedia*, for example, enacted a form of violence *in sua viscera* that only suggested self-harm before the resolution of the clause clarified that the viscera she brought violence against referred to her children.⁷ Mere metaphorical self-harm is not sufficient for Seneca's Medea, whose feverish commitment to the punishment of her faithless husband extends to her own polysemic evisceration; she would puncture her own viscera (womb) in order to destroy any trace of her viscera (offspring). On the oddly impersonal formulation *in matre*, Boyle (2014, 380) observes that "one might have expected a word denoting the part of the body by which a woman becomes a mother, i.e., the womb." I contend that viscera *is* the womb word in this passage and that Medea dissociates from the role of mother (*in matre* rather than *in me*), disallowing personal concern for the integrity of her own body from becoming an obstacle to her revenge. In rejecting her identity as mother and eliding the possessive adjective, such that there is no explicit indication that the viscera belong to her, Medea further disarticulates herself from the extraordinary harm she envisions inflicting upon her own maternal body. We might therefore characterize Seneca's Medea as both post-Ovidian and über-Ovidian: she deliberately and impersonally recenters the site of maternal violence to her own womb and reconfigures the symbolic entanglement of the mother's body with the wellbeing of her offspring into a material threat of filicide-by-suicide.

Seneca elsewhere draws together the conditions for reproductive viscera from a constellation of episodes elaborated in Ovid's mythographies, so that his metaphors compete with and supersede their Ovidian antecedents. In both the *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*, for example, the convergence of visceral metaphor with the cannibalistic and sexual consumption of kin render Thyestes into an overwrought amalgamation of Ovid's Tereus and Cinyras. In the moments just

5. See chapter 4. Boyle (2014, 381) suggests that Ovid's reference to Medea in the elegiac abortion diptych (*Colchida respersam puerorum sanguine*; *Am.* 2.14.29), which comes immediately after his declaration that women attempting abortion attack their viscera with weapons (2.14.27), happens "as if to anticipate this passage [in Seneca's *Medea*]."

6. Rimell (2012) analyzes this threat, alongside Medea's broader engagement with the language of fertility and birth, as part of the play's exploration of correlations between maternity and expansive imperial space.

7. As discussed in chapter 4.

before Thyestes realizes that he has ingested the flesh of his own children, Seneca exploits the polysemy of viscera for dramatic irony (*Thy.* 999–1004):

quis hic tumultus viscera exagitat mea?
 quid tremuit intus? sentio impatiens onus
 meumque gemitu non meo pectus gemit.
 adeste, nati, genitor infelix vocat,
 adeste. visis fugiet hic vobis dolor—
 unde obloquantur?

What turmoil is this that agitates my viscera? What has trembled within?
 I feel an intolerant burden and my chest groans with a groan that is not
 my own. Come, sons, your unhappy father calls you, come. This pain
 will pass away once I have seen you. From where do they respond?

The tragic condition of the father who has unknowingly cannibalized his children is emphasized by his unwitting double entendre, where viscera point at once to his body and to the offspring contained within it. The children's dismembered corpses had earlier been reduced to viscera in the set piece of their butchery and preparation (*Thy.* 765); moments after the discovery, Thyestes wails that "[his] viscera churn within" (1041). The horror of familial autophagia is confirmed by these disturbing lexical confluences of viscera as offspring, as belly, and as meat. Seneca's Thyestes resonates with Ovid's Tereus, whose unwitting consumption of his son Itys was articulated as a gathering of his own viscera into his belly,⁸ and who, like Thyestes, had the fruitless impulse to free his dead offspring by tearing open his abdomen (*Met.* 6.663–64; *Thy.* 1043–44).⁹

When Thyestes reappears as a shade in the opening scene of the *Agamemnon*, he situates the ingestion of his own children in overt competition with the wicked misdeeds of the underworld's usual suspects (i.e., Ixion, Sisyphus, Tityos, Tantalus; 15–21). After cataloguing their torments, Thyestes insists that he will outdo them all (*Ag.* 25–7):

vincam Thyestes sceleribus cunctos meis.
 a fratre vincar, liberis plenus tribus
 in me sepultis? viscera exedi mea.

8. "Vescitur inque suam sua viscera congerit alvum," *Met.* 6.651 (see chapter 4).

9. Tarrant (1985, 235) draws this connection; Ovid's persistent influence on Seneca's representations of Thyestes is apparent throughout Tarrant (1985), with additional explorations in Schiesaro (2003) and Curley (2013, 225–28).

I, Thyestes, will surpass the rest with my crimes. Will I be surpassed by my brother, I who am full of three children buried within me? I consumed my own viscera.

Once again, Thyestes' gruesome experience includes plentiful contextual triggers for an Ovidian-style visceral child: a network of intrafamilial violations (brother against brother, father against child), the cannibalistic consumption of one's own offspring, and the possessive adjective *mea* figuring viscera into the speaker's children. But the crimes of Thyestes are not limited to this act of involuntary cannibalism; he is guilty also of a sexual violation that affiliates him with the incestuous father Cinyras of *Metamorphoses* 10.¹⁰ In the lines immediately following, the shade of Thyestes confesses to the further offense of impregnating his own daughter (*Ag.* 28–36):

nec hactenus Fortuna maculavit patrem,
sed maius aliud ausa commisso scelus
natae nefandos petere concubitus iubet.
non pavidus hausit dicta, sed cepi nefas.
ergo ut per omnes liberos irem parens,
coacta fatis nata fert uterum gravem
me patre dignum. versa natura est retro:
avo parentem (pro nefas!), patri virum,
natis nepotes miscui—nocti diem.

Not yet was Fortune finished staining the father, but having dared another crime more serious than what was already done, she ordered me to pursue abominable intercourse with my daughter. I was not afraid as I drank in her orders, but I seized upon the abomination. Therefore, so that I as parent might go through all my children, my daughter, coerced by fate, bears a pregnant belly worthy of me as father. Nature has been upended: I have confounded parent with grandfather (oh, the crime!), husband with father, grandchildren with children—day with night.

The criminal vocabulary used to characterize the incestuous sex between Thyestes and his daughter (*scelus*, 29; *nefandos*, 30; *nefas*, 31, 35) matches the most

10. See again chapter 4.

pervasive lexical signposts of the unspeakable relationship between Cinyras and Myrrha (*scelus*, *Met.* 10.315, 322, 323, 342, 367, 413, 460, 468, 474; *nefas*, 10.307, 322, 352, 404). Thyestes' explication of confused familial roles (*Ag.* 35–36) recalls Myrrha's tormented anticipation of the same issue (“tune eris et matris paelex et adultera patris? / tune soror nati genetrixque vocabere fratris?” Will you be your mother's rival and father's mistress? Will you be called the sister of your son and the mother of your brother?; *Met.* 10.347–48). If Thyestes' earlier declaration that he had consumed his own viscera (27) also anticipates his sexual cannibalism, then his daughter too assumes the role of Myrrha, whom Ovid had branded her father's viscera when she first entered his bed (*Met.* 10.465). The Senecan father who feeds upon the bodies of his sons and impregnates his daughter thus becomes an overwrought aggregation of Ovid's Tereus and Cinyras, more terrible for having combined their individual crimes into a doubly horrifying pattern of consumption. As with the character of Medea, Seneca's Thyestes recalls and then surpasses the crimes of his Ovidian models in a literary competition that sustains the semantic innovations of the Ovidian figures.

Seneca's emulous confrontation with Ovidian conditions for visceral bodies continues in the *Phoenissae*, as Oedipus laments the terrible fate that marked him even before his birth. He compares himself to an unborn child that dies within the womb (*Phoen.* 243–51):

infanti quoque
decreta mors est. fata quis tam tristia
sortitus umquam? videram nondum diem
uterique nondum solveram clausi moras,
et iam timebar. protinus quosdam editos
nox occupavit et novae luci abstulit:
mors me antecessit. aliquis intra viscera
materna letum praecoquis fati tulit:
sed numquid et peccavit?

Death also was decided for me as a babe. Who ever was apportioned such a terrible fortune? Not yet had I looked upon the day nor resolved the delays of the confined womb, and I was dreaded already. Night has seized some newborns immediately and ripped them from the unfamiliar light: death found me in advance. Some, premature in fate, have endured death within maternal viscera: but did they also sin?

Oedipus frames pre-partum death in terms that are clearly influenced by Ovidian figures for the womb: such a death occurs *intra viscera / materna* (249–50).¹¹ Yet Oedipus does not describe himself as having occupied a visceral womb; the viscera here offer a point of comparison for an unborn child whose death is still not so lamentable as Oedipus' fate. Oedipus goes on to describe his crimes of parricide and maternal incest in terms underscoring their unprecedented combination (264–73):

facinus ignotum efferum
 inusitatum fare quod populi horreant,
 quod esse factum nulla non aetas neget,
 quod parricidam pudeat. in patrios toros
 tuli paterno sanguine aspersas manus
 scelerisque pretium maius accepi scelus.
 leve est paternum facinus: in thalamos meos
 deducta mater, ne parum sceleris foret,
 fecunda. nullum crimen hoc maius potest
 Natura ferre.

Announce your crime—unheard of, savage, unprecedented—one to make the people shudder, a deed which no age would not deny, which would shame even a parricide. Into my ancestral bedchamber I bore hands defiled with my father's blood and received a worse crime as reward for the first. Insignificant is my paternal offense: my mother, led into my bedchamber, lest there be a dearth of crime, was fertile. No wrongdoing graver than this can Nature endure.

Oedipus emphasizes that his composite domestic violations render him far guiltier than a mere parricide: the murder of his father, followed by maternal incest, resulting in offspring conceived of this polluted union, accumulate into something entirely unprecedented and unnatural,¹² to which no other crime could possibly compare.¹³ Although the many familial violations that structure

11. Fantham (1983) demonstrates that plotlines involving incest in Seneca's tragedies entail an obsessive focus on the womb, here and in the *Oedipus*, *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, *Thyestes*, and *Phaedra*.

12. Compare Oedipus' "nullum crimen hoc maius potest / Natura ferre" (No wrongdoing graver than this can Nature endure; *Phoen.* 272–73) with Thyestes' "versa natura est retro" (nature has been upended; *Ag.* 34); their cumulative domestic crimes, entailing the confusion of familial and sexual boundaries, have upset the natural order. Cf. also *natura versa est* (Nature has been overturned; *Sen. Oed.* 371), declared by Manto upon discovering an unborn calf in the entrails of a sacrificial cow (see the next section in this chapter, "Unholy Sacrifice").

13. Frank (1994, 151) emphasizes that "the view of incest as a more heinous crime than parricide is unique to Seneca."

Oedipus' life (not least patricide and maternal incest) would make him a prime candidate for occupation of a visceral womb in an Ovidian narrative, Seneca's Oedipus instead describes his own fate as worse than the infant who dies within his mother's viscera. By construing Oedipus in comparative terms and characterizing him as worse for having committed precisely the crimes that so often cast Ovidian wombs as visceral, Seneca activates the conventional conditions of Ovidian viscera and then amplifies them in confrontation with their Ovidian models.¹⁴

Unholy Sacrifice

In addition to Seneca's amplification of the social taboos attending the reproductive figures in Ovid, I argue that we encounter throughout his tragic corpus a new correspondence of the word viscera with perversions of ritual practice. Seneca's entanglement of a previously unmarked referent for viscera—that is, the portion of sacrificial meat set aside to be cooked and consumed by human worshippers¹⁵—with acts of kin-slaying, cannibalism, and incest establishes a new contextual association of the word with unholy rituals. The deliberate confluence of viscera-as-child with viscera-as-sacrificial-meat stains the lexicon of sacrifice with disturbing new connotations, refining a thematic substrate of the Ovidian figure into a novel mode for representing the horrors of ritual pollution.

This phenomenon is especially prominent in two plays that we have already examined for their competitive replications of the Ovidian figures: *Medea* and *Thyestes*. Long before Seneca's *Medea* threatens to stab herself in the viscera (*Med.* 1009–13), she provides, in her opening monologue, a declaration of violent intentions whose recourse to visceral language is entangled with the lexicon of sacrifice (37–50):

hoc restat unum, pronubam thalamo feram
 ut ipsa pinum, postque sacrificas preces
 caedam dicatis victimas altaribus.

14. Because the shape of the Oedipal myth aligns so neatly with the contours of the Ovidian figures, the incomplete state of the *Phoenissae* (Frank 1994, 8–16; *contra* Tarrant 1978, 229–31) is unfortunate. I am inclined to believe that more viscera may have appeared in the lost sections of the play.

15. *OLD* s.v. *viscus* 1b. See chapter 1 for viscera's standard connotations in Roman religion. In addition to new contextual affiliations with aberrant ritual, note that Seneca does not universally maintain the religious distinction between viscera and exta (as the portions of sacrificial victims consumed and examined, respectively), referring in his *Naturales Quaestiones* to animal exta and viscera without clear differentiation in a discussion of omens and augury (2.32.3–4).

per viscera ipsa quaere supplicio viam,
 si vivis, anime, si quid antiqui tibi
 remanet vigoris. pelle femineos metus,
 et inhospitalem Caucasum mente indue.
 quodcumque vidit Phasis aut Pontus nefas,
 videbit Isthmos. effera ignota horrida,
 tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala
 mens intus agitat: vulnere et caedem et vagum
 funus per artus. levia memoravi nimis;
 haec virgo feci. gravior exsurgat dolor:
 maiora iam me scelera post partus decent.

This alone remains, that I myself carry the nuptial torch into the bed-chamber and after sacrificial prayers slaughter the beasts on consecrated altars. Seek a path for vengeance through the viscera themselves, if you live, spirit, if any of your former strength remains. Drive off womanly fears and clothe your mind in the cruel Caucasus. Whatever crime Phasis or Pontus witnessed, Isthmos shall witness. Savage, strange, terrible things, evils to be feared equally by heaven and earth, does my mind devise within: wounds and slaughter and death roaming through the limbs. I have recalled things too frivolous; I was a girl when I did these things. Let a heaver anguish rise: now that I have given birth, greater crimes befit me.

The technical language of sacrifice pervading this passage anticipates Medea's eventual displacement of violent revenge onto the bodies of her children. When she invokes the vocabulary of ritual slaughter (*caedam dicatis victimas altari-bus*; 39), the audience is prompted to flash forward to the forthcoming filicides and imagine the *victimae* (sacrificial victims) not as animals but as Medea's own children.¹⁶ Her intention to "seek a path for vengeance through the viscera themselves" (40) suggests the examination of animal entrails as a ritual knowledge-seeking practice. As discussed in chapter 1, the parts of animal victims that underwent haruspicy were generally denoted by the word *exta*.¹⁷ The

16. That the *victimae* are Medea's children is one of several possibilities suggested by Costa (1973, 67–68); Hine (1989, 415) accepts this interpretation and additionally identifies the *tenera hostia* of line 66 with her children (416). Boyle (2014, 123) prefers Jason's new wife and father-in-law as the sacrificial beasts (as was Costa's ultimate preference), but does allow for viscera to contain "a latent meaning here signalling the infanticide to come" (124).

17. Paired often with verbs of examination and consultation like *inspicere* and *consulere*; e.g., Pl. *Aul.* 565; Cic. *Div.* 1.131, 2.28; Verg. *A.* 4.64; Ov. *Met.* 15.576. Lucan's Etruscan seer Arruns offers

implicit suggestion that Medea's perverse approximation of haruspicy will happen not by inspection of the exta but rather *per viscera* exerts pressure on the word's semantic range, especially in coordination with the underlying suggestion of human rather than animal slaughter. The word is thus stretched in two directions: first, as a slightly uncomfortable lexical substitution for the exta that are typically inspected for knowledge of the future, and second—with appropriate irony, given the immediate context of divination—as an accurate forecast of the violence she will soon enact upon her own children.

Medea's ensuing reminiscences about her past crimes cast these viscera against her history of ruthless domestic violence. As she exhorts herself to take on the mindset of her earlier life in Colchis (*Caucusum mente indue*; 43) and recalls the unspeakable offenses (*nefas*; 44) that she committed in her girlhood (*haec virgo feci*; 49), the audience is reminded of her callous butchery and dispersion of her brother's dismembered body; still, as Medea herself emphasizes, these past deeds are trivial (*levia*; 48) in comparison to the evils she now designs. Her identification of motherhood as the circumstance that has amplified the necessary magnitude of her crimes (*maiora iam me scelera post partus decent*; 50) further broadcasts filicide as her ultimate pathway for vengeance; in retrospect, the *victimae* and viscera of lines 39–40 resonate all the more strongly with her doomed children. At the conclusion of her soliloquy, the Chorus presents an immediate course-correction for Medea's unholy sacrificial language, offering a hymn anticipating an auspicious wedding between Jason and Creusa: they wish for divine approval (*numine prospero*, 56; *auspice dextera*, 68) and for the people to perform ritually-correct behaviors (*populis rite faventibus*; 58), with sacrificial animals designated for the appropriate divinities (*taurus*, 60; *femina . . . / intemptata iugo*, 61–62; *tenera hostia*, 66). The prescriptive hyper-correctness of the marriage ceremony imagined by the Chorus further underscores Medea's impious appropriations of the sacrificial lexicon.

The two additional instances of viscera appearing before Medea's final climactic threat continue to build the word's association with unholy ritual practices. Medea's magical preparations are associated with foreign ritual behaviors alien to the Olympic gods and described by her nurse as “*turbam malorum, arcana secreta abdita*” (her host of evils, occult, mysterious, hidden things; 679, trans. Fitch 2018). She supplicates at the altar unpropitiously with her left hand (*triste laeva comprecans sacrum manu*; 680); she summons monsters with magical incantations (*magicis cantibus*; 684), affiliating herself with creatures,

a parallel for the verb *quaero* in contexts of extispicy: “*iram superum raptis quaesivit in extis*” (He investigated the gods' anger in the gathered entrails; Luc. 1.617).

like Python and the Hydra, who threatened harm to Olympian gods and their favored heroes (699–702); she gathers a multitude of herbal poisons, most of them connected to foreign peoples and lands (705–30). It is in the midst of these unholy ritual preparations that viscera next appear, as Medea adds to her collection of fatal herbs (*mortifera . . . gramina*; 731) and snake venoms (*serpentium / saniem*; 731–32) the innards of various inauspicious birds (*obscenas aves*; 732), including the heart of a gloomy horned owl (*maesti . . . cor bubonis*; 733) and, finally, “viscera extracted from a living screech owl” (*strigis / exsecta vivae viscera*; 733–34). The *bubo* and *strix* are both proverbially unpropitious birds: the *bubo* is closely associated with death and the underworld, while the *strix* was thought to eat babies.¹⁸ Their additional tendency to appear in moments of terrible ill omen, including during the taking of public auspices,¹⁹ makes them a particularly marked choice of ingredient for her poisonous tincture. Medea’s ominous gathering of deadly ingredients escalates finally into a prayerful invocation (*comprecor*; 740) of chthonic deities and denizens of the underworld. The beings invoked here recall the catalogue that Medea provided in her opening monologue, identified then as “quosque Medae magis / fas est precari” (those whom it is more correct for Medea to supplicate; 8–9). Those appearing in both invocations include Chaos (*noctis aeternae chaos*, 9; *Chaos caecum*, 741), gods of the dead (“dominumque regni tristis et dominam,” 11; *ferales deos*, 740), shades of the dead (*manesque impios*, 10; *vulgus silentum*, 740), and the realm of the underworld itself (*aversa superis regna*, 10; *opacam Ditis umbrosi domum*, 741).

Medea’s repeated appeals to anti-Olympian sources and realms of power are therefore twice attended by perverse associations of viscera with the trappings of ritual sacrifice: first the viscera of slaughtered (human) *victimae* through which she exhorts herself to seek a path to vengeance (40) and then the viscera of a screech owl (733–34) whose entrails become ingredients in a poison rather than a source of divine knowledge. Though the components of proper divination are present—divine invocations, birds, entrails—the categories are

18. E.g., *ferali carmine bubo* (the horned owl of deadly song; Verg. *A.* 4.462), *tristia . . . Stygius dedit omina bubo* (the Stygian horned owl gave grim omens; Ov. *Met.* 15.791); *bubo* is also typically collocated with adjectives of ill omen: *profanus* (unholy; Ov. *Met.* 6.431–32), *dirus* (ill-omened; Calp. *Ecl.* 6.8), *sinister* (inauspicious; Luc. 5.396). Ov. *Fast.* 6.137–39 affirms the superstition that striges had a taste for infant viscera. Boyle (2014) points out that the *strix*’s habit of eating children makes it “the perfect bird for Medea” (311).

19. The omen of the *bubo* marks both the marriage of Tereus and Procne and the birth of their son Itys (Ov. *Met.* 6.432–34), whom Procne will dismember and feed to his father in revenge for Tereus’ abduction and rape of her sister Philomela; Pliny describes the *bubo* as “funeris et maxime abominatus publicis praecipue auspiciiis” (deadly and extremely accursed, especially for public auspices; *Nat.* 10.34).

misrepresented by type—chthonic deities, ill-omened birds, viscera instead of exta—and the ultimate purpose of the ritual manipulated for deadly instead of divinatory ends. This distortion of the task and the victims of the *haruspex*, where the source of the entrails and the contexts of their usage depart in the most unholy manner from typical divinatory practices, further binds viscera to these new contexts of inauspicious sacrifice.

This uncomfortable admixture of divinatory ingredients appears once more when Medea infuses the poison into the garments (817–24; I follow the line breaks of Costa 1973):

tu nunc vestes tinge Creusae,
 quas cum primum sumpserit, imas
 urat serpens flamma medullas.
 ignis fulvo clausus in auro
 latet obscurus, quem mihi caeli
 qui furta luit viscere feto
 dedit et docuit condere vires
 arte, Prometheus.

You, now, [Hecate,] imbue Creusa's garments, so that, as soon as she puts them on, a creeping flame may burn her deepest marrows. The unseen fire lies hidden, enclosed in tawny gold, fire which Prometheus (who expiates his heavenly thefts with fertile viscus) gave to me and taught me with cunning to conceal its powers.

Prometheus is first in a list of beings from whom Medea procured the components of her deadly fire, given prominence of place for having bestowed both the gift itself and the knowledge of how to wield it (*dedit et docuit*; 823). Like most of the authorities to whom Medea appeals, Prometheus is defined by his opposition to the gods of the upper realms, which in his case is not a matter of birth or affiliation but a consequence of his own defiance (*caeli / . . . furta*; 821–22). That Medea describes his eternal punishment in visceral terms is especially significant, given the building associations of the word with perversions of ritual: the cyclical avian consumption and regrowth of Prometheus' liver is framed as an expiation (*luit*) whose means are compressed into the succinct but meaningful phrase *viscere feto* (822).²⁰ Here the word viscera, unusually in

20. For the use of the lexicon of fertility to describe regenerating organs, cf. Verg. *A.* 6.598–99 (*fecunda . . . poenis / viscera*; viscera fertile for punishment) and Sen. *Ag.* 18 (“tondet ales avida fecundum iecur”; the greedy bird devours the fertile liver)—both of Tityos. Seneca is not alone in

the singular, is marked as a productive site of expiatory punishment—a recurrent and regenerative act of sacrifice whose contexts and procedures constitute an unsettling confusion of ritual techniques. Where sacrificial viscera typically belong to beasts and are meant for consumption by humans, here Prometheus' viscera are consumed by birds. Medea's earlier ritual behaviors exerted pressure on the semantic range of viscera so that it could stand in, uncomfortably, for *exta*; the implicit presence of birds as the agents of expiatory violence and consumption further engages with the larger confusion of ritual elements surrounding visceral vocabulary.

The association of viscera with impious ritual practices throughout Seneca's *Medea* contributes to a broader confusion of the standard elements, contexts, and procedures of religious sacrifice. This escalating swirl of ritual corruptions ultimately renders Medea's final threat to violently terminate any existing pregnancy into an apex of unholy sacrifice, since her intention to expel Jason's theoretical offspring (*extraham*) is immediately preceded by the promise *scrutabor . . . viscera* (1013)—she will “closely examine,” “search,” or “inspect” her own viscera as though her womb and the hypothetical child within it have become divinatory entrails.²¹ The viscera of her children, of the ill-omened birds, and of the traitorous Prometheus accumulate into broader symbolic defilements of divine law that anticipate this pseudo-divinatory inspection of her own vitals. Medea's defiance of uxorial and maternal *pietas* is thus implicated in the larger deconstructions of religious piety at work throughout the play; Seneca ultimately frames the deaths of her children as a form of unholy expiation for Jason's crimes, authorized by a parareligious muddling of ritual vocabularies and ingredients. Medea's threat to extract any offspring of Jason's from her viscera is therefore more than a mere replication of Ovidian reproductive violence because it fashions an emerging connection of the word viscera with inauspicious, unsanctioned, and ill-intentioned sacrifice.

This pattern is even more explicit in Seneca's *Thyestes*, where Atreus' mutilation of his nephews' bodies is gruesomely framed as sacrificial slaughter (753–67):²²

o nullo scelus
credibile in aevo quodque posteritas neget!

framing Prometheus' punishment in visceral terms: see e.g., Hyg. *Astr.* 2.15.5, Ov. *Ib.* 541–42, and *CIL* 12, 05687, 15 ([Prometheus in] *Caucaso* / [vin]ctus viscera / pa[s]cen[tis] / [aq]uila).

21. Cf. Sen. *Oed.* 372: “scrutemur, unde tantus hic extis rigor” (we will make an inspection, to determine why there is such stiffness in the entrails).

22. This speech is delivered by a messenger. Boyle (1997, 47) notes “Atreus' meticulous attention to sacrificial procedure” in this scene, as well as the confusion of man and beast that permeates the play.

erepta vivis exta pectoribus tremunt
 spirantque venae corque adhuc pavidum salit;
 at ille fibras tractat ac fata inspicit
 et adhuc calentes viscerum venas notat.
 postquam hostiae placuere, securus vacat
 iam fratris epulis. ipse divisum secat
 in membra corpus, amputat trunco tenus
 umeros patentes et lacertorum moras,
 denudat artus durus atque ossa amputat;
 tantum ora servat et datas fidei manus.
 haec veribus haerent viscera et lentis data
 stillant caminis, illa flammatus latex
 candente aeno iactat.

O crime, conceivable in no age and which posterity should deny! The entrails snatched from living chests quiver and the veins throb and the still trembling heart pulses; but [Atreus] draws out the entrails and examines their predictions and notes the still hot veins of the viscera. After the sacrificial victims have proved agreeable, he is now free and clear for his brother's feasts. He himself severs the divided body into pieces, lops off the exposed shoulders and the impediments of the upper arms up to the trunk, callously he strips the joints and cuts around the bones; he saves only the faces and the hands given in trust. These viscera cling to spits and drip, offered to slow fires, while those [viscera] the blazing water tosses about in the hot bronze.

The correspondence with extispicy and prognostication is unmistakable here: Atreus' desecration of his nephews' corpses begins as the work of a pseudo-*haruspex* who removes the entrails (*fibras tractat*, 757) and examines them as though divining the future (*fata inspicit*, 757).²³ In fact, lines 755–58 (*erepta . . . notat*) read as a fairly straightforward (if poetic) report of divinatory procedure; it is the exercise of ritual prognostication on human bodies that renders this passage into a horrifying perversion of otherwise standard practice.²⁴

Next, the bodies are subjected to the same processes of butchery and cooking used to prepare the meat of sacrificial animals for consumption. In this

23. Tarrant (1985, 198) suggests that Atreus has no actual interest in learning the future, but his simulation of *extispicium* "display[s] perverse regard for established form."

24. The appearance of viscera alongside *exta* and *fibrae* for the entrails under examination, meanwhile, continues the word's broader imperial expansion into the semantic space of divination. Goyette (2021) demonstrates how the horror of this scene is further amplified by medicalized terminologies of vivisection.

transitional moment, where Atreus imagines there is divine approval to progress from divination to dining, the children are marked as *hostiae* (759)—a term which, like *victimae*, denotes sacrificial beasts.²⁵ The dismemberment of their bodies and doubled roasting and boiling of their flesh (*haec viscera . . . illa [viscera]*; 765–66) furthermore perverts the standard connotations for viscera in ritual contexts: while the word has long been a referent for the edible portions of sacrificial meat,²⁶ its use to denote cuts of *human* flesh that have been cooked in preparation for feasting is entirely novel. The disconcerting behaviors of the cooking fire and the smoke it produces further stress this unholy perversion of sacrificial butchery. Fear, reluctance, and signs of protest in typical sacrificial contexts indicate that the offering will be unpropitious; these concerning behaviors were generally observed in the victims marked for sacrifice.²⁷ Here the fire itself appropriates these indices of ill omen, first refusing to cook the sacrificial flesh (*dapes / transiluit*; 767–68) and then ultimately burning unwillingly (*invitus ardet*; 770). The smoke's unpleasant texture (*piceos . . . fumos*; 772) and meandering pathway (*non rectus*; 774) are likewise unpropitious, as is the ominous settling of the pitchy smoke in a cloud around the *penates* (household gods; 775).

The viscera within this passage operate within a clear symbolic framework that substitutes human for animal flesh in a ritual of slaughter, extispicy, and consumption. As in Seneca's *Medea*, this sacrifice serves a *telos* of vengeance, rather than propitiation or prognostication, and so its ritual procedures are further warped in the service of unholy ends.²⁸ While the gravity of Atreus' crimes is intensified by his aberrant imitation of a haruspex, even true seers in Seneca end up entangled in unholy sacrifice. Calchas, whom Agamemnon praises as "interpreter of the gods" (*interpretes deum*; 351) and "one to whom the hidden parts of the viscera reveal signs of fate" (*cui viscerum secreta . . . / dant signa fati*; 355–57), is summoned in the *Troades* for consultation about the Greeks'

25. Human *hostiae* and *victimae* tend to appear in ethnographies of foreign barbarism: e.g., "pro victimis homines immolant" ([the Gauls] sacrifice humans in place of animal victims; Caes. *Gal.* 6.16); "certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent" ([the Germani] consider it lawful on certain days also to make sacrifices [to Mercury] with human victims; Tac. *Ger.* 9.1).

26. See chapter 1.

27. Resistance or escape was a bad omen (e.g., Livy 21.63.13–14). Such signs were often taken seriously enough that a new victim would be chosen and the sacrifice begun anew; see Driediger-Murphy (2019) on the reasoning behind continued sacrifice *usque ad litationem* (until acceptance by the gods).

28. Cf. the messenger's earlier articulation of the confusion wrought by Atreus' crimes, as he expresses his preference for the children's corpses to have been left unburied and consumed by dogs and birds—normally an unthinkable prospect, but still preferable to the horrors Atreus inflicts upon their bodies: "what is usually a penalty becomes, under him, a prayer," (*votum est sub hoc quod esse supplicium solet*; 752).

next steps after victory at Troy. Though one might expect such a seer's expertise to be defined in terms of *exta* rather than *viscera*, the latter word's appearance is immediately justified: first by the oblique reminder that Calchas' last great achievement in divination was to demand the human sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigeneia (357–58) and second by his immediate affirmation that two further human sacrifices, Polyxena and Astyanax, must be offered before the Greeks can set sail (360–70).

Tiresias, too, in his efforts to interpret Apollo's prophecy for Oedipus, must contend with an unusual concentration of ritual *viscera*. In a scene of divination gone horrendously wrong, the word *viscera* appears thrice in the space of thirty lines (*Oed.* 352, 370, 380), each time emphasizing the terribly inauspicious outcomes of the ritual.²⁹ Despite the selection of an *opima victima* (plump sacrificial beast; 303), careful religious invocations (*voce sollemni*; 304), and offerings of incense (*turis*; 305), the omens at this sacrifice are immediately dire. The fire behaves erratically, the wine turns to blood, and heavy smoke settles around Oedipus' head; the sacrificial bull is resistant and requires multiple blows to fell; its blood runs slow and scant. Hearing Manto's description of these ominous signs, Tiresias declares: "infausta magnos sacra terrores cient. / sed ede certas viscerum nobis notas" (Inauspicious rites stir great fears. But relate to me the sure signs of the viscera; 351–52). Manto's lengthy description of all that is horrifically wrong with the entrails includes the identification of a missing membrane that normally covers the *viscus* (370), followed immediately by the declaration *natura versa est* (nature has been overturned; 371) as she discovers the unspeakable presence of an unborn calf in the body of the unmated heifer (*quod hoc nefas? conceptus innuptae bovis!*; 373).³⁰ In her final account of the disturbing scene—as the calf struggles to move and one of the victims rises up to gore a priest—Manto reports: *viscera effugiunt manum* (the viscera flee my hand; 380).

Even for those invested with true religious authority, then, who approach sacrificial ritual with the best intentions, the intervention of *viscera* indexes a

29. Debrouhun (2017) examines the influences of Greek models on this *extispicium* (Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, naturally, but also his *Antigone* and Euripides' *Phoenissae*), noting that the ritual contaminations of the Senecan scene are appropriately characterized by theatrical *contaminatio*.

30. Cf. the description in Ovid's *Fasti* of the purposeful sacrifice of unborn calves during the *Fordicidia*: "visceribus vitulos rapuere ministri / sectaque fumosis exta dedere focus" (the attendants snatched the calves from the [cows'] viscera and placed the excised entrails on smoking hearths; *Fast.* 4.637–38). The preliminary slippage here between *viscera* as animal womb and as sacrificial entrail perhaps anticipates the Senecan innovation, though the violence of the excision is presented as part of a necessary and proper civic ritual to maintain agricultural fertility. See also *Ov. Fast.* 1.671–72, which similarly frames the viscera of a pregnant sow (*gravidae visceribus . . . suis*) as part of a correct and sanctioned ritual.

religious praxis doomed to failure. Throughout Senecan tragedy, there is unsettling slippage between divination, consumption, and death, as humans are made to substitute for animal *victimae* and their viscera are consulted and consumed; birds devour human viscera, while bird viscera produce poison instead of knowledge; divinities of the lower realms opposed to Olympian authority are invoked for guidance, while vengeful humans impose sacrificial frameworks on the violence they inflict upon their kin. This consistent association between viscera and inauspicious sacrifice is not unique to Seneca, as we will observe in chapter 7: Lucan, Seneca's nephew and contemporary in Nero's court, similarly draws viscera into divinatory contexts where things go horribly awry.

Honorable Mothers and Protected Pregnancies

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the earliest reproductive viscera in the extant record carry a persistent connotation of domestic and civic violence; as this chapter has established thus far, Seneca's reception of these figures generally involves both a reiteration of these disturbing frameworks and a new contamination of the word's sacrificial referents within contexts of improper ritual. In this section, I consider a selection of visceral language within Senecan literature—most of it from texts beyond his tragic corpus—which introduces a surprising variation on the figure's established associations with intrafamilial violence. While the conditions of violent loss do remain ever-pertinent to Senecan viscera, the breaches of familial loyalty so central to the Ovidian figure are sometimes transformed into opportunities for selfless devotion.

In *Troades*, Andromache's desperate efforts to protect her young son exemplify this phenomenon. When Ulysses attempts to force her to reveal the whereabouts of Astyanax, Andromache invokes viscera in a defiant refusal to be cowed by his threats of torture (582–86, 88):³¹

propone flammas, vulnera et diras mali
doloris artes et famem et saevam sitim
variasque pestes undique et ferrum inditum
visceribus ustis, carceris caeci luem
et quidquid audet victor iratus timens:
animosa nullos mater admittit metus.

31. No Latin is omitted here—most editions (Fitch 2018 included) reposition line 587 to precede 574.

Inflict flames, wounds, and dreadful techniques of wretched torment and starvation and savage thirst and diverse plagues from all sides and iron set upon scorched viscera, the penalty of dark imprisonment and whatever the enraged and frightened conqueror dares: a courageous mother feels no fears.

Andromache's bold invocation of an array of physical torments, culminating in an incitement to be wounded directly in her viscera, discloses her willingness to put herself in physical danger in order to safeguard her son. Her readiness to endure torture correlates with her self-identification as a courageous mother (*animosa mater*; 588): she would gladly suffer and even die before revealing her child's location to the murderous Greeks. Andromache's rhetoric complicates the tradition of the Ovidian mother who uses viscera for purely figurative displacement of harm against her child onto her own body. Instead, Andromache offers up her own viscera in order that her son *not* be harmed—a true redirection of harm designed to protect the child from material injury. This selfless shielding, demonstrative of the maternal piety that Ovidian mothers too often lack,³² at once invokes and rejects the Ovidian conditions for visceral children.

While the viscera of line 585 are not unambiguously reproductive,³³ there is further reason to interpret this passage as a confrontation with Ovidian precedent. Just a few lines earlier, as Andromache claims ignorance of her son's location, she imagines that he has become carrion for scavengers (“numquid immanis ferae / morsu peremptus pascis Idaeas aves?” Do you feed the Idaean birds, slain by the maw of a ferocious beast?; 566–67). These lines recall a number of precedents within Ovid's corpus, most notably Canace from *Heroides* 11, who, in expressing an identical sentiment, imagines wild animals tearing apart the body of her child (*diripiunt avidae viscera nostra ferae*; 118).³⁴ While Andromache echoes Canace's fears about the violent death of her helpless child, she does not picture that child in visceral terms. Her choice to deploy such language only in figuring herself as a physical obstacle between Ulysses and Astyanax centers the word's violence on her body and her body alone. If any viscera are harmed as a result of this encounter, Andromache is determined that they will be the ones in her body and not, in the tradition of Ovid's self-absorbed

32. For Andromache's maternity in the *Troades*, see McAuley (2016, 258–93). Payne (2022) suggests that Andromache's response to Ulysses' threats of torture, as informed by declamatory discourses, casts him as a tyrant.

33. Note that *ustis* is a contested MS reading; Fantham (1982, 296–97) argues for William's conjecture *his et* and cites the external force of the verb *indere* to support her translation “with shackles fixed upon this flesh” (162).

34. See chapter 4.

parental failures, their figurative extension into a referent for her offspring. Once again, Seneca's tragic reception of Ovidian viscera presents a blend of imitation and innovation, where the breaches of familial trust so essential to the figures in Ovid loosen their hold on the reproductive relationships entangled in the metaphor. Seneca expands the spectrum of parental morality at both poles, allowing viscera to accompany both the worst possible violations of familial *pietas* (Medea, Thyestes) and its most noble and unselfish expressions (Andromache).

Beyond Seneca's tragic corpus, there are a number of instances where reproductive viscera attend maternal devotion in further contravention of Ovidian precedent. In his *De Consolatione ad Helviam*, a letter written to his mother from exile that applies philosophical reasoning to offer her comfort in his absence, Seneca uses viscera in key moments that emphasize the magnitude and rarity of Helvia's devotion to her children. Early in the letter, Seneca frames the grief of separation as a figurative injury. In explaining why he has not written to her sooner, he affirms that he felt it necessary to process his own grief before attempting to console her: "itaque utcumque conabar manu super plagam meam inposita ad obliganda vulnera vestra reptare" (in this way I was trying somehow, with my hand placed over my own injury, to crawl toward you to bind up your wounds; 1.1).³⁵ This association of grief with bodily harm sustains itself throughout the letter's introductory sections, as Seneca compares it with illness (*in morbis*; 1.2) and injury (*vulnus*; 2.2), likens untimely consolation to premature medical treatment (*immatura medicina*; 1.2), and equates his aggressive consolatory approach to cauterization and surgery (*urere ac secare*; 2.2). The abundant losses that Helvia has suffered in her lifetime, including her mother, husband, and three grandchildren (2.4–5), culminate, as Seneca frames it, in the gravest wound of all—his exile: "gravissimum est ex omnibus quae umquam in corpus tuum descenderunt recens vulnus, fateor; non summam cutem rupit, pectus et viscera ipsa divisit" (The most serious of all wounds which ever have penetrated into your body, I confess, is this latest one; it did not merely tear into the surface of the skin, but cleaved apart the chest and the very viscera; 3.1). Seneca elaborates the metaphor of grief-as-wound by activating viscera's existing application to contexts of serious physical injury, in which the vital organs are exposed as a result of exterior violence. The use of viscera to illustrate the metaphorical injury that exile inflicts on separated parties relies on Helvia's maternal devotion—it is the strength of her love that motivates the figuration of his exile as an injury to her viscera.³⁶

35. Edition: Reynolds (1977).

36. Cf. a return to the metaphor of injury, when Seneca suggests that their past separations should make this one easier to bear: "non ex intacto corpore tuo sanguis hic fluxit: per ipsas cic-

Within a discussion of Helvia's numerous and rare virtues,³⁷ Seneca praises the pride she has always taken in motherhood, in contrast with other women's vanity (16.3):

numquam te fecunditatis tuae, quasi exprobraret aetatem, puduit, numquam more aliarum, quibus omnis commendatio ex forma petitur, tumescentem uterum abscondisti quasi indecens onus, nec intra viscera tua conceptas spes liberorum elisisti.

Never have you been ashamed of your own fertility, as if it cast reproach upon your age, never in the manner of other women, for whom all worth is sought from their beauty, did you conceal your growing womb like an unsightly burden, nor did you expel the promises of children conceived within your viscera.

The association of abortion with viscera recalls numerous pregnant women from the Ovidian corpus as well as Seneca's Medea, all of whose attempts to terminate pregnancy are framed as violent attacks that render their wombs visceral.³⁸ Here, the visceral womb becomes more than a specter haunting those fictional mothers who populate myth, legend, and elegy; this is an affliction applicable to those peers of Seneca's mother who do not measure up to his standards of honorable womanhood. The impulse to value beauty above fertility, as Seneca frames it, such that women would conceal or even terminate pregnancy for fear of ruining their beauty or revealing their age, is yet another of the many womanly vices that Helvia has managed to reject; while the immediate context of abortion justifies the appearance of viscera for the womb, the effect of its usage here is to praise an act of maternal devotion against a backdrop of womanly depravity. The overarching potential for violence is still present, implicated in the crowd of vain women who do abort their pregnancies, but the viscera themselves belong to a mother who has prioritized fertility over *forma* (beauty).

Elsewhere in the letter, Seneca entangles viscera with larger questions of fertility and desire. In cataloguing the vices which humans should have the

trices percussa es" (This blood has flown not from an uninjured body; you've been struck through the scars themselves; 15.4).

37. For Seneca's construction of aristocratic womanhood and especially maternity through Helvia, see Wilcox (2006), Fantham (2007), Caro and Zapata (2014, 28–29), McAuley (2016, 170–99), and Gloyn (2017, 14–47).

38. See chapter 4 and previous sections of this chapter. The accusation that women have abortions for vanity's sake resonates with the opinions of the Ovidian amator at *Am.* 2.14.7: *ut careat rugarum crimine venter* (so that the belly would lack the crime of stretch marks); cf. the Ovidian praepceptor's insistence that childbirth quickens aging: *partus faciunt breviora iuventae / tempora* (childbirth shortens the duration of youth; *Ars* 3.81–82).

strength to resist, Seneca reminds his reader to conceive of sexual desire as a tool for the continuance of lineage (*causa . . . propagandi generis*) rather than for the pursuit of pleasure (*voluptatis*); sexual desire (*libido*) is then characterized as a “destructive force, concealed and fastened within the very viscera,” (*secretum et infixum visceribus ipsis exitium*; 13.3).³⁹ Because the explicit localization of ruinous sexual impulses to the viscera appears alongside an exhortation to center fertility, as opposed to gratification, as the end goal of this instinct, Seneca draws a clear connection between viscera and reproductivity that ultimately frames the production of offspring as a moral good. In the course of this consolation, then, the viscera are shown to contain both the reproductive impulse and its products (*spes liberorum*; 16.3); both usages, however, are shadowed by the suggestion of destructive behaviors that threaten or decenter fertility.⁴⁰

Further, though less morally weighted, links between viscera and fertility appear in his late-career *Naturales Quaestiones*. As Seneca expresses skepticism over the rumored effects of certain waters that lack explainable causes, he mentions that Nile water reportedly aids in fertility: “quorundam causa non potest reddi: quare aqua Nilotica fecundiores feminas faciat, adeo ut quarundam viscera longa sterilitate praeclosa ad conceptum relaxaverit” (Of some the cause cannot be ascertained: why water from the Nile should make women more fertile, to the extent that for certain women it has loosened for conception viscera closed off by lengthy barrenness; *Sen. Nat.* 3.25.11).⁴¹ While there are no contexts of violent attack or physical danger, these viscera still denote a womb in less than ideal condition due to prolonged infertility (*longa sterilitate praeclosa*). In a decisive departure from Ovidian precedent, the womb no longer requires the hostile attack of mother against fetus to be represented by viscera; the mere condition of barrenness, in which a womb is merely an unwelcome environment for fetal growth, seems to qualify just as well.

Seneca shifts the visceral womb further still from its Ovidian precedents in his *Epistulae Morales*.⁴² Near the end of a letter dedicated to explaining why death is not to be feared, he frames death as a second birth and compares life to gestation within a mother's womb (*uterus*; *Ep.* 102.23).⁴³ Just as humans wail

39. We might recall in this context that Seneca had been relegated by Claudius for the alleged crime of adultery. On the political environment that led to his exile and the potential insincerities of this consolation (given Seneca's underlying purpose of achieving a recall to Rome), see Ferrill (1966).

40. This consolation long predates any of Seneca's tragedies; for a contextualized reading of Senecan (and Lucanian) viscera with a closer eye to chronology, see the final section of chapter 7.

41. Edition: Hine (1996).

42. Edition: Reynolds (1965).

43. “Quemadmodum decem mensibus tenet nos maternus uterus et praeparat non sibi sed illi loco in quem videmur emitti . . . sic per hoc spatium quod ab infantia patet in senectutem in alium

at the thought of death, infants cry when they are born; this birth, as Seneca frames it, sends them forth “from the warm and soft protection of the maternal viscera” (*ex maternorum viscerum calido mollique fomento*; 102.26).⁴⁴ He then clarifies that death, like birth, is a process of division: “nunc tibi non est novum separari ab eo cuius ante pars fueris” (Now it is not a new experience for you to be separated from something of which you were previously a part; 102.27). This explication of childbirth as a separation of part from whole correlates with the Ovidian logic through which a mother’s viscera can represent her offspring; a child’s former occupation of its mother’s womb allows it to retain the “somatic tinge” of that visceral origin—it grew within her viscera and, upon separating from the physical body in which it grew, can be figured as an extension of the parent.⁴⁵ The *materna viscera* in this letter, however, are a universalizing representation of maternity.⁴⁶ They do not belong to women who enact violence against their children or who will be harmed by their children. Here, maternal viscera are the warm and safe environment in which children grow and from which they must be unwillingly forced into a startling and unfamiliar world. For all the clear engagements in Senecan tragedy with the violence and domestic strife tied to visceral reproductive bodies, these select examples, mostly from his prose texts, confirm his attention to the rich possibilities for nuancing the Ovidian contexts in which they so consistently appeared. Seneca provides new models of motherhood that allow for good mothers to participate in the world’s reproductive usages and permit viscera to become an unmarked, even positive, referent for the womb.

Insights from Pseudo-Senecan Drama

This section provides something like a postscript to the previous discussion of viscera in Senecan tragedy, since it presents evidence from two plays whose original attributions to Seneca have been rejected by modern scholars: the *Octavia*

maturescimus partum” (Just as the maternal womb holds us for ten months and equips us not for itself but for that place into which we seem to be sent forth . . . thus during the time span which stretches from infancy into old age do we mature for another kind of birth). On Roman representations of gestational time in both technical and mythographic literature, see Hines (2024).

44. Cf. *Epist.* 124.8, in which Seneca emphasizes how small the difference is between a newborn and “the one who is still a hidden burden of his mother’s viscera” (“illum qui maternorum viscerum latens onus est”).

45. On “somatic tinge,” a phrase coined by Ruth Padel, see the introduction.

46. Recalling especially the maternal viscera in Pythagoras’ speech in *Ov. Met.* 15; see chapter 5.

and the *Hercules Oetaeus*.⁴⁷ Although these works were likely not penned by the same playwright who composed the tragedies discussed above, their imitation of Senecan language, style, and theme provides valuable evidence for receptions of visceral figures in Senecan-style poetics during the late 1st century CE.

The *Octavia*, as the only extant Roman *fabula praetexta*, differs primarily from the plays discussed previously in that it stages contemporary politics at Rome instead of foreign events from a legendary past. Set in 62 CE, it explores the events surrounding Nero's unpopular divorce from Octavia.⁴⁸ It contains a solitary but rich reception of the visceral womb, appearing when the shade of Agrippina speaks to Nero from the underworld and laments that he was not killed before she gave birth to him (636–39):

utinam, antequam te parvulum in lucem edidi
aluique, saevae nostra lacerassent ferae
viscera. sine ullo scelere, sine sensu innocens
meus occidisses.

If only, before I brought you forth as a newborn into the light and nourished you, savage beasts had shredded our viscera. Without any crime, without any sensation, you would have died, innocent, mine.

Agrippina's *nostra viscera* replicates the language of Ovid's Canace, who lamented in *Heroides* 11 that wild beasts (*ferae*) were ripping apart her viscera in the form of her exposed newborn.⁴⁹ The shade of Agrippina, however, does not match Canace's distress over the prospective demise of her child, fashioning instead a violent contrafactual fantasy of Nero's death in the womb. While Canace's infant is rendered visceral by its mother's postpartum appropriation of its dying body as a metaphor for her own vitality, Seneca's Agrippina inverts the timeline of that viscosity: her wish is that the attack of wild beasts (which occurs upon Canace's child after its birth) had happened while Nero was still in utero. The beasts would then have assailed her pregnant body in a convergence

47. There is general scholarly consensus that the *Octavia* was written after the deaths of both Seneca and Nero, though the precise era of its composition is contested; see Boyle (2008, xiii–xvi), who lands on the early years of Vespasian's rule. The *Hercules Oetaeus* has inspired more disagreement, with some arguing for authenticity, e.g., Nisbet (1987, 249–50), who suggests composition in 65 CE just prior to Seneca's death, but most rejecting it on reasonable grounds (see Marshall 2014, 40).

48. I use the edition of Boyle (2008). Ginsberg (2017) provides a thorough introduction (1–17) to the historical, political, and literary contexts in which the *Octavia* was written and demonstrates throughout its central significance to studies of Rome's self-representation and civil war anxieties.

49. See chapter 4.

of womb and wound more reminiscent of Seneca's Medea, who was willing to pierce her own viscera to ensure the death of Jason's offspring. Furthermore, Agrippina's retrospective feticidal impulse complements her son's matricidal violence against her: she is motivated by "the rage of a mother who died by your crime" (*genetricis ira, quae tuo scelere occidit*; 635).

Agrippina ultimately qualifies the cruelty of her wish with the assertion that a premature death for Nero would have preserved his innocence and their bond (*innocens / meus occidisses*; 638–9). In these terms, the *Hercules Oetaeus* presents Alcmene expressing a similar desire: "utinam meis visceribus Alcides foret / exsectus infans!" (If only the infant Alcides had been cut out from my viscera!; [Sen.] *Her. O.* 1805–6).⁵⁰ This declaration stems not from any filicidal impulse on Alcmene's part, but rather a desire to undo her immense suffering, as it directly follows a wish that she had been struck down by Jupiter's lightning (*si fulmantem et ipsa sensissem Iovem!* 1804). The implicit comparison to Semele, whom Jupiter destroyed while she was pregnant with Bacchus, suggests that the infant Hercules would not have perished in this fantasy—he would have been safely cut away (*exsectus*) and presumably brought to term through some divine intervention. From Alcmene, then, we have the invocation of a visceral womb-as-wound that manages to circumvent filicide: in opposition to Agrippina and Medea, who were willing to die for the sake of killing their unborn progeny, Alcmene yearns for a solution in which she could have been destroyed without harm to her offspring. Her visceral womb emphasizes an abandonment of maternal duty born from exhaustion and regret rather than vengeance, as its imagined violation accomplishes not a destruction of the child within but a release from responsibility for the mother.

50. Edition: Fitch 2018. Cf. Phaedra's regret in *Ov. Her.* 4 that her production of heirs has done harm to Hippolytus: "o utinam nocitura tibi . . . / in medio nisu viscera rupta forent" (If only my viscera, which were going to do you harm . . . had burst in the midst of labor; 125–26); see Michalopoulos (2006, 196–97).

CHAPTER 7



Self-Destructive Devotion and Aberrant Divination in Lucan

An overarching preoccupation with the human body and its dismembered parts inflects much of Lucan's *De Bello Civili*. As civil war divides Rome into political factions, Lucan is keen to explore how this internecine violence rends the literal and symbolic bodies of Rome.¹ Unsurprisingly, *viscera* play a vital role in Lucan's discourses of civic strife.² Much like his uncle Seneca, Lucan adapts the Ovidian reproductive figures to suit the literary and political concerns of his epic project. Alongside imitations of the Ovidian pattern in which visceral reproductive bodies indicate alarming violations of domestic and civic bonds, Lucan progressively recalibrates the word into an index of ardent familial devotion, often entangled with the desperate or even unwarranted forfeiture of one's own life. Where Seneca's engagement with visceral bodies intensified the conditions and costs of domestic violence, Lucan uses viscera to clarify how necessarily self-destructive the force of kinship bonds must become in the contexts of civil war. Furthermore, Lucan reinforces the Senecan pattern of associating viscera with religious pollution, incorporating the word into numerous scenes of inauspicious divination. Lucan's experimentation with viscera in the epic's final extant books ultimately destabilizes the relationship of the individual human body—especially the bodies of Pompey and Caesar—to the welfare of the body politic, imagining that the true viscera of the republic expand beyond the mortal bodies of its citizens.

The opening lines of the *De Bello Civili* present the Roman people as a collective attacking their own viscera (1.1–3)³:

1. For Lucan's preoccupation with the body as metaphor, see Bartsch (1997, esp. 10–47), Dinter (2012, esp. 9–49), and Mebane (2016).

2. Barrandon and Vial-Logeay (2021) discuss Lucanian viscera from a primarily medicalized perspective that deals concretely with their connection to wounded bodies. Briefer treatments of Lucan's viscera include Chiesa (2005, 22–23) and McClellan (2019, 149, 167–69).

3. Edition: Shackleton Bailey (1997). There has been some debate over the authenticity of the first seven lines, but they are generally accepted as genuine (see Grimal 2010).

bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos
iusque datum sceleri canimus, populumque potentem
in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra

We sing of wars more than civil, fought through the Emathian plains,
and of right granted to crime and of a powerful people turned with con-
quering hand against their own viscera

These lines have been frequently interpreted as an overt allusion to Vergil.⁴ Such readings are entirely justifiable: the viscera of *DBC* 1.3 unmistakably echo Anchises' dire forecast of the very civil conflict Lucan's epic explores. In prophesying the war, Anchises' warning ("ne, pueri, ne tanta animis adsuescite bella / neu patriae validas in viscera vertite viris," Do not, boys, do not accustom your minds to such great wars nor turn your vigorous powers against the viscera of your fatherland; *Aeneid* 6.832–33) is clearly addressed to Caesar and Pompey, the central players in Lucan's text.⁵

There is a significant distinction, however, between the viscera of Anchises' prophecy and those of Lucan's programmatic opening. While Anchises warns of the dire consequences of civil war, the viscera that he invokes belong to an embodied fatherland (*patria*; 6.833) rather than the Roman people themselves. As often in late-stage republican literature, the failing health of a political body can be diagnosed by threats to its vital organs; any danger posed to Rome, especially if the threat is internal, is easily imagined as violence targeting its viscera.⁶ The exceptional perils of civil war are no doubt signified by these Vergilian viscera, but kinship relationships are only quietly implied in the paternal root of *patria*. The primary metaphor in Vergil is that of citizens threatening serious

4. Conte (1966), Thompson and Bruère (1968, 1–2), Narducci (1979, 28–29), Feeney (1991, 274–77), Martindale (1993, 48–54), Putnam (1995, 222–26), Narducci (2002, 18–22), Casali (2011, 83–86), Reed (2011, 24–25); but cf. Keith (2011, 112–114) on the highly Ovidian character of these opening lines. Dinter (2012, 9n2) unusually does not source the expression to Vergil, but posits the image as "an actualization of the Latin expression *bellum intestinum*" with citations from Livy, Sallust, and Cicero.

5. See chapter 2: the Vergilian figure of the *viscera patriae* (viscera of the fatherland) elaborates the symbolics of internal political discord implied by the Ciceronian figure of the *viscera rei publicae* (viscera of the republic).

6. Cf. Calp. *Ecl.* 1.48–50, where Bellona, forced in a time of peace to wage war against herself, attacks her own viscera: "in sua vesanos torquebit viscera morsus / et, modo quae toto civilia distulit orbe / secum bella geret" (she will twist frenzied bites into her own viscera and will wage with herself the civil wars which she once scattered through the entire world). This poem is usually associated with the Neronian era, but some scholars place it much later (for a helpful summary, see Stover [2015, 290 with n6]; Stover himself pushes Calpurnius to the 4th century CE). Though its chronology relative to Lucan is unclear, the transposition of civil violence onto the body of war personified certainly resonates with Lucan's poetics of viscera.

harm to an embodied state. Lucan's *sua viscera*, however, gesture to the familial relationships at stake in civil war by adhering to the Ovidian formula for visceral reproductivity.⁷ As I demonstrated in chapter 4, the appearance of the possessive adjective in conjunction with viscera is a key component of the Ovidian visceral child. In Lucan, it is not the viscera of the fatherland but the people's own viscera that receive this reflexive civic violence, where the phrase *sua viscera* indicates their vital organs *and* their offspring, an embodied metaphor of self-destruction that echoes the Ovidian displacement of violence against children back onto the bodies of the parents who harm them. By incorporating into this Vergilian allusion a distinctly Ovidian treatment of viscera, Lucan confirms that Ovid's figures resonate meaningfully in the context of Rome's most devastating civil conflict.⁸ In this way, Lucan characterizes his project as both direct answer to the Vergilian prophecy of Rome's self-destructive violence and imaginative reworking of Ovidian approaches to staging conflicts between members of the same civic family.

A rich intertextual program circulating around Lucanian viscera is thus established from the poem's opening line. My analysis below of Lucan's visceral wombs, prophecies, and 'set pieces' will demonstrate that the word's great frequency in the *De Bello Civili* is no mere side effect of the epic's martial content. Marked thematic and narratological clusters of visceral imagery indicate that Lucan's repeated decisions to inscribe the word viscera into his poetics were neither haphazard nor arbitrary. I also establish the structural significance of viscera's progression through the text: after probing in Books 1–6 the boundaries of viscera's semantic range in reproductive and divinatory contexts, Lucan produces in Books 7–10 a refinement of visceral poetics through the bodies of Pompey and Caesar, whose viscera develop, respectively, broad symbolic value extending beyond the limits of the physical body and a pointed individualism forecasting violent demise.

Lucan's Visceral Wombs

There are four visceral wombs in the *De Bello Civili*, all appearing in the first half of the poem. Although the first occurrence of this figure conforms to a

7. Indeed, as the Bern Scholia suggest, Lucan's *plus quam civilia* invokes the familial violence necessitated by civil conflict, "when both sons against fathers and brothers against brothers fought" (*ubi et filii cum parentibus et fratres dimicavere cum fratribus*; *Comm. Bern. ad 1.1*). For more on this phrase and its reception in later authors, see Jal (1963, 35–37).

8. Recognition of this Ovidian expression will support discussions of Ovid's influence on Lucan, e.g., Tarrant (2002), Wheeler (2002), Keith (2011).

hyper-Ovidian mode of civic and domestic violence, Lucan quickly complicates the contexts in which viscera are made to stand in for the womb. The remaining three instances, in fact, attach the womb to unambiguously good mothers, in stark contrast with the murderous or murdered women to whom the figure applies throughout Ovid. These mothers still endure pain and grief, but they neither inflict violence upon nor receive it from their kin; on the contrary, their suffering underscores their maternal and civic piety and even forecasts fraternal loyalty among their offspring. In an epic whose primary focus is the kinship violence necessitated by civil war, it is a remarkable step away from Ovidian precedent to reserve the visceral womb primarily for women who neither commit nor become victims of domestic discord.

After establishing in the proem the programmatic importance of violence *in sua viscera*, Lucan almost immediately presents his readers with a visceral womb that precisely encapsulates the word's Ovidian configurations. As the narrative turns to Caesar's soldiers and their alarming loyalty to the cause, the centurion Laelius announces that his commitment extends to even the most egregious violations of familial piety. He offers as proof an ascending tricolon of horrific domestic crimes (Luc. 1.376–78):

pectore si fratris gladium iuguloque parentis
condere me iubeas plenaque in viscera partu
coniugis, invita peragam tamen omnia dextra

If you should order me to bury my sword in the chest of my brother
and in the throat of my parent and into the viscera of my pregnant wife,
though with unwilling hand, nevertheless I will carry out all these orders

Alongside the imagined rupture of his filial and fraternal bonds, Laelius escalates his murderous loyalty to include the destruction of his conjugal and paternal bonds in the shape of a visceral womb—a formulation for which he is clearly indebted to Ovidian precedent. In Senecan fashion, this first instance of reproductive viscera constitutes an overdetermination of the Ovidian contexts for the figure, as Laelius threatens, in the space of a single syntactical breath, nearly every significant domestic relationship he has. The inward-turning civic violence anticipated by the proem's *in sua viscera* (1.3) sharpens to its inevitable point in the womb of Laelius' wife, where the self-destructive momentum of civic discord threatens not only the familial bonds of the present moment but the continuity of future generations. The ambiguous form *peragam* (378), moreover, is instrumental in Laelius' steady acceleration into cultural taboo.

At first the verb might read as a present subjunctive in the apodosis of (what seems like) a future-less-vivid condition. As Laelius continues, however, the verb resolves into a future indicative in parallel to *miscēbit* (380) and *veniam* (382). The outrageous pledges articulated by Laelius in these terms exemplify what we might call the grammar of civil war: an initial ambiguity gradually gives way to a criminal certainty, as Laelius in his furious enthusiasm transitions to conviction and even active intention.

In keeping with Ovidian precedent, viscera emerge here to mark the transformation of womb to wound, as Laelius ardently links reproductive bodies to the violated familial ties necessitated by civil war. In this moment, Lucan uproots the methodical Ovidian subtext and lays it starkly before his audience: all reproductive relationships are inherently dangerous—there can be no absolute trust between brother and brother, father and son, wife and husband—under the conditions of civil war which inevitably demand the violation of familial *pietas*.

This characteristically Ovidian thesis is not, as it happens, borne out by the subsequent instances of the visceral womb that appear as the epic progresses. The next woman whose womb is represented by viscera is Marcia, a paragon of uxorial and maternal duty. After bearing three children to Cato, she endured an unwanted divorce so that she could provide male heirs, at Cato's direction, for his friend Hortensius (2.329–33).⁹ After the death of Hortensius, Marcia returns to Cato and pleads with him to make her his wife again (2.338–41):

dum sanguis inerat, dum vis materna, peregi
iussa, Cato, et geminos excepi feta maritos:
visceribus lassis partuque exhausta revertor
iam nulli tradenda viro.

While the strength,¹⁰ while the maternal potential was present, I fulfilled your orders, Cato, and fertile I received two husbands: I return now with

9. Marcia was supposedly pregnant with Cato's child at the time of this arrangement (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25.5). On the questions of legality and consent in Marcia's marriages, see Treggiari (2019, 125–27), with important critique (at n51) of Cantarella's (1995) concept of *locatio ventris*. See also Quintilian's discussion of rhetorical exercises concerned with the legal and moral ramifications of Marcia's marriages (*Inst.* 3.5.11–13, 10.5.13).

10. Marcia here invokes the body metaphor of sanguis (blood), which in this context connotes vigor (*OLD* s.v. *sanguis* 5) but relates also to the larger figurative system connecting blood to lineage (*OLD* 8, 9, 10); see previous discussion in chapter 3. Lucan uses metaphors of blood as kinship often: e.g., *pignora iuncti / sanguinis* (pledges of joined blood; 1.111–12); *sanguine ab Iliaco populi* (from the people's Trojan blood; 1.428); and, of Marcia's marriage to Hortensius, *sanguine matris / permixtura domos* (intended to mix houses by the mother's blood; 2.332–33).

wearily viscera and drained by childbearing, to be handed over now to no other husband.

While Marcia's emphasis on her maternal potential (*vis materna*; 338) and fertility (*feta*; 339) reflect her fulfillment of the crucial function of a citizen wife, it is notable that she frames these qualities as existing in a circumscribed past (*dum . . . inerat*; 338). Her present plea to Cato reminds him of her dutiful completion of this task, with candid acknowledgment that pregnancy and childbearing have weakened her body. It is in the context of her frank declaration that she has been drained by birth (*partu . . . exhausta*; 340) that she refers to her own womb as wearied viscera (*lassis visceribus*; 340).

Past precedent would suggest that this word choice bodes extraordinarily ill for Marcia and her family—were this an Ovidian text, she would surely be destined to kill her own children, or to be killed by them, or perhaps to witness them kill each other. None of these outcomes will be true for Marcia, however, who remains a faithful wife and mother until her death.¹¹ Her invocation of a visceral womb, then, in reference to the physical labor of pregnancy and childbirth, indicates instead the depths of her loyalty to her husband(s) and to the social principles of motherhood, to whom and for which she has offered up her body as a reproductive tool. Indeed, Cato's choice to refrain from sex with Marcia after their remarriage (2.378–80) perhaps reflects Marcia's wish to cease bearing children.¹²

The narrator's subsequent emphasis on the civic importance of Cato's paternal and marital identities (*urbi pater est urbi que maritus*; 3.388) underscores Marcia's parallel functions as mother and wife. Marcia submitted the use of her womb to the point of visceral exhaustion in accordance with the will of her husband, but ultimately her motherhood was a role fulfilled for the benefit of the urbs itself.¹³ Marcia's viscera therefore offer a robust counterexample to the first such womb that Lucan's readers encountered: while the pregnant wife of

11. Nor is there any trace in the record of violence amongst her children. Tansey (2016, 186–204) provides a thorough prosopography with comprehensive testimonia for Cato and Marcia's marriage and attested offspring. Plut. *Cat. Min.* 52.3–5 suggests that Marcia returned to Cato's household to look after their two daughters immediately after their remarriage. Only one of their children (Porcia Minor—see Tansey [2016, 197n831]) is attested in later life; any children Marcia bore to Hortensius seem to have died young (or been female and thus overlooked in subsequent discussions of his lack of heirs).

12. Fantham (1992 *ad* 2.341–42) sees an explicit request from Marcia that their remarriage involve no sexual activity. Since Lucan's Cato believes that "the most important purpose of sex was offspring" (*Veneris quoque maximus usus / progenies*; 3.387–88), this abstinence may not have troubled him.

13. See Sannicandro (2007) for Marcia's role as feminine complement to Cato's *pater patriae* (father of the fatherland).

Laelius presented a recognizable reiteration of the shocking domestic violence that stained so many Ovidian wombs, Marcia offers a new paradigm of visceral reproduction that emphasizes the fruitful (if strenuous) fulfillment of maternal and marital duties.

Lucan's third visceral womb returns to more immediate contexts of violence that seem, at least superficially, reminiscent of Ovidian patterns. The naval battle at Massilia features the tragic tableau of a set of twin brothers, one of whom is destined to die in battle: "stant gemini fratres, fecundae gloria matris, / quos eadem variis genuerunt viscera fatis" (There twin brothers stand, the glory of their fertile mother, whom the same viscera bore for different fates; 3.603–4).¹⁴ The birth of twins from a visceral womb recalls the pregnancy of Silvia with Romulus and Remus in Ovid's *Fasti*, where the viscosity of the mother's womb foreshadowed impending fratricide.¹⁵ In this case, however, there is no fraternal discord between the twins; quite the opposite, as one will perish in the act of protecting the other. With limbs severed, weapons lost, and his own death a foregone conclusion, this twin ultimately uses his dying body to shield his brother from injury (3.618–22):

iam clipeo telisque carens, non conditus ima
puppe sed expositus fraternaue pectore nudo
arma tegens, crebra confixus cuspidē perstat
telaque multorum leto casura suorum
emerita iam morte tenet.

Now lacking shield and weapons, not concealed deep within the ship but out in the open and covering with bare chest his brother's arms,¹⁶ he endures, struck by multiple spears, and he blocks weapons that would have killed many of his allies, with death already earned.

The dying twin's fraternal devotion extends, in the end, to all his fellow soldiers (*multorum suorum*, 3.621)—his final act is to hurl his mangled trunk onto the enemy ship, causing it to sink (3.622–33). At the start of this scene, then, when

14. Metger (1970) shows that this episode reworks the twin narrative from Verg. *A.* 10.390–96; cf. Leigh (1997, 252–54). Hunink (1992, 230) notes the ill omen attending this womb ("considering the constant associations of death and destruction connected in *BC* with viscera, the word seems ominous even here"); our familiarity with Ovidian precedent now clarifies Hunink's instinct. The visceral womb rarely bodes well for its inhabitant(s).

15. See chapter 5.

16. My translation exploits the ambiguity of English "arms"—the dying brother is technically protecting his twin's equipment (perhaps his shield) and not his body. Dinter (2012, 23) suggests a play on *armi* and *arma*, since the dying brother's arms have been severed.

Lucan incorporates a visceral womb into his introduction of the twins, this lexical choice complicates the Ovidian metaphor and resolves itself into an index of pietas maintained rather than violated. Though familial relationships are still at stake, this womb anticipates loyalty and self-abnegation instead of betrayal and self-preservation. Though the visceral womb still aptly foreshadows the violent death fated for one of its occupants, the brotherly devotion on display defies the inevitability of fratricide ostensibly compelled by contexts of civil war.

The fourth and final visceral womb to appear in Lucan redeploys the figure as an index of the physical suffering of childbirth. On this occasion, the womb belongs to a familiar mythical exemplum of prolonged parturition: Latona (Leto), whose search for a place to birth Apollo and Diana has featured prominently in Greco-Roman literature from the Homeric Hymns to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁷ Within the expansive description of the origins, environment, and functions of Apollo's shrine at Delphi (5.71–120) that precedes Appius' troubled consultation of the Pythia,¹⁸ Latona appears briefly in connection with Apollo's slaying of Python (5.79–81):

ultor ibi expulsae, premeret cum viscera partus,
matris adhuc rudibus Paeon Pythona sagittis
explicuit, cum regna Themis tripodasque teneret.

There Paeon [Apollo], avenging the banishment that his mother experienced when birth was pressing hard upon her viscera, destroyed Python with still unpracticed arrows, when Themis held sway over the realm and the oracle.

Lucan relates a version of the myth in which Latona must contend with not only the refusal of all lands to grant her a birthing place, but also the pursuit of the monster Python.¹⁹ Apollo's slaughter of Python is an act of vengeance (*ultor*; 5.79) as much as an effort to establish sovereignty over the Delphic oracle. The viscosity of Latona's womb reflects the physical torment of days-long labor with no safe place to rest, where her overdue offspring exert painful pressure on her viscera. Alongside this suffering, however, as with Marcia in Book 2, comes a meaningful absence of any internal familial discord. Latona preserves and cares for her chil-

17. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 25–126; Pindar fr. 33d (Race 2014); Callim. *Hymn* 4.55–259; Ov. *Met.* 6.184–91, 331–38; cf. the Callimachean Artemis' claim that Leto gave birth to her without pain (Callim. *Hymn* 3.24–5).

18. For this episode, see the next section in this chapter, "Unholy Divination."

19. As related in Hyg. *Fab.* 140 (cf. *Fab.* 53); the majority of extant sources for Apollo's defeat of Python do not mention Leto at all.

dren, raising them with careful attention to their needs and joy in their successes; Apollo and Diana, in turn, display unwavering fidelity to their mother, eagerly and often excessively punishing threats to her person or reputation.²⁰ The twins born from this womb, though they are not without their petty rivalries, certainly never harm each other in the mode of Romulus and Remus.²¹ Leto's viscera mark a painful birth, but forebode neither filial nor fraternal violence.

In opposition to the wife of Laelius, then, Lucan presents three visceral wombs belonging to women who, though they do suffer, do not suffer domestic violence. The mother of the twin who perishes at Massilia possesses a womb that, while it forecasts a violent death in civil conflict, does not necessitate fraternal discord between its occupants; in a distinct revision of her likely Ovidian model in Silvia, this anonymous mother bears a twin who dies *for*, rather than because of, his brother. Marcia and Leto, meanwhile, offer models of motherhood whose viscera reflect the physical discomfort of childbearing but also affirm their commitment to maternal duties. The first half of the *De Bello Civili*, therefore, charts a trajectory of reproductive viscera that first acknowledges (and even momentarily surpasses) Ovidian precedent, before complicating the previously necessary contexts of domestic discord. Like Seneca, Lucan creates space for viscera to denote the wombs of good mothers who suffer on behalf of their children or in grief for their losses. Even so, any apparent distinction of these good women from Ovid's murderous mothers creates friction with the corrupting forces of civic violence that surround them; even the most selfless mothers cannot escape, especially in contexts of civil war, from the agony, exhaustion, and grief of motherhood.

Unholy Divination

I observed in chapter 6 that in Senecan tragedy the word viscera develops new associations with religious impiety, as characters like Medea and Atreus intertwine unspeakable domestic violence with unholy perversions of sacrificial rituals. Lucan follows a similar pattern: whenever viscera appear in ritual contexts, something is inevitably amiss, whether that defect is a darkly unpro-

20. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* includes clear indications of Leto's affection for her children and pride in their accomplishments (5–19). The twins' violent revenge on her behalf extends from their destruction of monsters like Python and Tityos (Pind. *Pyth.* 4.90–92, Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.759–61) to their joint massacre of Niobe's children (Hom. *Il.* 24.605–9, Ov. *Met.* 6.155–312).

21. Cf. Dinter (2012, 14), who sees an early interaction between the two (in their guises as sun and moon) as meaningfully representative of "brotherly strife": "fratri contraria Phoebe / ibit" (Luc. 1.77–78).

pitious outcome, an unwilling ceremonial participant, or a malicious divine authority. An additional remarkable feature of Lucan's unholy viscera is their consistent connection with divination; all three of the religious contexts in which Lucanian viscera appear involve some effort by a mortal actor to gather information about the future.²² In this way, Lucan contributes to the expansion of viscera's semantic range in religious contexts, amending its existing association with (holy, propitious, unmarked) sacrifice so that it inevitably involves deficient or profane ritual practices.

The first of these episodes stands in programmatic position near the conclusion of Book 1, where viscera appear twice amidst the troubling results of the Etruscan seer Arruns' efforts at divination. Arruns, the narrator emphasizes, has expertise in interpreting a variety of omens: "fulminis edoctus motus venasque calentis / fibrarum et monitus errantis in aere pinnae" (learned in the thunderbolt's movements and the hot veins of entrails and the warnings of birds that wander the sky; 1.587–88). Despite careful ritual preparations (1.589–610), the sacrifice produces extraordinarily unpropitious results. The first sign of trouble is the bull's uncooperative demeanor (*impatiensque diu non grati victima sacri*; 1.611); the second, the ooze of black slime from its throat instead of the expected flow of red blood (*diffusum rutilo nigrum pro sanguine virus*; 1.615). Arruns, disturbed by these *sacra feralia* (deadly rites; 1.616), scrutinizes the entrails to understand the gods' anger (1.618–25):

terrui ipse color vatem; nam pallida taetris
 viscera tincta notis gelidoque infecta cruore
 plurimus asperso variabat sanguine livor.
 cernit tabe iecur madidum, venasque minaces
 hostili de parte videt. pulmonis anheli
 fibra iacet, pravusque secat vitalia limes.
 cor latet, et saniem per hiantis viscera rimas
 emittunt, produntque suas omenta latebras.

Their very hue frightened the seer; for abundant bruising was coloring with scattered blood the pale viscera stained with foul spots and tainted by clotted gore. He discerns the liver drenched in corruption and he sees threatening veins on the adverse side.²³ The gasping lung's filament lies

22. For a recent treatment of divination in Lucan (with comprehensive bibliography), see Santangelo 2015.

23. The *pars hostilis* gave signs to do with the enemy (as opposed to the *pars familiaris*, which offered information about friends and allies); the distinction collapses in the context of civil war.

ill and the membrane dividing the vital parts is deformed. The heart is obscured and the viscera expel diseased blood through gaping fissures and the membrane enclosing the bowels exposes its hidden recess.

Arruns' inspection of the entrails concludes with the recognition of a second lobe growing upon the head of the liver, a grim portent of civil war (1.627–29).²⁴ The intertwining of viscera into these noxious systems of internal corruption (they are *pallida*, pale; *tincta*, stained; *infecta*, tainted) and disease (*saniem* . . . *emittunt*, they expel diseased blood) fixes the word squarely within the lexicon of ill-omened ritual.²⁵ Arruns' reaction affirms that the results of this extispicy are terribly unpropitious. He refers to things unholy and unspeakable (*vix fas*, 1.631; *non fanda*, 1.634) and concludes that infernal divinities (*inferni* . . . *dei*; 1.634) have occupied the victim. Arruns is even disturbed enough to undermine the art of divination itself, hoping first for his reading to be false (*fibris sit nulla fides*; 1.636) and then for his discipline to have been a fabrication of its legendary founder (*conditor artis / finxerit ista Tages*; 1.636–37). Book 1 therefore contains a meaningful progression of visceral imagery—from the proem's imagination of the Roman people turned against their own viscera to Laelius' threats of domestic violence to the ominous contents of these divinatory entrails—that establishes the word's programmatic entanglement with violence against kin, reproductive bodies, and unpropitious ritual.

Appius Claudius Pulcher's decision to reopen the Delphic shrine in order to discover for himself the outcome of the war presents another series of viscera related to prognostication.²⁶ The less than propitious features of this episode center around the terrified priestess, Phemonoe, who is compelled to prophesy against her will. Her fear and resistance are palpable throughout the ordeal as Appius and the priest force her into the temple: she is terrified (*pavidam*; 5.124), afraid (*metuens*; 128), trembling with fear (*pavens*; 146); her patient dread (*metus*; 142) undermines her false claim that the shrine is dormant and thus useless; she is hesitant and uncertain (*haerentem dubiamque*; 145); she resists (*resistit*; 147). Phemonoe's defiance generates an accumulation of unpropitious circumstances, as her unconvincing attempt to impersonate the oracle leads an enraged Appius to label her impious (*impia*; 158), while her

24. The liver was central to extispicy: see chapter 1. Roche (2009 *ad* 627–28) offers a cogent explanation of the rather obscure Latin describing the anomalies on this liver.

25. Narducci (1979, 149–52) identifies Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Oedipus* as intertextual models for this scene; see chapter 6.

26. The historical Appius was an augur who penned a treatise on divination; this visit to Delphi is recounted at V. Max. 1.8.10. See Masters (1992, 91–149) on this episode, esp. (118–33) on connections between Lucan's Pythia and Vergil's Sibyl.

eventual submission to the oracle's power comes only as she is utterly terrified (*conterrita*; 161). This accretion of inauspicious behaviors seems to contribute, in the end, to Apollo's anger (*iratum te, Phoebae*; 174) and to the violence of Phemonoe's possession (5.171–77):

per inania templi
ancipiti cervice rotat spargitque vaganti
obstantis tripodas magnoque exaestuat igne
iratum te, Phoebae, ferens. nec verberare solo
uteris et stimulis flammasque in viscera mergis:
accipit et frenos, nec tantum prodere vati
quantum scire licet.

She whirls with wavering neck through the temple's voids and scatters the tripods in her way and burns with abundant fire, enduring you, Phoebus, as you are enraged. Not only do you wield the whip and goads and plunge flames into her viscera: she also suffers the reins, and the seer is not permitted to disclose as much as she is allowed to know.

Phemonoe's possession recalls a pattern of usage that we first observed in Lucretius, for whom viscera refer to the bodily site where physical sensations are stirred.²⁷ The descent of Apollo's divine fire into the priestesses' viscera seems designed to emphasize the physical anguish she endures in the course of her divine possession. The narrator confirms, in fact, that Apollo broke his way more fully into Phemonoe's body than he had done to any priestess before (non unquam plenior artus / Phoebados irrupit Paeon; 5.166–67).

After Phemonoe has pronounced a riddling prophecy about the *quies* Appius will find in Euboea (to an optimistic Appius, "rest," but to the knowing reader, "death"), Apollo cuts off her speech and she is driven, still frenzied, out of the temple. Further narration of her sustained agitation follows (5.211–20), until at last Apollo withdraws the sacred knowledge that he had bestowed on her (5.221–24):

immisit Stygiam Paeon in viscera Lethen,
quae raperet secreta deum. tum pectore verum
fugit et ad Phoebi tripodas rediere futura,
vixque refecta cadit.

27. See chapter 1. Similar usages elsewhere in Lucan denote thirst, plague, and poison: Pompeian forces suffering dehydration in Spain (4.324, 372), famine and disease near Dyrrachium (6.94), and two victims of snakebites on Cato's march through North Africa (9.742, 774).

Paean [Apollo] sent Stygian Lethe into her viscera to repossess the secrets of the gods. Then the truth fled from her chest and future events returned to the tripods of Phoebus, and [Phemonoe], scarcely restored, collapsed.

Since we have already been invited to measure the relative intensity of divine possession against the depth of its penetration (*non umquam plenior*; 5.166), the juxtaposition of viscera and *pectus* (chest) here is significant. As with Arruns, under normal circumstances knowledgeable in *fibrae* rather than viscera, we should compare the viscera in this episode of forced prophecy with earlier, unmarked descriptions of the oracular process. The narrator had previously localized a typical Pythian inspiration to the *pectus* (*virgineo conceptum est pectore numen*; 5.97); in explaining why the Pythias welcomed the shrine's inactivity, he mentioned that priestesses generally died after the god entered their *pectora* (5.116). Moreover, when Phemonoe initially feigns divine inspiration, she does so by "pretending the god is beneath her chest" (*deum simulans sub pectore*; 5.148). It is only after Appius compels the unwilling, resistant Phemonoe to receive divine inspiration that the forces occupying her body descend to the level of the viscera.²⁸

The suggestive incorporation of the lexicon of sexual violence, moreover, renders Apollo's possession of the Delphic priestesses and especially of Phemonoe into a symbolic rape and impregnation.²⁹ Phrases like *conceptum est* (5.97, of Pythian inspiration generally) and *concepit* (5.163, of Phemonoe specifically), alongside "sic plena laborat / Phemonoe Phoebō" (thus Phemonoe labors, full with Phoebus; 5.186–87), are decidedly evocative of intercourse and pregnancy; *potitus* (5.165), *premunt* (5.178), and *raperet* (5.222) frame Apollo as a sexual aggressor.³⁰ That her experience of divine inspiration concludes with an entry into (*immisit*) and an aggressive repossession (*raperet*) from her viscera (5.221–22) reconfigures Phemonoe's body into a once-pregnant vessel whose womb has been violently emptied of its contents. It may be significant,

28. Note that the *pectus* remains prominent throughout Phemonoe's possession: "insueto concept pectore numen," 5.163; *potitus / pectore*, 5.165–66; *toto . . . / pectore*, 5.168–69; *premunt . . . pectus*, 5.178; she even uses her *pectus* to dash open the doors of the temple after delivering the prophecy (5.208–10). Cf. Seneca the Elder's disapproving description of a Vestal Virgin who declared that marriage must be sweet—her voice emerges *ex imis visceribus* (from her deepest viscera; Sen. *Controv.* 6.8).

29. Perilli (2020) demonstrates that Phemonoe's modeling after Cassandra contributes to the subtexts of sexual violence, with measurable influence from Ovidian scenes of rape. Vergil's Sibyl has similarly been read as suffering sexual violence at the hands of Apollo (see, e.g., Skulsky 1987).

30. *OLD s.v. concipio* 3: "to receive in the womb, conceive"; *s.v. plenus* 2b: "pregnant"; *s.v. potior*¹ 2c: "to win sexually, gain the submission of"; *s.v. premo*¹ 2b: "to copulate, have intercourse with"; *s.v. rapio* 4: "to carry off (and violate), ravish."

in fact, that Latona's visceral womb appeared at the top of this episode (5.79), establishing for readers the essential relationship between viscera, the womb, and Apollo's seething violence.

This episode features a very different brand of divination from Arruns' extispicy; the viscera involved are likewise far removed from the corrupted entrails of the sacrificial bull. While the Pythia's viscera designate something closer to the Lucretian seat of sensation, they also accentuate the sexual and generative symbolism of Apollo's oracular possession. Behind the entire ordeal, moreover, stands Appius, impatient seeker of knowledge about the future. His early designation in this episode as "scrutator ad ultima fati" (examiner of the ends of fate; 5.122)—especially in light of the forcible removal from Phemonoe's viscera of the *secreta deum* (secrets of the gods; 5.222)—recalls the Senecan Medea's *scrutabor . . . viscera* (I will examine my viscera; 1013), a perversion of divinatory language that targeted the womb-as-child-as-sacrificial-victim.³¹ The depth of Apollo's penetration into Phemonoe's body, finding its nadir in her viscera, thus stains Appius' arrogant search for knowledge with textual substrates of sexual violence and abortive destruction.

A final cluster of viscera associated with unholy prophecy surfaces during Sextus Pompey's visit to the witch Erichtho, who performs a necromantic ritual to extract knowledge from the dead about the outcome of the war.³² Like Appius before him, Sextus is driven by fear to seek information about the future (*stimulante metu fati praenosceret cursus*; 6.423), but he is uninterested in consulting the Pythia (6.425) and likewise shuns the expertise of anyone "who could know fate through entrails, who examines birds, who observes heavenly lightning" (*quis noscere fibra / fata queat, quis prodat aves, quis fulgura caeli / servet*; 6.427–29).³³ His choice to consult Erichtho constitutes a particularly ill-conceived violation of Roman social norms surrounding divinatory practice.³⁴ While Arruns and Appius both encountered inauspicious outcomes, neither of them failed to consult appropriate divine authorities; Erichtho's transparent entanglement with ritual practices antithetical to the Olympian gods

31. See chapter 6.

32. For the long tradition of scholarship on Erichtho, see Masters (1992, 179–80, with n1); productive recent treatments include Celotto (2018), Cruz (2023), and Zientek (2023).

33. These are the same divinatory arts in which Arruns was expert (1.587–88); Sextus' further refusal of astronomy (6.429) recalls Figulus, who gave a reading of the stars after Arruns' extispicy (1.639–72).

34. See Ogden (2001, 149–59) on necromancy in the Roman world; Erichtho surfaces *passim* throughout the entire book. Gordon (1987, 232) asserts that "the germ of the idea for the scene of necromancy" was a story (surviving in Pliny, *Nat.* 7.178–79) involving Sextus Pompey and a man who survived an execution attempt claiming to have returned from the dead to deliver messages *ab inferis*. Santangelo (2015, 182–84) contextualizes this episode against the larger Roman tradition connecting the Pompeys to necromancy.

immediately renders any prophetic information that she divulges an unholy abomination.

Even before Erichtho appears, the narrator is clear and specific about Sextus' dreadful interest in occult magic (6.430–34):

ille supernis
detestanda deis saevorum arcana magorum
noverat et tristes sacris feralibus aras,
umbrarum Ditisque fidem, miseroque liquebat
scire parum superos.

[Sextus] knew the secrets of dire witchcraft execrated by the celestial gods and altars grim with deadly rites and trust in the shades and Dis, and it was clear to the wretched man that the gods above knew too little.

His eager knowledge of *sacra feralia* (deadly rites; 6.432) provides an ominous counterpoint to Arruns' horrified response in Book 1 to the same (“palluit attonitus sacris feralibus,” he blanched, terrified by the deadly rites; 1.616). Sextus' rejection of the sanctioned divinatory techniques of skilled practitioners like Arruns, his allegiance to infernal deities, and his determination to ascertain the course of fate all send him careening toward the worst kind of unholy prophecy; dark ritual spectacle is no mere outcome of an otherwise properly managed ceremony, as it was for Arruns, but the very source of divinatory authority.

The copious impieties churning through this episode—in the description of Thessaly, the witches who inhabit it, and Erichtho specifically—would take too long to enumerate here: suffice it to say that there is an intense concentration on the wicked, the unspeakable, and the forbidden,³⁵ with relentless emphasis on the witches' awful ability to control the Olympian gods and to manipulate the environment without their knowledge or consent.³⁶ Erichtho herself, the narrator declares, is the worst of them all (6.507–9):

35. A representative selection: *arcanum ferale*, 6.440; *impia . . . / carmina*, 6.443–44; *infandum . . . murmur*, 6.448; *flammis . . . / illicitis*, 6.453–54.

36. *Vim factura deis*, 6.441; *ares / caelicolum . . . convertunt carmina*, 6.443–44; *verbaque ad invitum . . . cogentia numen*, 6.446; *abducat superos*, 6.451; *Iuppiter . . . / miratur non ire polos*, 6.464–65; *tonat ignaro caelum Iove*, 6.467; *obstrictos . . . deos*, 6.494; *omne nefas superi . . . / concedunt, carmenque timent audire secundum*, 6.527–28.

hos scelerum ritus, haec dirae crimina gentis
effera damnarat nimiae pietatis Erichtho³⁷
inque novos ritus pollutam duxerat artem.

These ceremonies of sin, these crimes of the grim race [of witches] fierce
Erichtho had condemned as too pious and she had brought new rites to
her desecrated craft.

Erichtho's overdetermined wickedness, as she works diligently to outdo her fellow
witches and enhance the unholiness of her already polluted craft, promises that
the forthcoming ritual will prove an infernal carousel of sacrilege and blasphemy.

An essential feature of Lucan's poison-breathing, crop-blighting, tomb-
robbing Erichtho is the manner in which her personal rejection of extispicy
is articulated: "nec fibras illa litantis / novit" (nor does she know sacrificial
entrails; 6.524–25). The verb *litare*, which connotes favorable prognostics, pairs
with *fibrae* (cf. 1.588, 6.427) to disconnect auspicious divination from visceral
vocabulary. The precision of this word choice becomes even more consequen-
tial when Erichtho's repulsive interactions with the dead begin and the assem-
blage of viscera in this episode materializes.

All four instances of viscera are gruesomely anatomical and, suitably for
necromantic ritual, denote vital organs of the dead suffering unholy post-
mortem disturbances. Erichtho makes a habit of desecrating corpses, with a
collection of disturbing behaviors that range from stealing ashes, bones, and
funeral garments (6.533–37) to plucking eyes from desiccated bodies (6.538–
43) to mangling the corpses of hanged men (6.543–46):

laqueum nodosque nocentis
ore suo rupit, pendentia corpora carpsit
abrasitque cruces percussa que viscera nimbis
vulsit et incoctas admissis sole medullas.

With her mouth she broke the noose and deadly knots, snatched at the
hanging bodies and robbed the crosses and tore away the rain-beaten
viscera and the sun-roasted marrow.

37. The witch's name transliterates the Greek Ἐριχθῶ; where I preserve the aspiration of the let-
ter chi and thus spell her name Erichtho, the Latin edition of Lucan I use (Shackleton Bailey 1997)
prefers Erichtho. This alternate spelling is also preferred in a number of titles in the bibliography.

After Erichtho has begun the ritual to raise the dead, the ingredients of the magical tincture she concocts (a colorful list including dog drool, dragon eyes, and snakeskins) features, in second position, the viscera of a lynx (6.672).³⁸ Erichtho then invokes a litany of lower-world divinities, including the Furies, Chaos, Persephone, Hecate, and the Fates (6.695–706). Within this catalogue of infernal characters comes a reference to a mysterious *ianitor* who feeds human meat to a dog: “ianitor et sedis laxae, qui viscera saevo / spargis nostra cani” (and the doorkeeper of the vast space, you who sprinkle our viscera for the savage dog; 6.702–3).³⁹ Finally, once Erichtho has summoned the soul of a dead soldier, the shade is fearful and hesitates to reenter its former body (6.720–23):

aspicit astantem proiecti corporis umbram,
 exanimes artus inuisaque claustra timentem
 carceris antiqui. pavet ire in pectus apertum
 visceraque et ruptas letali vulnere fibras.

[Erichtho] looks upon the sprawled body's shade as it stands beside her, fearing the lifeless limbs and the hateful enclosure of its former prison. It is terrified to enter the opened chest and the viscera and the entrails broken by a deadly wound.

The revived soldier's revulsion at his own viscera and entrails encapsulates the dreadful perversions of a divinatory practice that exchanges the sanctioned slaughter and examination of animal victims for the desecration of a human corpse and the torment of a human soul.⁴⁰ The conditions of this ritual, its ingredients, its practitioner, and the authorities invoked therefore controvert in every respect those of a sacrifice auspiciously made. The viscera interspersed throughout the episode (as dead flesh, rotting flesh, devoured flesh, resurrected flesh) inevitably experience an amplification of their relationship with profane ritual practices.

38. Recall the potion of Seneca's Medea, which contained the viscera of the strix (Sen. *Med.* 733–34) and entailed a confusion of divinatory ritual ingredients (birds, entrails, bad auspices—see chapter 6). The bubo and strix both appear in Erichtho's ritual, but in auditory form, contributing their screeches to the dissonant layers of her dreadful voice (Luc. 6.689).

39. The identity of this *ianitor* is ambiguous; the dog could be Cerberus, who was known to feed on dead bodies; see Korenjak (1996, 199) and Tesoriero (2000, 208–9).

40. Korenjak (1996, 205) connects the reanimation of this corpse to the forced possession of Phemonoe in Book 5 via the shared language of the pectus (chest). On this passage's intertextual resonance with descriptions of human dissection in medical and literary sources (including Celsus' *De Medicina*, Seneca's *Thyestes*, and the flaying of Marsyas in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), see Goyette (2021, 122–26).

The inclusion of viscera in scenes of unholy sacrifice, given the abundance of evidence we have observed in Seneca and Lucan, may feel like a foregone conclusion for Roman articulations of religious pollution. In earlier literary periods, however, we should note the regular presence of viscera in scenes of good ritual practice,⁴¹ alongside a conspicuous absence of the word viscera in episodes involving bad ritual outcomes. In Plautus' *Poenulus*, the pimp Lycus' complaint of misfortune portended in entrails uses *exta* twice, but never viscera (449–66). Cicero accuses Vatinius of infernal rituals (*nefaria sacra*), necromancy (*inferorum animas elicere*) and human sacrifice (*puerorum extis deo manis mactare*) without once invoking viscera (*Vat.* 14). In Vergil's *Georgics*, the catalogue of terrible omens attending the death of Julius Caesar describes inauspicious extispicy without recourse to viscera (“*nec tempore eodem / tristibus aut extis fibrae apparere minaces / . . . cessavit*,” nor at that time did threatening growths cease appearing in grim entrails”; 1.483–85). Ovid's version of the dark omens preceding the same assassination likewise does not make use of viscera to describe the widespread manifestation of ill-omened extispicy: “*victima nulla litat, magnosque instare tumultus / fibra monet, caesumque caput reperitur in extis*” (No sacrificial victim gives favorable prognostics and the innards warn that great chaos looms and a severed lobe is found in the entrails; *Ov. Met.* 15.794–95).⁴² Livy notably avoids viscera in his description of the inauspicious entrails that mar the consular sacrifices at the beginning of the year 176 BCE, inspiring real fear among the magistrates and repeated attempts to obtain divine favor (41.14–15).⁴³ The pervasive association of the word viscera with peculiarly corrupt divination, whether that corruption manifests in the preparation, execution, or outcome of the ritual, seems not to arise within Latin literature until the late Julio-Claudian period.

We might finally consider whether there is anything to be said about auspicious divination in Lucan. Admittedly, the thematic centrality of civic bloodshed does not allow much narrative space for favorable prognostics. Lucan's final word on divination does come, however, in the form of its rejection by the moral authority of Cato when he passes by the temple of Jupiter Ammon (9.511–86). Against the incitements of his companions, Cato elects *not* to con-

41. This pattern is especially apparent in Vergil (see chapter 2) and is generally sustained throughout Ovid's *Fasti*, which contains a high concentration of sacrificial viscera appearing in neutral or auspicious contexts (e.g., *Fast.* 1.347–48, 1.587–88, 1.671–72, 3.729–32).

42. Lucan's catalogue of the prodigies of war, scholars agree, is a direct response to these passages from Vergil and Ovid: see Roche (2009 *ad* 1.522–83).

43. Driediger-Murphy (2019, 187–92) reads this passage as a worst-case scenario for bad sacrificial outcomes, arguing that the opportunity to continue making sacrifices *ad litationem* would not have made the initial terrible omens any less serious.

sult the oracle, espousing instead a comprehensive rejection of divination as a reliable or even desirable source of knowledge.⁴⁴ His denunciation of prophecy is twice characterized by the narrator in prophetic terms, first as “a response worthy of an oracle” (*dignas adytis . . . voces*; 9.565) and second by the meaningfully ambiguous *sic ille profatus* (thus he spoke/prophesied; 9.584) that follows his pronouncement. Labienus, in urging Cato to consult the oracle, suggests that he fill his chest (*pectora*)—not his viscera, as happened for the Pythia—with the oracle’s voice (9.561–62). Cato’s response, in a mirror image of this request, pours forth from his chest (*effudit . . . e pectore*; 9.565).⁴⁵ This formal rejection of divination maintains a careful distance from the visceral imagery that saturates the unfavorable prophetic experiences of the epic. Of those who perform divination or visit oracular sites, Cato alone encounters no horrific or grievously flawed ritual—and likewise no divinatory viscera—perhaps because he is not so imprudent as to pursue divine knowledge of the future in the first place.

The Visceral Set Piece: Massilia, Vulteius, Pharsalus

So far, my discussion of Lucan’s viscera has been organized thematically, with connections drawn between passages distributed throughout the epic. This section, in contrast, isolates three discrete episodes, which I label “visceral set pieces,” on the basis of their concentrated bursts of usage: the naval battle at Massilia, the mass suicide under Vulteius, and the climactic battle of Pharsalus.⁴⁶ Although these episodes contain the lengthiest battles in the epic, the recurrence of viscera within them is not a mere side effect of violence done in the course of war; rather, the word plays a significant structural and thematic role, underscoring both the honor and the costs of devotion to one’s domestic and civic families. As fathers and brothers perform acts of daring self-abnegation in order to protect their loved ones, viscera acquire a new potential to underscore fidelity and bravery instead of cowardice and betrayal. In this way, Lucanian viscera offer a nuanced confrontation of the assumption that familial treachery is a necessary product of civil war: although men like Lae-

44. See Long (2007, 189–90) and Santangelo (2015, 185–87).

45. See Wick (2004, 219) for the affinity of *pectora* with oracular inspiration and (221) for the religious resonance of the formula *effundere vocem e pectore*.

46. The word viscera is absent for a stretch of 1,000 lines (2.341–3.603) before Massilia, where it appears five times in less than 150 lines (3.604, 3.644, 3.658, 3.677, 3.748); the mass suicide under Vulteius includes three instances within 56 lines (4.511, 4.545, 4.566); it appears nine times during the battle of Pharsalus (7.309, 7.350, 7.467, 7.491, 7.500, 7.579, 7.619, 7.722, 7.843), after a stretch of more than 400 lines (and preceding a stretch of 550 lines) without it. Connolly (2016, 283–84) identifies these three episodes as exemplifying Lucan’s engagement with body horror and the sublime.

lius, whose bloodthirst for the cause endangers his family, can still invoke viscera as a meaningful marker of domestic violence, the word's appearance (by epic's end) is just as likely to signal respect for familial and civic pietas. Even so, commitment to these admirable principles presents its own set of difficulties in circumstances of civil slaughter. Inevitably, even those acts presenting as devotion and loyalty represent gruesome perversions of these qualities because of their entanglements with civic violence; the emergence of viscera in these moments, especially given the word's established affiliations with violated relational bonds, ultimately stresses the impossibility of truly preserving pietas in the midst of civil conflict.⁴⁷

The first of these visceral set pieces, the naval battle at Massilia, requires us to revisit our previous discussion of the twin soldiers whom the narrator first identifies via their birth from the same womb ("stant gemini fratres, fecundae gloria matris, / quos eadem variis genuerunt viscera fatis," There twin brothers stand, the glory of their fertile mother, whom the same viscera bore for different fates; 3.603–4). As discussed previously, this introduction to the brothers foregrounds their shared gestation without necessitating fraternal discord; rather, their mother's visceral womb anticipates the grotesque elaboration of the tragic but noble effort that one makes, as he dies, to preserve the other's life. This is also the first instance of viscera in Book 3, after which the word appears four more times in quick succession. Within this set piece, viscera are connected consistently to the gravely injured bodies of soldiers whose devotion to their fellows and to the cause itself is ultimately self-destructive.⁴⁸

The dying twin is the first of these examples, as he deploys his own mutilated body to shield his brother and comrades. The viscera in this passage, appearing not during his violent death but as part of the description of his birth, emphasize the unique fraternal bond forged between twins who share a womb; one twin submits himself to horrendous pain and certain death in order to protect his brother from the same. The next example is the soldier Lycidas, whose body is hit by a grappling hook and severed in two (3.642–46):

47. Theories of abjection and the grotesque may prove illuminating in thinking further through how viscera participate in the epic's larger deconstruction of familial and civic pietas, as one reader has helpfully suggested to me; while such investigations remain beyond the scope of this project, I highlight scholarship applying these concepts fruitfully to Lucan (Johnson 1987; Bartsch 1997; Spentzou 2018) and to other works of Latin literature (Zimmerman Damer 2019; Pietropaolo 2020; Weiss 2024).

48. Note that the battle at Massilia, though part of the civil war writ large, is not itself a civil conflict, since it pits Roman soldiers (loyal to Caesar) against Greeks protecting their besieged city. The twins fight on the Greek side. Even so, as Masters (1992, 39–42) emphasizes, "the whole battle repeatedly enunciates the single fact of civil war, a state of being which has invaded every level of things, from the cosmos, to the individual, to the poet and his language" (42).

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.

The lower portion of his trunk gave over to death limbs empty of their vitals; but where the swelling lung lies, where the viscera blaze, there death clung at length and, having battled intensely with this part of the man, with difficulty overtook all his limbs.

The mention of Lycidas' viscera here does not, as is standard in narratives of external bodily injury, emphasize the inevitability of his death, but rather encapsulates the valiant, if unwinnable, struggle of the upper half of his body to survive. Even more importantly, the grappling hook on its own would not have cleaved its target—Lycidas' death is rather ensured by his comrades' ill-considered attempts to save him, for they decide to seize hold of his legs after he has been pierced by the hook ("mersus foret ille profundo, / sed prohibent socii suspensaque crura retentant. / scinditur avulsus," He would have been submerged in the deep, but his comrades prevent this by holding back his suspended legs. Torn away, he is divided; 3.636–38). The immediacy and violence of Lycidas' death is a direct result of his comrades' actions; had they not ventured to hold him back, he would likely have drowned—a terrible death, but not a visceral one. His viscera make their appearance specifically as a result of this misguided loyalty, which condemns him to an end more grotesque and gory than he might otherwise have suffered.

The next visceral death can also be blamed on the victim's comrades, whose fierce commitment to the battle (*nimum pugnax*; 3.647) leads them to overbalance their ship. After the craft capsizes, an unnamed soldier is cut in half by the colliding *rostra* of two other vessels (3.652–58):

tunc unica diri
 conspecta est leti facies, cum forte natantem
 diversae rostris iuvenem fixere carinae.
 discessit medium tam vastos pectus ad ictus,
 nec prohibere valent obtritis ossibus artus
 quo minus aera sonent; eliso ventre per ora
 eiecat saniem permixtus viscere sanguis.

Then an exceptional form of dreadful death was witnessed, when by chance two ships pierced with their prows a young soldier treading water. The center of his chest was divided in two at the immense blows, nor could his limbs, with bones crushed, prevent their beaks from resounding in collision; with his belly expelled, blood mixed with viscus cast out gore through his mouth.

As with Lycidas, it is the foolish bravery of his own comrades that leads to this soldier's gruesome death. Their negligence of basic naval strategy in the heat of battle accentuates the mindlessness of their devotion to the cause. The mixing of sanguis (blood) with viscera, moreover, given the presence of an entire shipful of the victim's countrymen in the ocean beside him, connects the destruction of his body to the realm of symbolic kinship—this merging of blood and viscera provides a corporeal analogue for the larger circumstances of his death, bleeding out amid an ocean of his drowning kin.

Further self-destructive impulses govern the actions of the soldiers at Masilia who run out of weapons. After leveraging their surroundings for improvised missiles (oars, sternposts, rowing benches), they begin looting corpses and then, grotesquely, their own bodies (3.676–79):

multi inopes teli iaculum letale revulsum
vulneribus traxere suis et viscera laeva
oppressere manu, validos dum praebeat ictus
sanguis et, hostilem cum torserit, exeat, hastam.

Many of them, lacking weapons, dragged deadly javelins ripped from their own wounds and with the left hand pressed down their viscera, until their blood provided the strength for powerful blows and flowed out only once it had hurled back the enemy spear.

Although these soldiers understand that repurposing weapons pulled from their own wounds will quicken their deaths, their resolve to inflict harm upon the enemy overrides any sense of self-preservation. Their readiness to hasten their own ends for the sake of victory echoes the reckless heroism of the dying twin and the self-destructive instincts of the crew of the capsized ship. As in the death of the soldier crushed between two prows, the collocation of sanguis and viscera activates both words' broader connection to life force and kinship ties. Blood and vital organs together represent not only the essential functions of the

warring soldier's body, but also the shared ancestry that binds him in common cause with his fellows.

This exploration of the self-destructive impulses that originate from intense allegiance to cause or comrade reaches its pinnacle in the final death scene of the episode, in which a man's devotion to an abstract principle of fatherhood ultimately drives him to an accelerated suicide. This unlucky father (*infelix . . . genitor*; 3.727), seeing his son Argus fatally wounded, hurls himself toward death twice over to ensure that his son will still survive him (3.737–51):

ille caput labens et iam languentia colla
 viso patre levat; vox faucis nulla solutas
 prosequitur, tacito tantum petit oscula vultu
 invitatque patris claudenda ad lumina dextram.
 ut torpore senex caruit viresque cruentus
 coepit habere dolor, 'non perdam tempora' dixit
 'a saevis permissa deis, iugulumque senilem
 confodiam. veniam misero concede parenti,
 Arge, quod amplexus, extrema quod oscula fugi.
 nondum destituit calidus tua vulnera sanguis,
 semianimis iaces et adhuc potes esse superstes.'
 sic fatus, quamvis capulum per viscera missi
 polluerit gladii, tamen alta sub aequora tendit
 praecipiti saltu: letum praecedere nati
 festinantem animam morti non credidit uni.

[Argus] lifts his sinking head and already feeble neck when he sees his father; no sound emerges from his slackened mouth, with silent face he seeks only kisses and urges his father's right hand to close his eyes. Once the old man shook off his numbness and bloodstained grief started to intensify, he said, "I will not waste the time granted by cruel gods and I will pierce my aged throat. Forgive your wretched parent, Argus, because I have fled your embrace, your final kisses. Not yet has the hot blood deserted your wounds, you lie half-living and still you could outlive me." Having spoken thus, although he stained a sword hilt plunged through his viscera, nevertheless he strove with headlong leap into the deep waters: he did not trust to a single death that his hastening spirit would outstrip his son's demise.

This father's grief-stricken commitment to a very specific conviction—that the parent should never outlive the child—inspires an overdetermined rush toward death that deliberately defies his son's non-verbal request for comfort as he dies. The site of the sword strike, plunged through the father's viscera, seems in Ovidian terms to evoke the parental grief that urges this suicide.⁴⁹ The symbolic expansiveness of *sanguis*, meanwhile, introduces a meaningful tension to the father's words: even as he asserts that the son's blood (as life force) has not yet deserted him (*nondum destituit . . . sanguis*; 3.746), he himself—the son's blood (as kin)—actively abandons him.⁵⁰ This final death at Massilia, while it reiterates the familial devotion of the twins whose episode began this visceral set piece, also drives that exemplary *pietas* toward a destructive and unnecessary extreme; the clear purpose of the twin's sacrifice (his brother's survival)⁵¹ gives way to an emptier echo of domestic loyalty, where commitment to a noble but ultimately hollow principle prevents a father from comforting his dying son. Through this entire set piece of visceral deaths, then, Lucan traces the progressive erosion of noble self-abnegation into impulsive self-destruction, disclosing the disquieting truth that automatic commitment to familial or civic *pietas* does not necessarily achieve good or noble ends.

The mutual suicide pact under Vulteius occasions another surge of visceral imagery, as a group of cornered Caesarians choose death at each other's hands over surrender. This episode is notable for its apparent, but ultimately superficial and imperfect, reenactment of Stoic doctrines governing suicide.⁵² Lacking the just cause, calm decisiveness, and self-inflicted injury of the ideal Stoic suicide, the deaths of Vulteius' men are driven by desperation, madness, and, technically speaking, murder. The viscera in this episode, I argue, produce a vigorous echo of the lesson from Massilia that reckless commitment to one's cause and one's comrades can reduce a theoretically noble death to wasteful self-destruction.

49. As with, e.g., Althaea's suicide *per viscera* at *Met.* 8.532 (see chapter 4). Fratantuono (2012, 123) notes the strength of the verb *polluerat* in characterizing this as a "polluting act," affirming Lucan's critique of the suicide as "no noble or heroic act, but a symptom of . . . perverse logic."

50. For *sanguis* as metaphor for kinship relations, see previous discussion in chapter 3 (with *OLD* s.v. *sanguis* 8–10).

51. His survival is confirmed in the narrator's comment that his likeness to his dead brother keeps their parents' grief fresh (3.605–8).

52. As argued by Gorman (2001, 280–84), who suggests that the anonymity of soldiers in this and other battle scenes weakens the force of epic *aristeia* in the context of civil war. Leigh 1997 contextualizes this scene against the larger suicidal frameworks of the epic (217–19) and identifies significant intertexts with Senecan tragedy (259–64).

Vuliteius proposes the collective suicide as an act of extreme devotion, reminding his men of *militiae pietas* (military duty; 4.499) and framing their voluntary deaths as proof of their loyalty to Caesar (*pignora . . . amoris*; 4.502). Especially telling is Vuliteius' wish that their enemies might offer them mercy—not, he emphasizes, so that he and his men would be spared, but so that their rejection of this offer would render their deaths even more honorable (4.507–12):

temptare parabant
foederibus turpique volent corrumpere vita.
o utinam, quo plus habeat mors unica famae,
promittant veniam, iubeant sperare salutem,
ne nos, cum calido fodiemus viscera ferro,
desperasse putent.

They will prepare to test us with treaties and will want to corrupt us with disgraceful life. If only, so that our unparalleled death would have all the more renown, they would promise forgiveness, would bid us to hope for safety, lest they think, when we will pierce the viscera with hot iron, that we have done so out of despair.

Vuliteius suppresses the fact that his proposed course of action requires violating the taboo against inflicting violence on kin and countryman, foregrounding instead matters of honor and volition in order to represent the requisite mass murder as noble suicide. The phrase *fodiemus viscera* (we will pierce [our] viscera; 4.511) exemplifies the careful ambiguities of his rhetoric, where the omission of the possessive adjective *nostra* forecloses an easy reading of viscera as symbolic reference to blood relations. Vuliteius directs his men to focus on corporeal bloodshed rather than kinship bonds, endeavoring in vain to disentangle this symbolic suicide from the kin-slaying its execution demands.⁵³

When the internecine violence begins, it becomes immediately clear that Vuliteius' lofty principles do not negate the horrific crimes he requires of his followers (4.541–47):

Vuliteius iugulo poscens iam fata relecto
'ecquis' ait 'iuvenum est cuius sit dextra cruore

53. Asso (2010, 204) ties Vuliteius' *fodiemus viscera* back to the proem, suggesting that the "image of self-wounding Romans is obsessively present to L[ucan]'s mind." Note that Caesar will use the same collocation of words in Book 7 just before the Battle of Pharsalus—see discussion later in this section.

digna meo certaue fide per vulnera nostra
 testetur se velle mori? nec plura locuto
 viscera non unus iam dudum transigit ensis.
 collaudat cunctos, sed eum cui vulnera prima
 debebat grato moriens interficit ictu.

Vul-teius, already demanding death with his throat exposed, says, “Which youth is the one whose hand would be worthy of my blood and with certain faith would prove that he is ready to die by wounding me?” He spoke no more—numerous swords had already pierced his viscera. He praises them all, but dying he kills with grateful blow the one to whom he owed his first wound.

Although Vul-teius activates the suicide pact with a dramatic baring of his throat (*iugulo . . . relecto*; 4.541), his comrades elect to kill him by driving their swords through his viscera (4.545). Recalling that Vul-teius had previously conceptualized viscera as the collective target of their mutual violence (*fodimus viscera*; 4.511), there emerges a distinction between what Vul-teius’ original rhetoric proposed—a lofty, noble suicide—and the ignoble slaughter that he is, in practice, demanding. After the piercing of Vul-teius’ viscera, the scene devolves immediately into a clear and damning episode of kin-slaying, epitomized by the narrator’s comment that they “accomplished in a single faction the whole abomination of war” (*totumque in partibus unis / bellorum fecere nefas*; 4.548–49).

The narrator likens the reciprocal violence to that of the Theban Spartoi and Colchian earthborn,⁵⁴ who “fell by the wounds of their kin” (*cecidit . . . suorum / vulneribus*; 4.550–51) and drenched the earth “with kindred blood” (*cognato . . . sanguine*; 4.554). Vul-teius’ company, he likewise emphasizes, includes members with close family ties (4.562–68):

cum sorte cruenta
 fratribus incurrunt fratres natusque parenti,
 haud trepidante tamen toto cum pondere dextra
 exegere enses. pietas ferientibus una
 non repetisse fuit. iam latis viscera lapsa
 semianimes traxere foris multumque cruorem
 infudere mari.

54. Recall that Ovid, in Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*, described the fratricidal civil war of the Colchian *terrigenae* in pointedly visceral terms: see chapter 5.

When, in accordance with cruel destiny, brothers rushed against brothers and son against father, even so they wielded their swords with full force and steady hand. The only *pietas* for the attackers was not to strike a second time. Then half-dead they dragged along the viscera that had slipped from their sides and poured out abundant blood into the sea.

Since traditional *pietas* has no place in a battle amongst kin, its necessary redefinition—into the landing of a blow heavy and true enough to fell the victim without further attack—aptly precedes the visceral imagery with which this episode concludes.⁵⁵ As the dying soldiers trail spilled vital organs, these *viscera lapsa* (4.566) recall and reify the careful rhetorical stratagems through which Vulteius concealed kin-slaying under a veneer of noble suicide. Though the target of violence was indeed the soldiers' corporeal viscera, not a single soldier pierced his own vital organs: from the moment the violence began, the familial bonds between the soldiers rendered Vulteius' *fodiemus viscera* (4.511) into an authorization of violence amongst kin.

The extreme devotion of these soldiers to their cause has compelled them toward an unholy perversion of the already horrific conditions of "*bella plus quam civilia*"—a civil war within a civil war, in which the soldiers are *glad* to slay their kin and to be slain by them in return.⁵⁶ This self-destructive violence begins and ends with viscera—first as a conceptual target, then as the site of Vulteius' death blow, and finally spilling forth from the wounds of men slaughtered by their own kin. As sequel to the naval battle at Massilia, where soldiers' eagerness to defend their allies or defeat their enemies hastened their own deaths, the mass suicide under Vulteius further intensifies the consequences of unthinking devotion, the gravity of which is stressed by the complex semantic potential of viscera.

The visceral set piece at Pharsalus begins with Caesar's pronouncement that he will die by suicide if any of his troops shows the slightest sign of retreat: "*fodientem viscera cernet / me mea qui nondum victo respexerit hoste*" (whoever looks back with the enemy not yet conquered will observe me piercing my own viscera; 7.309–10). There is clear intratextual resonance here with Vulteius' *fodiemus viscera* (4.511), but with an important distinction: while Vulteius aligned himself with his soldiers as attackers of viscera with no specified possessors, Caesar isolates himself as the sole aggressor (*fodientem . . . / me*)

55. Tola (2016) demonstrates that the resignification of *pietas* in this episode, alongside *virtus* and *fides*, produces a deconstruction of traditional epic heroism.

56. Fratantuono (2012, 161) calls the scene "the ultimate display of the *nefas* of civil war without a rival combatant."

and identifies the viscera as his own (*viscera . . . / mea*). Caesar's status as both agent and victim is focalized through his own men as potential witnesses to, rather than shared participants in, this self-destructive harm—in fact, it is the prospect of their casting a glance backward, as though in doubt of victory, that leads him to threaten suicide in the first place. The fact that the fates of Caesar's men and of Rome itself are entwined with his survival is rhetorically sublimated, but not entirely excised, in the precision of the phrase *mea viscera*: Caesar proposes, as Roche (2019, 142) puts it, “an individual enactment of the state suicide promised in the proem.” Pompey, meanwhile, assures his men that their cause enjoys divine favor, declaring that “[the gods] themselves will guide our weapons through the viscera of Caesar” (*ipsi tela regent per viscera Caesaris*; 7.350). In concrete terms, as Pompey probably intends, this statement envisions the death of Caesar alone, but the irresistible affiliation of viscera with kinship may also render the *viscera Caesaris* into a more expansive referent for the collective body of the citizen-enemy.⁵⁷

The specter of state suicide lingers behind these attempts to circumscribe the unruly symbolics of visceral metaphor into tangible and restricted targets. Neither leader seems willing to articulate the broader civic implications of Romans attacking each other's viscera, though the narrator has been hammering this point home since the epic began; the shared political and civic body of the Roman people, along with the shared kinship relations established by both blood and marriage, mean that Caesar's viscera should be more broadly representative of all the Roman people. Caesar's attempt to leverage his own body as collateral to prevent retreat inadvertently concedes the analogy between his hollow threat and the larger self-inflicted violence that he is responsible for enacting at the state level. In similar fashion, Pompey's confident assertion that his side will strike Caesar's viscera forecasts the indiscriminate spilling of blood belonging to all of Caesar's Roman kin, regardless of their factional affiliations.

The opposing sides, once close enough to recognize family among the enemy, experience a shared emotional repulsion: “gelidusque in viscera sanguis / percussa pietate coit” (Blood runs cold into viscera with pietas shattered; 7.467–68). These viscera closely approximate the Lucretian site of sensation,⁵⁸

57. The question of ritual sacrifice is also entangled in Pompey's reference to the *viscera Caesaris*, which he follows with an assertion that “the gods themselves will wish to ratify Roman laws with this blood” (*ipsi / Romanas sancire volent hoc sanguine leges*; 7.350–51); Roche (2019, 152) emphasizes that *sancire* typically accompanies an animal sacrifice, such that “Pompey's point is that Caesar will play the role of this sacrificial victim.”

58. See chapter 1. Lanzarone (2016, 378) collects literary examples of blood running cold (a fairly common phenomenon in Vergil); this passage is the first extant example of cold blood entering the viscera.

though their invocation is newly connected to the recognition of close kin among enemy ranks. It is not anger or fear but violated *pietas* itself that afflicts the viscera—a *pietas* whose aberrant redefinition under Vulteius evidently does not hold. For all that Caesar and Pompey endeavored to focalize the impact of the forthcoming battle onto the body of a single man, the soldiers' visceral reaction to the imminent prospect of slaying their own kin indicates how forcefully the impending violence will destabilize the Roman citizen-family at large.

Once the battle has begun, viscera are a primary target of attack for the warring soldiers, whose general preference for swords over projectile weapons reflects the grotesque intimacies of civil war: “*odiis solus civilibus ensis / sufficit, et dextras Romana in viscera ducit*” (Only the sword satisfies civil hatreds and guides their hands into Roman viscera; 7.490–91). The piercing of armor with deadly blows occurs as an impersonal movement toward the viscera (*per-ventum est ad viscera*; 7.500), while the narrator's artificial refusal to explicate individual deaths begins from his feeling ashamed “to examine through whose viscera the death-bearing wound passed” (*quaerere letiferum per cuius viscera vulnus / exierit*; 7.619–20). In corporeal terms, the soldiers at Pharsalus are exposed to such a great deal of violence directed precisely at their viscera that the word's anatomical referent remains activated throughout; as an index of fatal injury, its recurrence is a grim reminder that such wounds are impossible to survive.

Amid this chaos of carnage, Lucan renews the symbolic value of viscera when Caesar directs his soldiers toward the senators on the battlefield (7.578–81):

in plebem vetat ire manus monstratque senatum:
scit cruor imperii qui sit, quae viscera rerum,
unde petat Romam, libertas ultima mundi
quo steterit ferienda loco.

[Caesar] forbids them to target common soldiers and points out the senate: he knows what is the blood of empire, what are the viscera of things, from where he may attack Rome, in what place stood the world's final freedom for him to strike down.

Here, the *cruor imperii* (blood of empire) and *viscera rerum* (viscera of things) construct an image of the Roman political body under attack from within.⁵⁹ As

59. The phrase *viscera rerum* is a unique collocation that, especially given its presence in a

Caesar understands it, the senators are his most important target because they comprise the most vital parts of the republic: one might even suggest a silent *publicarum* after *rerum* in line 579.⁶⁰ This passage preserves a meaningful configuration of the Roman body politic before republic gave way to empire and the conceptual “head of state” emerged; Caesar’s determination to destroy the republic must inevitably focus not on a symbolic head,⁶¹ but on the vital organs without which it could not survive. There are embedded echoes here of Cicero’s concern for the *viscera rei publicae*, a political figure first invoked specifically to emphasize internal threats to the well-being of the republic.⁶²

Lucan’s narrator is not satisfied to leave implicit this invocation of political viscera. After Pompey’s flight, he voices a gruesome indictment of the violence Caesar has wrought upon his own people: “tu, Caesar, in alto / caedis adhuc cumulo patriae per viscera vadis” (You, Caesar, in a deep mass of slaughter, still stride through the viscera of the fatherland; 7.721–22). The corpses of Roman soldiers, set against the gravely wounded body of the Roman fatherland, accentuate the interdependency of people and nation, both mangled in Caesar’s pursuit of power.⁶³ Manifold referents for viscera are activated in this biting apostrophe: the vital organs of the dead soldiers, the kinship relations between them, and their central importance to the health of the Roman state. This polysemy stimulates in turn a palimpsest of images for Caesar’s imagined movement: he wades through a pile of eviscerated bodies, delights in the kin-slaughter that his actions have compelled, and steps over the corpse of Roma personified, whose vital parts are the Roman people. In this way, Lucan’s most explicit gesture toward Anchises’ prophecy in the Vergilian underworld, which foretold that the violence in this precise conflict would be inflicted upon the *viscera patriae* (Verg. A. 6.833),⁶⁴ amplifies the stakes of those political viscera by disclosing the bloody, corporeal aftermath of their destruction.

Caesar’s decision to refuse burial to the enemy dead produces one final and rather enigmatic image. A host of scavengers, birds and beasts alike, gather

declaration of knowledge (*scit*), suggests a corporeal perversion of the drive to understand natural philosophy (*rerum natura*).

60. For Leigh (1997, 209n50), these lines reflect the principle that “[Caesar’s] assault on the body of the Roman people should enact the poem.”

61. Republican conceptualizations of the body politic explicitly rejected the existence of a symbolic head; Cicero, for example, derided Catiline for attempting to elaborate his own metaphor for the body politic in which he himself might become its head (*Mur.* 51). See Mebane (2016, 197–98).

62. See chapter 2.

63. Dinter (2012, 35n99) calls this “a violent refashioning” of 5.510–12, when Caesar walked among his sleeping troops.

64. See chapter 2 and cf. the introduction to this chapter for Lucan’s more oblique engagement with this passage in his poem.

to feed upon the corpses, but do not consume all body parts indiscriminately (7.841–45):

non omnis populus pervenit ad ossa
 inque feras discerptus abit; non intima curant
 viscera nec totas avidae sorbere medullas:
 degustant artus. Latiae pars maxima turbae
 fastidita iacet.

The dead are not entirely picked down to the bone nor do they vanish completely, torn to pieces, into the beasts; [the scavengers] do not heed the inmost viscera nor are they eager to suck all the marrow: they nibble at the limbs. The great majority of the Roman throng lies scorned.

While Caesar's moral depravity in inflicting this indignity upon the corpses of his own people is clear, the unnatural behavior of these scavengers presents an even further disgrace: their distaste (or even scorn: *fastidita*; 7.845) for the bodies, and especially the viscera, leaves them to suffer the combined humiliations of dismemberment and decomposition. Given the wide-ranging applications of viscera throughout this episode (as the target of Caesar's empty threats of suicide; as the site where blood runs cold at the prospect of kin-killing; as the corporeal recipient of countless fatal wounds; as the senatorial class vital to the survival of the state; as the entanglement of mangled bodies with mangled body politic), the scavengers' abstention from consuming Roman viscera lends the word a final, complementary association with desecration in death. In the aftermath of so devastating a civil conflict, it is appropriate that even the birds and beasts who come to feed on the bodies feel an aversion to the viscera of the Roman dead.⁶⁵

The consistent blending throughout this episode and throughout the epic of the corporeal and political valences of viscera supports Lucan's larger emphasis on the inextricably intertwined fates of a political body and the people within it. He deploys viscera from numerous semantic angles, often concurrent and overlapping, so that harm to individual bodies is shown to weaken the republic and threats to the republic are framed as violence to its body. The frequent collocation of viscera with *sanguis* activates their shared symbolic import,

65. Roche (2019, 249) claims that the point of the animals' avoidance of viscera "is not that they are squeamish, but that they are full." While the sheer volume of the dead certainly provides a more than ample meal for scavengers, I am inclined to read additional symbolism into their lack of appetite.

reminding readers that the spilled blood in this epic is shared blood and that the vital force of the Roman political body is dependent upon the survival of its citizens. The set pieces at Massilia, Vulteius, and Pharsalus therefore leverage the polyvalence of viscera to expose paradigms of human behavior under conditions of civil war, demonstrating that even principled impulses can slip easily into unproductively self-destructive behavior, that the moral repugnance of violence amongst kin can unravel the social fabric of entire nation-states, and finally that nature itself recoils at the unholy remnants of civil slaughter.

The Viscera of Pompey and Caesar

I have observed a pattern of complex engagement with viscera throughout the first seven books of Lucan's epic, as the poet weaves together wombs, unholy divination, eviscerated bodies, and the vital parts of the Roman state to blur the line between ardent devotion and self-destruction. In the final three extant books of *De Bello Civili* (8–10), Lucan's focus shifts and sharpens, concentrating exclusively on the viscera of Pompey and Caesar. The epic's conclusion, as it survives, becomes very much fixated on the connection—or the disconnect—between the viscera of these leaders and the condition of the Roman state. I argue that Lucan's narrative choices in these final three books enact, on the one hand, an expansion of Pompey's viscera into a powerful symbol for the emotional core of the Roman republic, and, on the other, a constriction of Caesar's viscera so that they represent only the organs within his own body, marking his continued survival as antithetical to the health of Rome.

We should recall that the *viscera Caesaris* were previously isolated just before the battle of Pharsalus, as Pompey indicated to his soldiers that the gods would guide their weapons directly toward that target; Caesar likewise had threatened, should his men even begin to consider surrender, a suicidal blow to his own viscera.⁶⁶ In Book 8, attention turns toward the viscera of Pompey, as he seeks safe harbor in exile and becomes the target of an Egyptian conspiracy against his life. Ptolemy's advisor Pothinus is the first to single out Pompey's viscera, amid a series of apostrophic comments to an absent Pompey embedded in his advisory speech to Ptolemy (8.518–22):

quod nobis scepra senatus
te suadente dedit, votis tua fovimus arma.

66. Luc. 7.350 and 7.309, respectively; see previous section in this chapter.

hoc ferrum, quod fata iubent proferre, paravi
 non tibi, sed victo; feriam tua viscera, Magne,
 malueram soceri.

Because the senate gave us sovereignty at your persuasion, we favored your weapons in our prayers. This sword, which the fates command us to draw, I prepared not for you but for the vanquished; I will strike your viscera, Magnus, though I would have preferred to strike those of your father-in-law.

The alternation between Pothinus' preferred fantasy of killing Caesar and his revised intention to assassinate Pompey suggests that the viscera he imagines striking are corporeal—while his thirst for Roman blood does not necessarily discriminate between leaders, it does target the bodies of the men leading the conflict and influencing political decisions that have affected Egyptian sovereignty. These viscera mark Pothinus' desire to kill by their anatomical denotation of vital organs, as the inner parts of the body necessary to survival.

After Achilles has been selected to serve as assassin and the party sets out on its murderous quest, the narrator interjects to reprimand Ptolemy for his unwelcome intervention into a Roman conflict. He concludes this rebuke with a pointed question (8.556–60):

quid viscera nostra
 scrutaris gladio? nescis, puer improbe, nescis
 quo tua sit fortuna loco: iam iure sine ullo
 Nili sceptrā tenes; cecidit civilibus armis
 qui tibi regna dedit.

Why do you examine our viscera with a sword? You know not, wicked boy, you know not where your fortune lies: now with no claim you hold the scepters of the Nile; he has fallen to civil conflict who gave these kingdoms to you.

Since the true character of civil conflict ought to exclude foreign actors entirely, Ptolemy's meddling is particularly presumptuous—how could *he* dare to attack Roman viscera when Lucan's unambiguous programmatics of civil war have made it clear that this violence must be reflexive (*in sua . . . viscera*; 1.3)?⁶⁷

67. The collocation of *scrutor* with viscera recalls Seneca's *Medea* (see chapter 6) and Lucan's *Appius* (see earlier in this chapter), for both of whom the combination invoked unholy divination.

Because the narrator writes from the perspective of a future generation, the plural first-person possessive adjective *nostra* encompasses not merely all Romans but all Romans across time. By asserting a claim of ownership over the viscera under attack, the narrator magnifies the violence planned for Pompey so that it incorporates the vital parts of all Rome's citizens, past and future.⁶⁸

Finally, in the midst of Pompey's assassination, a grieving Cornelia articulates a significant reconfiguration of her dead husband's viscera into something existing outside of himself (8.642–46):

sed, quisquis, in istud
a superis immisce caput, vel Caesaris irae
vel tibi prospiciens, nescis, crudelis, ubi ipsa
viscera sint Magni: properas atque ingeris ictus
qua votum est victo.

But whoever you are, sent by the gods against [Pompey's] head, providing either for Caesar's wrath or for yourself, you know not, cruel one, where the true viscera of Magnus lie: you hasten and inflict blows precisely where your victim desires it.

Any blow to Pompey's actual vital organs, Cornelia suggests, is *not* a blow to his viscera, because the *ipsa viscera Magni* do not lie within his body. The disarticulation of Pompey's viscera from his mortal frame illuminates his sustained value as symbol for the preservation of the Roman republic and its ideals. This elegant paradox underscores how capacious the concept of viscera has become within the Lucanian poetics of family and fatherland: the narrator's previous suggestion that violence against Pompey constitutes harm to a collective and diachronic *nostra viscera* is answered by Cornelia's affirmation that the true viscera of Pompey are not tethered to his body. In this way, Lucan constructs a connection between all Romans that transcends the confines of a body made of flesh and blood; this transcendence manifests most powerfully in the form of the leader who signifies, even in death, a yearning for the survival of Rome.

Cornelia's semantic displacement of Pompey's viscera into a far-reaching political symbol comes as part of her efforts to provoke the assassins into killing her also—her next suggestion is that forcing Pompey to witness her demise would be a punishment worse than death for him (*poenas non morte minores / pendat et ante meum videat caput*; 8.646–47). The implication that the *ipsa*

68. Dinter (2012, 28) discusses the narrator's "search [for] an embodiment of himself and his poetics" within the epic, with reference to *Pharsalia nostra / vivet* (our Pharsalia will live; 9.985–86); I imagine that this *nostra viscera* contributes to the same phenomenon.

viscera Magni are also tied to Cornelia's safety suggests that it is not only civic but marital devotion that dislocates his viscera from his body. Indeed, the next instance of viscera in the epic, which appears at the beginning of Book 9, highlights the reciprocity of Cornelia's relationship with her late husband. In lamentation over her inability to conduct proper funeral rites, Cornelia reminds herself that a physical grave is not necessary (9.69–72):

quid porro tumulis opus est aut ulla requiris
instrumenta, dolor? non toto in pectore portas,
impia, Pompeium? non imis haeret imago
visceribus?

What need is there of tombs? Why, grief, do you seek any ornaments?
Do you not carry Pompey in your whole chest, impious one? Does his
likeness not cling to your deepest viscera?

Although Cornelia had insisted that Pompey's true viscera did not lie within his body, as grieving wife she professes that his presence still lingers in hers, carried in her chest and cleaving to her viscera.⁶⁹ His death thus renders him into a sweeping symbol for both civic and conjugal devotion: his dedication to the defense of his country and his citizen-family allows his true viscera to transcend his physical body, while his memory after death continues to grip the viscera of his loved ones. Through this accumulation of metaphors, Lucan generates a transubstantiation of Pompey into something much bigger than himself. Although much has been made of Pompey's decapitation as a symbol for the death of the republic,⁷⁰ viscera tell a slightly different story about the leader's demise: they point to the possibility of survival for Rome—perhaps not as a republic, but as an ideal uniting people of shared values, cultural heritage, and kinship ties—outside and beyond the body of its dead leader.

Lucan accomplishes a final negotiation of the viscera of Caesar and Pompey with the word's last two appearances in the text, culminating in an affirmation that Pompey's viscera are expansive and immortal symbols of Roman civic good,

69. The viscera of Cato's wife Marcia (see earlier in this chapter, in the section titled "Lucan's Visceral Wombs") and of Cornelia together exemplify uxorial devotion at the lower and upper boundaries of their family's lives (that is, birth and death). The collocation of the verb *haereo* with viscera is more typical in analogies of disease (e.g., Liv. 32.21.27) or descriptions of wounds (e.g., Cic. *Tusc.* 2.20, Verg. *A.* 10.727, Ov. *Met.* 6.290); Cornelia infuses this common construction with new associations of grief and lasting affection (perhaps most comparable to Cic. *Phil.* 1.36—see chapter 2).

70. See especially Mebane (2016), who persuasively traces a long tradition of investing the head with special symbolism within the Roman metaphor of the body politic.

while Caesar's are corporeal, anchored to his mortal frame, and vulnerable to future violence. After Caesar travels to Egypt and is greeted by the offering of Pompey's head, the narrator interprets his weeping as a manipulative masking of inner joy so that the Egyptians cannot leverage the assassination as a debt against him. The narrator further speculates that Caesar's tears stemmed from disappointment that he was not able to commit the murder himself: "fortasse tyranni / tangeris invidia, captique in viscera Magni / hoc alii licuisse doles" (Perhaps you are afflicted with envy of the tyrant and you grieve that it was granted to another to move against the viscera of captive Pompey; 9.1051–53).

Caesar's arrogance in this disappointment is underscored by a previous accumulation of programmatic assertions about knowledge or ignorance of the true locus of Rome's viscera. We may recall that Caesar directed his men at Pharsalus to attack the senators because he knew (*scit*) them to be the *viscera rerum* (7.579); that Ptolemy attacked Roman viscera because he did not know (*nescis . . . nescis*; 8.557) where his fortunes lay; and that Pompey's assassins attacked his body because they did not know (*nescis*; 8.644) where his true viscera were. That Caesar is aggrieved at the theft of an opportunity to attack the *viscera Magni* illuminates his failure to understand (like Ptolemy, like the assassins) the nature of Rome's viscera. Although Caesar understood, in strategic terms, that members of the senatorial class constituted something like the vital center of Rome's body politic, he refuses to conceive of Pompey within the same symbolic framework. That he fails to grasp the extent to which Ptolemy's delegated violence against the *viscera Magni* did not entirely destroy them, because he is determined to conceive of the dead Pompey as a body and not a symbol, suggests a misguided confidence that Pompey's demise secured an end to Roman resistance against his claims to power.⁷¹

The final occurrence of viscera in the epic—less than twenty lines before the extant text breaks off—underscores the fault in this overconfident assumption. As Caesar flees an Egyptian plot on his life, the narrator pointedly forecasts the deadly fate that awaits him back at Rome: "dum patrii veniant in viscera Caesaris enses, / Magnus inultus erit" (until native swords strike against the viscera of Caesar, Magnus will be unavenged; 10.528–29). The viscera of Caesar narrow here to a corporeal point: these are no symbol for a transcendent vision of Roman ideals, but the vulnerable inner organs of a single man whose

71. Indeed, the return of Pompey's shade to settle in the mind of Brutus at the beginning of Book 9 had already characterized Caesar's eventual assassination as predicated upon a continuation of Pompey's ideals. See Easton (2012) for a reading of Pompey's continued activity after his death as a reiteration of the theme of "victorious return" (213) embedded earlier in the epic.

crimes demand a violent death on the edge of his countrymen's swords.⁷² Caesar's inability to see the larger symbolic frameworks of Rome's vital core—to understand that the death of Pompey was *not* an end to the life of republican ideals—becomes a lesson that must be learned in his own flesh and blood.⁷³

Visceral Sacrifice in Julio-Claudian Contexts

Although the transfer of power from Augustus to Tiberius in 14 CE was peaceful, the Julio-Claudian dynasty would come to be plagued by uncertainty and sabotage. Now that the highest office in Rome was a lifetime appointment, the uneasy questions of succession—who would inherit (or seize) power, whether they would be fit for office, and how long they would survive—developed into ever more pressing concerns, especially as the emperors struggled to produce appropriate male heirs and to keep them alive.⁷⁴ Designated successors and presumed rivals died young and often under suspicious circumstances; the assassination of Caligula (41 CE) in particular, as Julia Mebane argues, “[threw] into sharp relief . . . the precarity of the dynastic succession” (2024, 132).⁷⁵ Nero's ascension in 54 CE was reportedly accomplished through violent scheming to eliminate potential rivals, including the alleged poisoning of his teenaged stepbrother Britannicus and perhaps—as some Roman historiographers would have it—the murder of emperor Claudius himself.⁷⁶ Whether or not Nero's rise to power came via assassination, the instability of the line of

72. Berti (2000, 340) affirms that the “senso concreto” of viscera in this line differentiates it from its usage in the poem. The adjective *patrii* (which I have translated as “native”) also contains connotations of ancestral kinship and of senatorial rank, with the force of the shared root *patr-* linking it to similarly charged terms like *patria* (fatherland) and *patres* (“fathers,” but also “senators”).

73. The question of Pompey's heroism in the epic is, of course, an extraordinarily complex one; the fundamentally heroic framework constructed by his viscera aligns well with Bartsch's (1997, 75) observations about the narrator's “parabolic trajectory that leaves him, at the end, clearly, even rabidly, in favor of one of the two leaders, whose goodness he proclaims even as the text of the poem must leave us skeptical.”

74. On the problems, procedures, and perceptions of succession in the Julio-Claudian period, see Gibson (2012) and Sawiński (2018).

75. Mebane (2024, 131–62) demonstrates how anxieties about succession in this period informed new conceptualizations of the Roman body politic. On political assassination as occurring with exceptional frequency during the early Roman Empire, see Sheldon (2018); on the practice of eliminating political rivals, Sawiński (2018, 253–54).

76. Historiographer's accounts of Nero's mother Agrippina poisoning Claudius (e.g., Tac. *Ann.* 12.64–69; Suet. *Claud.* 44) are probably sensationalized: “the actual evidence for murder, by [Agrippina] or anyone else, is slender indeed” (Barrett 1996, 138); still, Nero's ascension to power was attributable to his mother's machinations, since after marrying Claudius she persuaded him to adopt Nero as his heir. For Agrippina's unique position in the Julio-Claudian family tree and representations of her scheming ascent to power, see Barrett (1996, 95–142) and Gillespie (2014).

Julio-Claudian succession was clear; Romans living in the 50s and 60s CE, having witnessed over the previous decades a pattern of violent maneuverings for an office invested with nearly unchecked power, would reasonably have been concerned about what Rome's dynastic future might hold.

Seneca and Lucan had in common a significant personal relationship with Nero; the former served as Nero's tutor (starting in 49 CE) and then, once Nero became emperor (54 CE), his advisor, while the latter was part of Nero's circle of *amici* and seems, at least at first, to have undertaken his writing projects with the emperor's approval.⁷⁷ Both were accused of participating in the Pisonian conspiracy of 65 CE and died by suicide after being sentenced to death by Nero.⁷⁸ For this reason, both Seneca and Lucan are generally characterized as Neronian authors and their literary works examined for evidence of their (d)evolving relationships with the emperor. For Lucan, who began writing *De Bello Civili* around 60 CE, scholarship has focused on untangling how the poet's eventual falling out with Nero may have influenced his composition of the epic's later books and how it should color our interpretation of those sections composed while he still enjoyed the emperor's favor.⁷⁹ The development of Seneca's tragic corpus in relation to Nero is a far thornier question, especially given how impossible the task of pinpointing individual tragedies even to a specific decade of the author's life has proved.⁸⁰

With these caveats of chronology in mind, we may still posit productive correlations between Nero's progressively deranged implementations of auto-

77. Boyle (1997, 32) emphasizes that Seneca "witnessed at first hand and participated in the corrupting power, hypocrisy, self-abasement and abnormal cruelty defining (or so the ancient historians, especially Tacitus, would have us believe) the early imperial court." Griffin (1992) examines Seneca's role in Nero's court and dimensions of his literary corpus (esp. his moral philosophy) that reflect his political relationships, while Griffin (1984) does the same for Lucan. Lucan's positive relationship with Nero in the early stages of his reign is suggested by his composition of a *Laudes Neronis* in 60 CE.

78. Our most detailed primary source for the Pisonian conspiracy is Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.48–74), though this version of events is, by Tacitus' own admission, tempered by uncertainty: see Pagán (2004, 72–83). For representations of Seneca's death across numerous genres and time periods, see Ker (2009); Tacitus describes his suicide in *Annales* 15.62–64. Lucan's turbulent relationship with Nero, culminating in his forced suicide, is related in two *Vitae Lucani* (by Suetonius and, much later, his commentator Vacca).

79. Scholars puzzle over whether the praise of Nero in Book 1 is sincere or ironic. Narducci (1979, 21–30) summarizes and evaluates theories on how Lucan's unstable relationship with Nero affected the text; see Kimmerle (2015, 14–19) for a synthesis that includes more recent scholarship on this question.

80. For various approaches to dating Seneca, see Tanner (1985), Nisbet (1990), Marshall (2014). The groundbreaking metrical scheme proposed by Fitch (1981) provided the groundwork for at least grouping the tragedies into relative chronological clusters. Still, without external evidence to corroborate chronology, most of Seneca's plays *could* have been written under any of the Emperors from Tiberius to Nero; Fantham (1982, 9–14) emphasizes the scarcity of reliable internal evidence and the tendentiousness of most proposed dating criteria.

cratic power and those discomfitures with religious and civil conflicts apparent in Lucan and the (likely) late-career tragedies of Seneca.⁸¹ The most significant of these behaviors, for our purposes, would be Nero's alleged patterns of religious impiety and especially his fascination with necromancy. As the biographical tradition would have it, Nero's attitude toward state religion was inattentive at best and sacrilegious at worst; Suetonius calls him *religionum contemptor* (scorner of religious cults; *Nero* 56) and aligns him closely with magic and superstition. The pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, written shortly after Nero's death, represents him as scornful of and hostile toward the gods (*spernit superos*, 89; *hostis deum*, 240), accusing him of expelling gods from their temples (*templis expulit superos suis*; 241).⁸² In his comprehensive survey of necromancy in the Greco-Roman world, Ogden (2001, 152) affirms that Nero "is the emperor to whom the most elaborate traditions of necromancy attach." Scholars have seen the specter of Nero lurking behind Erichtho's necromantic ritual in *De Bello Civili* 6, positing connections between the religious perversions in the episode and Nero's blatantly impious behavior and even suggesting that Sextus Pompey could be modelled after Nero himself.⁸³

Even before Nero, members of the Julio-Claudian family had often found themselves accused of flirtations with dark forms of magic, but Nero himself was said to show an unprecedented intensity of interest in discovering the future through divinatory rituals, regardless of whether they belonged to sanctioned forms of religious practice.⁸⁴ He is reported most ominously to have turned to necromancy in the wake of his mother's death, out of a paranoid desire to appease her shade and any other infernal divinities that might have felt inclined to punish him for ordering the execution of his own mother (Suet. *Nero* 34.4):

adduntur his atrociora nec incertis auctoribus: ad visendum interfectae cadaver accurrisse, contrectasse membra, alia vituperasse, alia laudasse, sitique interim oborta bibisse. neque tamen conscientiam sceleris, quanquam et militum et senatus populique gratulationibus confirmaretur, aut statim aut umquam postea ferre potuit, saepe confessus exagitari se materna specie verberibusque Furiarum ac taedis ardentibus. quin et facto per Magos sacro evocare Manes et exorare temptavit.

81. Of the eight extant plays, *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* are generally agreed to be the latest in his career (perhaps c. 62 CE); *Troades* and *Medea* likely predate them but postdate Nero's ascension to the throne; *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus* may be the earliest. See Marshall (2014, 37–40).

82. Arampapaslis (2024, xii–xiv) analyzes these and other accusations as illuminating emergent discourses on magic more than offering any factual evidence of Nero's behavior.

83. E.g., Gordon (1987, 241), Celotto (2018); see also Ogden (2001, 153, with n9).

84. See Rochette (2003, 835–38).

More terrible crimes are added to these by reliable authorities: that he rushed to inspect the corpse of his murdered [mother], examined her limbs, critiqued some, praised others, and took a drink in the meantime to quench his thirst. Nor still was he able to endure his guilty conscience, although he was being affirmed by the congratulations of the soldiers and senate and people, either immediately afterward or ever, having confessed often that he was hounded by his mother's shade and the Furies' lashes and burning torches. It is even the case that, with a sacred ritual undertaken through magicians, he tried to call forth the shades and appease them.

Suetonius' report must, of course, be taken with a grain of salt; accusations of sacrilege could be as much a device of negative characterization as a reflection of Nero's true behaviors. Even so, we might also contextualize the biographical tradition recording Nero's impiety against the broader transformation of public religion that had been occurring as a result of Rome's transition to autocratic governance. As Gordon (1987, 241) writes:

One of the consequences of the establishment of the Principate was the creation of an iconography of Imperial sacrifice whereby, with scarcely an exception, the princeps alone is shown as sacrificant in public contexts. Sacrifice is a sign both of the piety of the regime and of its legitimate authority. The imposition of civic sacrifice upon the Empire as a whole was therefore not merely a mark of respect towards the gods but also a duty, to maintain the discipline of *humanitas*. To forbid illicit religion, human sacrifice, atheism, became imperial services to the public weal. Inevitably, those who did not conform became public enemies.

Nero's alleged impieties, then, and especially his experimentations with illicit forms of ritual (or, at least, his reputation for performing such experiments) would have been amplified by the significant civic trust placed in the body of the emperor as representative and executor of public sacrifice.⁸⁵ His reported refusal to participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries (Suet. *Ner.* 34.4) out of worry that matricidal pollution would endanger him speaks to what could have been a much broader concern among the Roman public with their emperor's rumored violations of divine law.

85. See also Scheid (2012) on the significance of the deified emperor in Roman sacrificial practices, especially in relation to the function of animal sacrifice in "constructing social hierarchy" (87).

Glenn Most (1992) notes a blurring of the distinctions between man and beast throughout Neronian literature that complements a more general fascination with bodily dismemberment; the two authors for whom this pattern holds most apparently are, not surprisingly, Lucan and Seneca. The blending of the human injury that arises at the intersection of domestic and civil conflict with perverse substitutions of human for animal flesh in sacrificial ritual are facilitated in both authors' literary corpora by the rich plasticity of the word *viscera*, which allows the authors to introduce a squeamish discomfort to scenes of divination and sacrifice gone horribly wrong. *Viscera's* fresh acquisition of contextual associations with religious impiety, then, developed in chronological correlation—certainly for Lucan, plausibly for Seneca's tragedies—with an apparent devolution of respect for the gods and for proper ritual practices taking place in the imperial court. Nero's investment with central authority in such matters threatened an outward reverberation of divine anger that could impact all Romans, but especially those in close personal proximity with ever-weakening control over their leader's unpredictable behaviors. The transference of a word typically associated with pious ritual practice into the semantic realm of unforgivable impieties, where human meat is sacrificed, consumed, and consulted for knowledge about the future, betrays a larger discomfort with the potentially disastrous degeneration of religious sanctity in Roman political life—a risk not tied exclusively to Nero, but to the centralization of religious authority in the office of the *princeps* itself.

Alongside the potential for imperial abuses of religious propriety, we should also note the persistence of civil war anxieties permeating Rome during this period. Even if the devastation of the Caesarian wars was generally beyond living memory, Lucan's epic restaging of that conflict was primed to pick the scab off a wound that had not entirely healed. His choice to dramatize this painful era of Rome's history is itself indicative of a sustained preoccupation with the threat of internecine violence. The instabilities of the Neronian period certainly provided no reassurance in this regard—though Seneca and Lucan could not have known it, nor did they live to see it, a new and bloody civil war was poised to overwhelm Rome in the immediate aftermath of Nero's death in 68 CE. It was, importantly, against this backdrop of escalating internal conflicts at Rome (and the author's personal conflicts with the emperor) that Lucan built a trajectory of visceral images that cautioned against the foolish extremes of militant devotion to individual leaders, while ultimately affirming Rome's continuity as a symbolic ideal that could transcend the bodies of its citizens.

Joy Connolly's (2016) reading of "reiterative violence" in Lucan offers an important perspective in this regard: Connolly resists the general scholarly

impulse to read Lucan's civil war epic as being about the dissolution of Rome, suggesting instead that he staged violence as an integrating force, where "the people crystallize as a community around the deaths of the community's members" (2016, 283). From this angle, we might think productively about Lucanian and Senecan viscera as figures regularly disarticulated, even and especially in contexts of civil war, from their previously sticky association with domestic discord. The most important modification that Seneca and Lucan make to the visceral pattern is a gradual disassociation of the word from the gruesome specificities of fratricide, filicide, and parricide that Ovid had initially imposed upon it. Even as they produce overdetermined replications of those Ovidian associations in select moments, Lucan and Seneca persistently introduce viscera to contexts emphasizing self-abnegation and use the word to explore the upper boundaries of loyalty to cause and comrades. These Neronian viscera, with their complex revision of the word's relationship to physical and symbolic violence, even amid the chaos and confusion of the authors' literary subjects and of the historical moment in which they were writing, carve out meaningful space for the reintegration of familial and civic loyalty into a social fabric rent by decades of civil war. In this way, Seneca's and Lucan's viscera offer rich (and richly ambiguous) opportunities for showcasing a tragic reiteration of familial loyalty, a reclamation of the Roman body politic, and a reaffirmation of the most noble protective instincts binding together members of the Roman civic family.

Conclusion

Changing Words, Changing Worlds

The Afterlife of Roman Viscera

This book has traced a set of sweeping innovations in the semantic range of the word *viscera* that coincided with watershed moments in Rome's history: the origination of the visceral body politic as the republic crumbled, the invention of the visceral womb and visceral child as autocracy took hold, and the new association of viscera with unholy sacrifice during the chaotic final years of the Julio-Claudian period. Though the book proper does not advance much beyond the death of Nero, I want to emphasize that the word *viscera* has a rich and productive afterlife in later Latin literature. Moreover, I find it important to demonstrate how relevant a nuanced understanding of the semantic history of this word can be to interpretations of literature from later periods. Before advancing to my final conclusions, I wish to offer a brief case study from the Roman author Quintilian, who lived and wrote in the late 1st century CE. I propose that a careful reading of Quintilian's engagement with visceral metaphor, especially one informed by the word's peculiarly Ovidian innovations, allows us to complicate Quintilian's reputation for being dismissive of Ovidian style; on the contrary, the viscera in Quintilian prove the author to be a sensitive and receptive reader of Ovidian texts, appreciative enough of the value in Ovid's poetics to perform his own reception of the confluence of sexual and textual offspring that was first ventured in Ovid's *Tristia* (as discussed in chapter 5).

In the proem to Book 6 of his *Institutio Oratoria*,¹ Quintilian recounts the immense grief he suffered at the losses of his wife and children. He emphasizes that the untimely death of his last surviving son had occurred in the midst of his efforts to complete an inheritance of educational books for him. In sorrow

1. Edition: Russell 2001.

and desperation, he speaks of a desire to indulge his anguish by burning, along with his son's body, the literary works intended for his education (6.pr.3):

unum igitur optimum fuit, infaustum opus et quidquid hoc est in me
infelicitium litterarum super in maturum funus consumpturis viscera
mea flammis inicere.

One thing would therefore have been best: to cast this ill-omened work and whatever remained in me of unlucky writings onto that untimely pyre, into the flames that were going to consume my viscera.

The image of an author despondently throwing his writings onto a fire meant to consume his own viscera bears unmistakable resemblance to Ovid's determination, in *Tristia* 1.7.19–20, to destroy his own texts: "sic ego non meritos mecum peritura libellos / imposui rapidis viscera nostra rogis" (So I placed my little books, undeserving [of punishment]—my viscera, about to perish along with me—on consuming funeral pyres). In these lines written from exile, Ovid conflates authorship with parentage, stretching the semantic scope of his long-established metaphor of the visceral child to frame texts as the vulnerable offspring of their author. Quintilian's viscera, denoting at once the texts he yearns to burn and the human son whose body is being cremated, offers a recognizable reworking of the Ovidian precedent, in which the metaphor of text-as-offspring converges with grief for the loss of a real child.

This reimagining of the funereal burning of authorial-parental products recenters its Ovidian model by activating multiple variants of the metaphor: the flames are meant to consume at once the text-as-child and the child himself. Both referents, transformed at the moment of their destruction into the vital organs of their creator, become the author's visceral children. The destruction of the parent's authorial opus is enacted as a mirror image of the death of his child and a redoubling of his paternal grief. A few lines earlier, Quintilian had described this second loss of a son as *repetito vulnere orbitatis* (the duplicate wound of losing a child, *Inst.* 6.pr.2); we might think here of *Tristia* 1.7.35, where Ovid describes his abandoned volumes as *orba parente suo* (bereft of their parent). That the death of the text should naturally coincide with the death of the child confirms Bloomer's (2011, 109) assessment of Quintilian's approach to childhood education: "The maturation of the child is imagined not in biological or social terms but as a correlate to the process of writing." Quintilian skillfully exploits the plasticity of Ovidian viscera, at once acknowledging their import as the incarnation of Ovid's late-career anxieties about textual produc-

tion and redirecting them to the semantic epicenter of their function in the larger Ovidian corpus—as an embodiment of dying or dead children.

Quintilian's keen attention throughout the *Institutio Oratoria* to Ovidian language, style, and rhetorical technique suggests that the allusion to Ovid's visceral text in the proem of Book 6 can hardly be accidental. Quintilian was a thorough, if not especially complimentary, reader of Ovid. His surviving evaluations of Ovidian literature suggest a general disdain for his perceived immaturity and lack of self-restraint: he labels various aspects of Ovidian style "childish" (*puerilis*; 4.1.77), "lewd" (*lascivus*; 10.1.88; cf. *lascivire*, 4.1.77), and deems the author "excessively enamored of his own talent" (*nimum amator ingenii sui*; 10.1.88). Even so, Quintilian's critiques of Ovid are frequently qualified by some admission of redeeming qualities (e.g., *laudandus tamen partibus*, he should still be praised in some regards; 10.1.88). His appraisal of Ovid's transitions in the *Metamorphoses* (*Inst.* 4.177), which he labels juvenile and self-indulgent, does acknowledge that the necessity of gathering diverse topics into the semblance of a unified work justifies those techniques (*quem tamen excusare necessitas potest, res diversissimas in speciem unius corporis colligentem*). Quintilian was not entirely without praise for Ovid's writing, as his assessment of the poet's foray into tragedy suggests: "Ovidi *Medea* videtur mihi ostendere quantum ille vir praestare potuerit si ingenio suo imperare quam indulgere maluisset" (Ovid's *Medea* seems to me to demonstrate how much that man could have excelled, if he had chosen to discipline rather than indulge his talent, 10.1.98). In Quintilian's eyes, it seems, the *Medea* was a rare example of Ovidian self-restraint, deserving of the praise that the poet's tendency toward playful excess so often prevented. It is unfortunate that this *Medea* is not extant; at the very least, we have evidence that Quintilian recognized Ovid's capacity to produce compositions of appropriate dignity and restraint.

In a moment of intensely personal tragedy and willful self-destruction, then, Quintilian selects for the fullest expression of paternal (and authorial) grief the Ovidian figure of the visceral child. It is of utmost importance that this turn of phrase is uniquely and recognizably Ovidian: how, then, did it make its way into a seemingly earnest expression of pathos written by an author who is generally unenthusiastic about Ovid's lewd and self-indulgent style? Russell (2001, Vol III, 3) has called this preface a "masterpiece of emotional writing." Leigh (2004, 123), in contrast, argues that the preface to this book on emotion is "the rhetor's coolly impersonal and manipulative control of superficially personal material." Whether this passage is one of sincere bereavement or its pathos is deployed underhandedly for a larger rhetorical purpose, Quintilian perceptibly entangles an Ovidian figure in a passage of great seriousness, whose tone is far removed from the playful childishness that he generally attributes to Ovid.

There can perhaps be no evidence more convincing than this—Quintilian’s incorporation of a distinctively Ovidian figure into a solemn expression of personal grief—that Ovid’s visceral metaphors were striking enough to inspire conscious and thoughtful imitation, and that Quintilian did indeed take Ovid seriously. Our appreciation of the complex semantic history of viscera is the cornerstone of this claim; I anticipate that other new intertexts could be identified, and our broader understanding of how Roman authors received each other’s works strengthened, by further applications of meticulous attention to patterns of semantic innovation in Latin literature.

Final Conclusions

Semantic change is messy. Although this book has isolated three phases of change in the life of a single word, I do not mean to give the unqualified impression that these modifications were straightforward, instantaneous, or uncomplicated. I have drawn attention to shifting patterns of usage, especially as they manifest within the surviving texts produced by members of Rome’s literary elite, and I have connected the symbolic value of those patterns to the ideological substrates of the historical moments in which they appear in the record. I must emphasize that these are only the scattered pieces of a much, much larger puzzle, the irrecoverable edges of which would inevitably not slot together quite so neatly as they may appear to do from the evidence that survives. If we could recover *every* usage—the textual and the oral, the formal and the casual, the serious and the silly, the innovative and the tired, the influential and the forgotten—the narrative would surely be more intricate and less linear than the one I have presented here, with innumerable instances of viscera resisting the pull of semantic change, conforming to new patterns only partway, or even originating the innovations that appear to us to be the distinctive work of literary hands.

Even so, when we step back to take in the fullest view of what *does* survive, the patterns of change are unmistakable. Viscera took on powerful political charge in the oratorical works of an influential Roman statesman who foresaw the demise of the republic and shrewdly incorporated the word into the already lively metaphorical structures of the body politic. Viscera then metamorphosed into an intelligible but disquieting metaphor for women’s reproductive organs and their issue during an uncertain period of political transition featuring an emerging autocrat’s ideological enforcement of fertility upon Roman citizen families. Viscera’s potent political and reproductive affiliations were then maneuvered, in the Neronian period, to confront pressing anxieties about civil conflict and sacrificial pollution, concerns that manifested in evident correla-

tion with the political and religious instabilities of Nero's reign. Even with major pieces of the puzzle missing, these patterns suggest a responsive relationship between the authors who invented or cemented these semantic changes and the historical, political, cultural, and social circumstances of the Roman worlds they occupied, such that the three starkest phases of semantic change observable in viscera's surviving histories coincide with three of the most alarming and tumultuous moments of political crisis in Rome's history.

As Horace suggested in his *Ars Poetica*, the success of authorial innovation was contingent upon the acceptance of new usages by their audience. When we identify a striking new usage introduced and elaborated throughout the works of a single author and then received and adapted in the works of his literary successors, we are observing this process at work. The community of language users participating in this phenomenon is limited and our record of their activities fragmented, but their self-aware and active engagement in the activities of semantic innovation also makes their work a fitting body of evidence for recovering those less typical mechanisms and motivations for language change. Literary composition offered Roman authors a textual playground—or perhaps a laboratory—where they could observe, react, accept, adapt, or reject the semantic innovations of their fellows. Yes, we are peering at the smallest tip of an enormous semantic iceberg, where an immeasurable amount of evidence is submerged. But what floats above the surface still offers us a meaningful glimpse at the texture, the character, and the shape of the whole; in any case, it is the only portion of the iceberg we are equipped to examine. (Puzzles, playgrounds, laboratories, icebergs—I have probably inflicted enough metaphors upon my readers, even for the conclusion to a book entirely preoccupied with figures of speech.)

I will offer my final conclusions in plainer language: there was a surge of semantic activity around the Latin word viscera during the late republic and early empire as it acquired previously unattested political, reproductive, and religious valences. It is not my intention to claim that these usages never surfaced in the daily conversations of everyday citizens, nor that their appearance could be exclusively attributable to the influence of Cicero, Ovid, Seneca, or Lucan; I cannot, in fact, entirely rule out the possibility that any of these new meanings began as a colloquial turn of phrase from which these authors drew inspiration. In the end, since it is impossible to determine any single origin point for an instance of semantic innovation, I propose that the extant record bears witness to these authors' careful articulations of these new usages, which enter the literary record infused with specific connotations that respond thoughtfully to the pressing cultural and political concerns of their contemporary moments.

Those authors who introduce or elaborate new word meanings, especially new metaphors, I further propose, participate actively in a conceptual restructuring (however microcosmic) of the world around them and invite their readers to accept these new conceptual structures as determinative of the way they perceive and describe their environment. In an era of deep political and cultural crisis, as Romans grappled with the fragility of their systems of power and scrambled to reckon with the looming threat of civil war, with heightened pressures to reproduce, and with a perilous investment of crucial religious authority in an office with unstable lines of succession, the word *viscera* became suddenly infused with symbolic power to speak to each of these concerns. Cicero pressed the word into service as a political metaphor not merely in response to the destabilizing internal strife afflicting the republic but in order to persuade his countrymen that civil war was a grave threat to the health of their nation and ought to be taken seriously; Ovid amplified *viscera* into a pair of violent reproductive figures not merely in reaction to Augustan fertility politics but in order to characterize this newly invasive regime and its reproductive pressures as damaging to the Roman civic family; Seneca and Lucan rendered *viscera* an index of profane ritual practice not merely in response to Nero's progressively irreverent behaviors, but in order to process anxieties about how insecure lines of succession might invest unchecked authority—religious or otherwise—in the hands of men unfit to wield it.

By these authors' interventions, then, we observe the word *viscera* not merely expanding its range but exerting pressure on new conceptual fields: as it traverses the semantic domains of politics, fertility, and religion, it accumulates the electric charge of civil strife, domestic violence, and ritual pollution. The word's fundamental connotations become dangerous and destructive, evocative of social collapse, political betrayal, and violated sanctity; it becomes a word indelibly stained by the violence of empire, the anxieties of parenthood, the unprecedented autocratic reach of government control, and the savage volatility of the principate's ruptured lines of succession. This astonishing semantic responsiveness of the word *viscera* to urgent contemporary concerns—leveraged not merely for reacting to, but also for actively intervening in, public discourses of power—supports a broader principle of language change as motivated by cultural discourse practices. Changing words illuminate changing worlds: Rome's visceral reactions therefore elucidate the crucial anxieties—about civil strife, about fertility, about succession—that attended Rome's fraught transition from republic to empire.

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