

Stephanie Melvin

“No Death Deserves its Own Lament”: Collective Lamentation and Transgressions of Genre and Gender in *Bellum Civile* VII

Overcome with horror at the bloody climax of the battle of Pharsalus, Lucan's narrator threatens to derail his own epic project by wishing tears would perish, and claiming he will stay silent. This assertion – immediately disregarded – illustrates a paradox in Lucan's text: his work is epic, both in its martial content and its meter, but the nature of *civil* war disrupts the narrative by provoking cries of (elegiac) lament. Lucan, realizing that an epic on civil strife must end in self-destruction, adopts instead the feminine discourse of lamentation, thereby threatening not only the generic, but also the gendered, expectations of his text.

Fantham (1999) and Richlin (2001) first emphasised the gendered nature of lament in Latin literature. While scholars have discussed both the formal laments (Keith 1998, Dutsch 2008) in *Bellum Civile*, as well as its narrative form (Henderson 2010), less attention has been given to the use of lamentation as a generic strategy, especially evident in book VII. Lucan thus foreshadows the well-noted centrality of lament in Statius' *Thebaid* (Voigt 2016), but whereas the latter poet focuses on female mourners, Lucan's approach is more subversive. The male funerary ritual of *laudatio* (an articulate eulogy for individuals), is rejected in favour of the indistinct, collective dirge (*nenia*) associated with feminine mourning. Just as individual *aristeia* are out of place in an epic of civil war, so the death of an entire people (VII.635) requires the stifling of personal laments (VII.616-9).

This paper shows how Lucan, by allowing his narrative to slide into collective lamentation, presents the genre of epic as incapable of narrating the trauma of civil war. Moreover, the generic shift from epic to lament demonstrates the death of Roman manhood, since the traditional avenues for performing one's masculinity – military prowess and rhetoric – have become impossible under the Principate.