

MARK THORNE, Speaking the Unspeakable: Engaging *Nefas* in Lucan and Rwanda 1994, in: Annemarie Ambühl (ed.), *Krieg der Sinne – Die Sinne im Krieg. Kriegsdarstellungen im Spannungsfeld zwischen antiker und moderner Kultur / War of the Senses – The Senses in War. Interactions and tensions between representations of war in classical and modern culture = thersites 4* (2016), 77-119.

KEYWORDS

Lucan; epic; *nefas*; trauma literature; civil war; narrator; genocide; Rwanda; Boris Boubacar Diop; Fergal Keane

ABSTRACT (English)

Lucan's *Bellum Civile* can be read as an epic that functions in the mode of trauma literature, i.e. a work that explicitly seeks to represent a horror that defies its very representation. Toward this end, this article applies the lens of modern trauma studies to a comparative reading of Lucan set alongside selections from two literary representations of the Rwanda genocide of 1994. By reading these ancient and modern texts alongside each other, we can gain greater insight into some of the shared rhetorical and narrative strategies that these writers from such different time periods have employed. In the face of lingering trauma, these ancient and modern strategies on one hand emphasize speechlessness (*nefas* and the threat of silence) and yet on the other hand engage the audience and invite them *into* the space of trauma through the senses of sight, sound, and emotion. The Roman poet Lucan, like his modern counterparts, seeks to guide his readers into a haunting encounter with the deeper traumatic reality of these conflicts such that they can no longer be unwitnessed or ignored.

ABSTRACT (German)

Lucans *Bellum Civile* lässt sich als ein Epos im Modus von Traumaliteratur lesen, d.h. als ein literarisches Werk, das anschaulich ein grauenvolles Geschehen wiederzugeben sucht, welches sich der Darstellung geradezu verweigert. Zu diesem Zweck unternimmt der vorliegende Beitrag aus der Perspektive der modernen Traumaforschung eine komparatistische Lektüre von Lucans Epos Seite an Seite mit einer Auswahl aus zwei literarischen Verarbeitungen des im Jahr 1994 in Ruanda verübten Genozids. Durch einen Vergleich des antiken und der modernen Texte lässt sich bessere Einsicht in einige der gemeinsamen rhetorischen und narrativen Strategien gewinnen, welche diese Autoren in ganz unterschiedlichen Zeiten angewendet haben. Angesichts eines nachhaltigen Traumas heben diese antiken wie auch modernen Strategien einerseits die Sprachlosigkeit hervor (*nefas* und drohendes Verstummen), sprechen jedoch andererseits die Rezipienten direkt an und beziehen sie durch visuelle und auditive Sinneswahrnehmungen und Emotionen in den Raum des Traumas mit ein. Der römische Dichter Lucan sucht seine Leser wie seine modernen Schriftstellerkollegen zu einer eindringlichen Begegnung mit der tieferen traumatischen Realität dieser Konflikte zu bringen, so dass sie dank dieser Zeugen und Mitwisser nicht mehr ignoriert werden können.

Speaking the Unspeakable: Engaging *Nefas* in Lucan and Rwanda 1994

Mark Thorne (Brigham Young University)

I. Introduction: The Haunting Encounter

Nefas is, as the Latin implies, unspeakable. Depending on context, it frequently conveys the more general concepts of crime or horrific deed, but at its root lies the notion of something beyond the boundaries of what is speakable.¹ As such, interesting parallels exist between the concepts of *nefas* and traumatic memory as it too is notably characterized by the unspeakable. Trauma is generated by events that are perceived as extreme and go beyond “normal” experience, thus rendering them difficult to speak about through traditional means.² While acknowledging some distinctions—Roman *nefas* shades more towards a compunction against giving voice to a horrific deed, whereas the “unspeakable” nature of traumatic memory is more characterized by the inherent inability to speak about a horrific deed—they may be fruitfully examined together since they both confront the limits of speaking about an event. Because of its horrific extremity, trauma contains within it a continuing paradox: if traumatic memory by its very nature

1 *Nefas*, with its inherent reference to those things about which one ought not speak (and thus remain in silence), suggests a religious sanction against speaking to protect against the presence of evil. It thus comes to commonly mean “hideous crime” or “unspeakable act”; cf. Cicero’s concise formulation: *quidquid non licet, nefas putare debemus* (*Parad. Stoic.* 3,25). Saby (2014) offers a detailed discussion of the range of the word’s use in Senecan tragedy which bears useful application to Neronian poetry as a whole. All translations are my own.

2 See Roth/Salas (2001) 1 where they define a trauma as “a painful occurrence so intense that it exceeds one’s capacities to experience it in the usual ways. A trauma breaks through the categories we use to take in the world, and thus it seems to be registered in our memories in ways that are unlike those used to register conventional experiences.” Commenting on the similar power of literary horror in Latin literature, Estèves (2006) 27 notes how it explodes into a text when the line is crossed “qui sépare le domaine de l’extrême, appartenant au monde connu et jugé admissible, des franges ténébreuses où survient un événement si excessif, qu’il en paraît inconnu et intolérable.”

seems unspeakable, how then do you speak about it? How can you bear witness to it in all its chaotic, violent truth? How can any narrative ever convey the fullness of the horror and help an audience to *see* it, *hear* it, *feel* it? Traditional historical narrative may convey the gist of events and a sense of cause and effect, but it cannot do justice to the reality of the *wound*. In spite of trauma's potential unspeakability, those who want to narrate such *nefas* have often still confronted this challenge. Notably, the very qualities of trauma that challenge traditional representation render it most responsive to creative acts of exploration.

While no act of mediation can communicate the full experience of any event, let alone the extremity of trauma, artists of all types have long attempted to create a subjective space in which an audience can encounter that which defies typical comprehension. What follows is a focused experiment in applying the modern resources of trauma studies to a reading of Lucan's efforts to represent his subject's unspeakable *nefas* to his readers. Taking an innovative comparative approach, I am also bringing along as conversation partners two modern accounts of the 1994 Rwandan civil war and genocide. These are in no way receptions of Lucan in the traditional sense; they rather offer a striking set of shared narrative patterns which together provide welcome comparative insight into the strategies available for an author of any time and place faced with speaking the unspeakable.³ The first work, *Season of Blood* (1995), conveys BBC journalist Fergal Keane's disturbing reflections on his travels into Rwanda during the mass killings. His narrative is non-fiction, but, despite the veneer of dispassionate, objective storytelling that characterizes his profession, Keane's story of his own deeply haunting encounter with the unspeakable horror of those days quickly reveals a

3 While there are pitfalls to the comparative approach, particularly in the temptation to find simplistic one-to-one relationships between the areas of inquiry, it can still be highly productive to explore the similar narrative patterns held in common and allow each to illuminate the other. In other words, literary efforts to represent the traumatic horror of recent civil violence in Rwanda can help us notice patterns in and ask better questions of similar efforts to represent the traumatic horror of long-ago civil violence in ancient Rome, and vice-versa. For recent examples of just this kind of comparative approach between ancient and modern, see Low/Oliver/Rhodes (2013) and Caston/Weineck (2016), especially the chapter by Potter (2016) and its productive discussion of precisely these kinds of shared narrative patterns among the Peloponnesian War, the First Punic War, and the First World War.

passionate narrator of genocidal *nefas* who continually struggles to find the words necessary to speak the unspeakable and yet never ceases in his attempt. The second work is the Senegalese novelist Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones* (2000), a work of fiction which inserts us as readers into the middle of the traumatic maelstrom by writing from the viewpoints of multiple characters, both the killers and the killed—all centered around the main character who, like the novel's readers (and author), travels to Rwanda only after the genocide to try to make sense of its lingering aftermath.

Despite the many differences in the historical and cultural settings of modern Rwanda and ancient Rome, reading together literary representations of these two national catastrophes of civil violence—both of which became the founding event for the new political system that followed in its wake—opens up a useful comparative dialogue that can ultimately help us better understand the universal challenges in representing trauma in a literary medium. In this article, my aim is twofold: I first want to demonstrate that Lucan's epic can—and should—be read as a creative attempt to represent and communicate the traumatic experience of the civil wars. In this regard, bringing the ancient Roman context together with the modern Rwandan context helps ground the validity of that claim. Second, I will examine a few selected passages in Lucan alongside examples in Keane and Diop to argue that, as literatures of trauma, these passages seek to represent *nefas* in a way that communicates not only the event but also, crucially, a synaesthetic taste of the chaotic traumatic experience itself. This is the *haunting* encounter: a confrontation with the unspeakable which transforms the reader into a co-witness, one that engages their senses and refuses to let them look away.

Readers of Lucan know that *nefas* is everywhere in his epic, standing as one of his programmatic words for civil war and all the mad horror that goes with it.⁴ The narrator in the proem defines civil war as the collapse of the body politic in *commune nefas* (1,6), laments Rome's horrific embrace of such great *amor nefandi belli*

4 Lucan is positively obsessed with the concept, using *nefas* and related forms such as *nefandum* and *infandum* 80 times over the course of the epic (Roche [2009] 106 claims 53 times, counting only *nefas* in the noun form, thus underselling its prevalence), along with five roughly equivalent forms (1,631, 1,634, 2,81, 6,430, 10,416). This is compared to 44 occurrences in Vergil and 32 in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. On the central role of *nefas* in Lucan, important treatments are O'Higgins (1988) 214–218; Feeney (1991) 276–283; Masters (1992) 7, 212–215.

(1,21), and then pointedly declares to Nero that *scelera ipsa nefasque* (1,37) are the prerequisites for creating his imperial position of power. Caesar accuses Pompey of being the bad guy who has prepared *bella nefanda* (1,325) against Rome, and then Pompey in turn accuses Caesar of being the bad guy who started it first (*coeperit inde nefas*, 2,538), whereas the narrator has already declared that even claiming to know which would-be tyrant took up arms more justly is itself an unspeakable act (*quis iustius induit arma | scire nefas*, 1,126–127). Cato “sums” it up in his succinct declaration to Brutus: civil war truly is the *summum nefas* (2,286). In this vein, Pompey admits in his speech before Pharsalus that the victor will have every unspeakable horror of war all to himself (*omne nefas victoris erit*, 7,123), the kinsmen on opposing sides are conscious of their *voti nefandi* (7,181) to slay their Roman kinsmen, and by fleeing Pharsalus Pompey saves himself the horror of having witnessed the close of that unspeakable battle (*nec istud | perspectasse nefas*, 7,698–799)—a *nefas* which Lucan immediately forces us to witness as he immediately goes on to narrate it (*spumantes caede catervas | respice... 7,699–700*).

This self-destruction of Rome is time and again said to be literally *unspeakable*, a concept whose feeling encompasses the poetic narrator’s burning outrage against the horrific *spectaculum* of Rome’s victorious military might attacking not a foreign enemy but its own body in a suicidal *furor* (*populumque potentem | in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, 1,2–3). Lucan thus expresses Rome’s self-destruction, I argue, in terms that are bursting with a decidedly *traumatic* dimension. By reading Lucan alongside literary representations of the Rwanda genocide, a modern trauma whose horrific reality we today cannot ignore, we are better able to understand Lucan’s traumatic poetics of instability which bring back to life so vividly—and yet also so subjectively and emotionally—the catastrophe that witnessed massive death, social disruption, and political upheaval, culminating in the death of Republican Rome and the subsequent birth of the Principate. In Lucan’s epic universe of traumatic catastrophe, we can do ourselves a disservice by reading *nefas* as mere “crime” as this can run the risk of bordering on the banal.⁵

5 I have found that reading Lucan alongside literature on modern catastrophes such as the Rwandan genocide (not to mention reflecting upon Lucan after speaking with Rwandans who survived the genocidal self-destruction of their country) an eye-opening corrective to the academic temptation toward abstracted scholarly musing on the past, distanced from the real terrors and hardships of life (ancient or modern). The *Bellum Civile* is, among other things, a

Lucan leverages the word to signal the very real sense of traumatic absence, emphasizing that the *nefas* of civil war is both not-to-be-spoken and *beyond* speech (another hyperbole in line with Lucanian *bella plus quam civilia*, 1,1).⁶ In the face of such trauma, words seem neither fitting, sufficient, nor even possible. And yet, for Lucan, silence is not an option. He, much like those in the present day who feel speechless in the lingering horror of Rwanda 1994, activates the traumatic memory of that catastrophe and seeks to re-present it to an outside audience who, he believes, should encounter it and remember. This dimension can thus help us make better sense of the epic's well-known obsession with civil war as a *spectaculum*.⁷ His epic makes his reading audience into new witnesses and ultimately calls on them to decide how to respond.

Written accounts such as these that attempt to transcribe *nefas* into intelligible, textual reality are studied as literatures of trauma. While this term may perhaps suggest that such works are primarily therapeutic exercises by primary witnesses (trauma survivors) working through their own traumatic memories, this is frequently not the case.⁸ Often, such authors who seek to represent a traumatic past to others do so as secondary witnesses, people who did not experience the horrific event personally but are deeply invested in bearing witness to it and its effects. Literatures of trauma thus encompass more broadly any text that seeks to “find a communicable language of sensation and affect with which to register

brazen shout of anger into the traumatic rupture of Rome's civil war past, and Lucan surely reflected upon the horror of the Republic's collapse in as much serious earnest as anyone who has similarly borne witness to any of the collective tragedies of our modern age.

6 Cf. O'Higgins (1988) 217n28: “Not only is civil war abominable in itself, but it pollutes those who bring themselves to speak of it. And civil war is, for Lucan, the quintessentially *nefas* thing... The word *nefandus* even more clearly reveals Lucan's sense that he is speaking the unspeakable.” Cf. also Feeney (1991) 276, Masters (1992) 7, and Day (2013) 88–89.

7 As laid out clearly by Leigh (1997) ch. 7, 234–291.

8 Despite the emphasis regularly placed on the role of the primary survivor-witness (e.g. Caruth [1996], Tal [1996]), secondary witnesses often play a larger role in bringing a traumatic event to wider public consciousness. As Dauge-Roth (2010) 29 argues, Spielberg's *Schindler's List* has had a greater impact on global popular consciousness of the Holocaust than survivors' own accounts largely due to the visual power of the medium of film, just as it took Terry George's 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda* to shift the Rwandan genocide into the wider mainstream of global consciousness.

something of the experience of traumatic memory.”⁹ Scholarly interest in this phenomenon has grown since WWII, shaped in particular by Western reflection upon the Jewish Holocaust, and has since spread to events and cultures globally.¹⁰ The general focus, however, has been upon historical traumas that have befallen people within the last couple of centuries, that is, within generational memory.

The ancient world has been relatively neglected by trauma studies, but there is much to gain from this line of inquiry given the frequency of disasters recorded in classical texts and the subsequent (if often undocumented) real psychological need among survivors and subsequent generations to cope with them. Fortunately, several studies have recently begun to explore this area.¹¹ With regard to Lucan

9 Bennett (2005) 2; the author is here discussing visual art, but the concept is equally applicable to texts.

10 For good surveys of trauma in its relationship to literature and cultural studies, see Friedlander (1992), Berger (1997), Rothberg (2000), LaCapra (2001), Roth/Salas (2001), Toremans (2003), and Becker/Dochhorn/Holt (2014); note also the cautionary remarks of Kansteiner (2004) regarding the potential limits of the trauma paradigm. The study of trauma in a modern context has its origins in Freudian psychoanalysis and has since become an ongoing concern in the fields of psychology and sociology. Interest in the expressions of trauma in the humanities grew slowly out of the horrific experiences of World War I, but the real foundations for later work in the study of trauma literature came as a result of the totalizing shock to Western culture posed by the European Holocaust of WWII. Additionally, in the United States, a significant factor in the rise of scholarly discussion of trauma was the need to acknowledge the experiences of veterans returning from the Vietnam War (Toremans [2003] 333), and this soon led beyond discussions of psychological treatment to a more informed analysis of all potential cultural products (including literature) of traumatic events. Trauma studies came into its own in the 1990s as Shoshana Felman, Cathy Caruth, and others (Toremans [2003] 336) developed more robust theoretical frameworks and as attention spread to other global contexts (from wars to revolutions to massacres and smaller-scale violence, including rape and natural disasters). As a whole, however, Western scholarship on trauma memory and literature still retains a foundational grounding in the prevailing discourses of Holocaust studies (cf. Möller [2010] 115 who calls the Holocaust the “cultural ground zero” for such scholarship).

11 Shay’s *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994) helped draw attention to the topic; see also Tittle’s (2000) personal comparison between the experiences of Vietnam and the Athenians’ massacre of the Melians. An excellent, more scholarly study is Becker/Dochhorn/Holt (2014) which focuses primarily on the application of trauma to Biblical studies but also includes Greco-Roman subjects; see especially Eckert (2014) on Sulla and Roman traumatic memory. In classical studies, see Meineck/Konstan (2014) for some pioneering work in this area, although their

and trauma, I take up again Walker's largely overlooked approach of applying traumatic concepts of belatedness and repetition to Lucan (but without employing his full psychoanalytic reading), but I am much more following the trail blazed more recently by Christine Walde in her 2011 article on the *Bellum Civile* as a literature of trauma in which she laid the essential groundwork for recognizing how Lucan portrays the catastrophe of civil war within the established discourse of a manmade disaster.¹² Walde focused more generally on the larger picture of the historical development of post-civil war epic and Lucan's contextual relationship to it; here I aim to extend this line of analysis by focusing more on strategies of trauma representation and reader engagement.

II. Traumatic Re-presentation

How do you describe the indescribable? Any attempt to mediate a horrific experience to outside observers immediately runs into the central problem of representation. This is because a trauma is not a normal event but is by definition characterized by *extremity*—by extreme experiences (usually involving extreme

volume looks mostly to the traumatic experience of the war soldier who survived combat and less on the wider-scale issues of collective traumas experienced by societies or on ways of reading classical texts (outside tragedy) as literatures of trauma.

- 12 Walker (1996); Walde (2011). The vividly violent flashback to Marius and Sulla in Book 2 was mentioned as likely reflecting what amounted to traumatic memory as early as Schrijvers (1988) 344, but he did so only in passing. See also the more developed observations in Estèves (2006) and (2009) 7–8. The most recent study on Lucan and traumatic memory is now Galtier (2016) who discusses the recollection of past horror under Marius and Sulla that opens Book 2, focusing on that speech is more about the traumatic and subjective impression of that memory than upon the facts themselves. Day (2013) 182–203 in his study on the role of the sublime in Lucan has also brought up the issue of trauma in its relationship to the sublime as something beyond what is representable in words and which astounds the senses. Day's analysis strongly affirms the presence of traumatic rupture in Lucan's narrative as a feature of his poetics that demands to be taken seriously; however, his intense focus on seeing the sublime everywhere in Lucan leads him to read Lucan's traumatic poetics almost entirely in terms of its ability to activate Longinian sublimity and the associated theoretical concerns of liberty and tyranny. I argue that we have much to gain by placing the traumatic features of Lucan's narrative more at the center of our attention and addressing them on their own terms.

violence) of an individual or collective nature. Unlike other disasters, in addition to any physical wounds to the body, a trauma's harm is most keenly felt as a boundary-violating wound within the sufferer's psyche. Crucially, trauma's effects are marked by displacement and belatedness, both in time and in its later re-manifestations.¹³ The *extremeness* which marks trauma is beyond the ability of the sufferer to sufficiently comprehend at the time of the event.¹⁴ This sense of displacement thus continues into the future in an ongoing way since trauma's effects inherently "encumber the victim as they resurge unexpectedly and continually in the present. Past trauma constantly contaminates the present, and the present is haunted even when resistant to the past."¹⁵ In this light, trauma is a dynamic and emergent experience rather than a static one, whose haunting and horrific power inherently hinders a person's ability either to comprehend it or—more importantly for our subject—talk about it in a meaningful way. Silence, or the inability to speak in the shadow of the unspeakable, thus forms another key characteristic of the effects of trauma.¹⁶ Traumatic memory of the wounded past continues this contamination in a seemingly endless cycle of compulsive repetition in which the trauma continually manifests itself in a variety of ways in the present; any sense of proper closure remains elusive. According to modern trauma theory, the path toward healing—getting "un-stuck" from this traumatic cycle—is the paradoxical (and fraught) task of speaking about that which defies speech. In this therapeutic process, the sufferer aims to confront the trauma as directly as possible as part of the work of reconciling the past reality with present reality.¹⁷

When moving, however, from trauma at the level of the individual to that of a larger group or entire society such as post-civil war Rome or post-genocide

13 LaCapra (1994) 9, 30 borrowing from psychoanalysis, calls this trauma's "dynamics of transference."

14 See Caruth (1996) 8 who argues that "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located." Cf. also Berger (1997) 572, Rothberg (2000) 12.

15 El Nossery/Hubbell (2013b) 1. Cf. also in a Rwandan context Syrotinski (2009) 429.

16 Stroińska/Szymanski/Cecchetto (2014) 13 note further that a predictable reaction to a traumatic event is "to banish it from awareness. There are no words to describe a traumatic experience."

17 Berger (1997) 575–576, Stroińska/Szymanski/Cecchetto (2014) 14, Baer/Sznajder (2016) 182.

Rwanda, it is important to exercise some methodological caution. As Jeffrey Alexander has convincingly argued, groups do not experience trauma psychologically in the same way as individuals, and it is therefore a fallacy to approach the analysis of the group experience of traumatic events as primarily a psychological phenomenon.¹⁸ In developing his theory of cultural trauma, he makes the practical observation that while members of a larger group can all be traumatized individually, it only becomes an identifiably *collective* phenomenon when a sufficient number of people in a group decide to designate a given social crisis as in fact a cultural crisis, one that is viewed as a threatening assault on group identity.¹⁹ In this sense, he reminds us, a cultural trauma is a “socially mediated attribution” to a felt experience of suffering.²⁰ The creation of a cultural trauma requires “carrier groups” who see in the negative event the threat to group identity, whether they experienced the event or not, and who work to frame the event and its consequences as a shared social responsibility. Next comes the necessary work of representation, which Alexander describes as the crafting of a master narrative of what took place, who suffered, who was responsible, what the wider consequences were, and why the society as a whole needs to acknowledge it and accept it as now part of their own collective experience. In this way, societies as well as individuals face the need to “reconstruct our traumatic pasts so the future can be reclaimed.”²¹

In other words, despite its overwhelming force, trauma (whether in the psychology of the individual or in the felt experience of a society) demands a witness to its horror.²² The paradox, of course, is that the psychological

18 Alexander (2004); see also Alexander (2012) which represents a slightly revised version of this earlier work.

19 Alexander (2004) 10; cf. Alexander (2012) 6: “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”

20 Alexander (2004) 8. See also Eckert (2014) 264–265 who reemphasizes Alexander’s point that a society at large cannot psychologically *be* traumatized but they can collectively *feel* traumatized.

21 Stroińska/Szymanski/Ceccheto (2014) 14.

22 Cf. Fegley (2016) who, writing in the specific context of the traumatic aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, notes: “Theories of trauma, whether in individual experience or collective

devastation of trauma is a crisis that “simultaneously defies and demands our witness.”²³ The challenge is even greater for those who are bearing witness (either as narrators or as observers) third-hand who did not experience the horror themselves.²⁴ This then brings us to the crux of the problem of representation: the would-be storyteller of such an event of traumatic extremity must face the challenge of speaking the unspeakable, in the sense of it being beyond both the limits of social taboos and the capacity of regular words (or other symbolic systems) to express in any adequate way.²⁵ To use the formula of Marjolijn De Jager, this is the very heart of “impossible storytelling.”²⁶ Wounds to the body are visible externally, but horror is experienced internally, emotionally, with the *whole* body. How can an outside observer observe and comprehend that?

Since the Holocaust, a rigorous theoretical and practical debate about these very questions has arisen.²⁷ For anyone choosing to bear witness to horror, however, the attempt to communicate trauma must be faced despite the challenges involved. In light of a trauma’s inherent extremity, attempts at conveying it in narrative run the risk of eliminating that very extremity by way of sensationalizing or otherwise packaging the story in an aesthetic way that ends up idealizing or even romanticizing the experience.²⁸ These attempts can in effect

history, includes central problems of listening, knowing, recalling, and representing catastrophic experiences” (xvi).

23 Caruth (1996) 7.

24 This is notably the position that Lucan and our two selected Rwanda storytellers are in.

25 Estèves (2006) provides a summary of the issues facing Roman authors attempting to narrate unspeakable horror.

26 De Jager (2012) xiii: “Trying to verbalize what in essence cannot be spoken is, indeed, impossible storytelling. Yet merely *attempting* to convey what is incomprehensible might be a way to survive tragedy.” Cf. the well-known maxim from Derrida (1996) 41: “On ne peut témoigner que de l’incroyable.”

27 See for example Rothberg (2000) 3–6 whose analysis of this debate tracks epistemological attitudes towards the comprehensibility of trauma by outsiders on a spectrum from the realist (knowable by traditional means) to the antirealist (inaccessible by traditional means) positions. His analysis focuses specifically on attitudes toward Holocaust representation in historical narratives, literature, art, and film, but it is broadly applicable to a discussion of the representability of any collective trauma.

28 Cf. El Nossery/Hubbell (2013b) 2, Dudai (2015) 259.

elide the experience, forcing the narrative into an established pattern that whitewashes the traumatic events, obscuring the reality of the horror to make the narrative more accessible.²⁹ The relationship with the audience of a trauma narrative is also a fraught one, since the manner of representation runs the risk of distancing a reader, rendering him or her not much more than a detached consumer of sensationalized, pre-packaged pain rather than an engaged witness to the inner truth of a trauma. And the more that a narrator attempts to avoid all of these potential pitfalls through reasoned, neutral analysis of “the facts” of a horrific trauma, the “further he moves from the horror of the deed.”³⁰

Authenticity in a trauma narrative thus represents what seems potentially an “impossible demand” given its demand for bearing witness to a horror that defies this very act of witness.³¹ Despite this theoretical quandry, however, it is the very *reality* of the trauma that drives people to become witness bearers of the impossible story and so confront and make sense of the wounded past (either their own or on behalf of others). Speaking the unspeakable in this way becomes possible, even imperative, despite the real challenges that remain. But what can such authenticity look like? So-called “objective” facts show the surface of things, but successful trauma representation requires less the “neutral” truth of historical events than the deeply subjective truth of the wounded experience as portrayed in art or literature.³² The decision to bear witness thus becomes “an aggressive act” inasmuch as it is a refusal to submit to the silence of a traumatic experience.³³ While the full reality of a trauma cannot be captured by any act of representation, this in no way denies the potential of a creative act to capture some portion of the

29 See Tal (1996) 6, who shows that one pitfall of representation occurs when “Traumatic events are written and rewritten until they become codified and narrative form gradually replaces content as the focus of attention” such that the horror of trauma can be reduced to a “recognizable set of literary and filmic conventions.”

30 Diner (2000) 164.

31 Toremans (2003) 337.

32 See Matus (1998) 14 who, commenting on Toni Morrison’s literary explorations of American slavery, notes that literature unlike traditional historical narrative can “explore the taboo, the psychic, as well as the historical. It can dwell on the imagined interior world and the formation of subjectivity. It is able to elicit powerful responses and urge ethical considerations.”

33 Tal (1996) 7.

essence of a trauma and communicate that successfully to an outside observer, with the goal not merely of informing but of engaging that person as a new witness.³⁴ Authors who seek to represent trauma adequately must search for the right rhetorical tools in order to accomplish their task. Given the limits of traditional representation in the face of trauma's extremity, it is crucially the power of art that offers many an access point into speaking the unspeakable. The extremity of trauma requires the creative power of the imagination.³⁵ For those who write literatures of trauma, it is frequently the case that only the "unreality" of the imagination can adequately capture the reality of the unspeakable, for "although sometimes only an oblique expressions of underlying pain, art can apprehend the unimaginable, depict the unrepresentable, and bear witness for those who cannot express it themselves and to those who will not listen or who refuse to believe."³⁶

Embracing what I am calling an aesthetics of disturbance or even chaos, literatures of trauma often come off as comparatively disjointed in comparison to more traditional narratives: they are frequently non-linear, polyvocal (with multiple or even competing narrative points of view), hyperbolic, and/or divergent from established history.³⁷ The artist of trauma is thus one who "touches the ocean of esthetics with one hand, the ocean of reality with the other, and responds to both simultaneously."³⁸ It is also essential to recognize that the goal of a creative trauma narrative with respect to the historical past is not to subject it to purely rational analysis or to create a historically accurate narrative so much as to enter *into* the past wound (and thereby inviting the reading audience

34 Cf. Möller (2010) 114, on the potential of creative trauma representation to transform a viewer from a passive to a participant witness.

35 Matus (1998) 16: "Both history and the novel are discourses that depend on narrative but what distinguishes the novel is its acknowledgment and affirmation—even celebration—of the role of the imagination." Cf. also Alexander (2004) 9: "Imagination is intrinsic to the very process of representation."

36 El Nossery/Hubbell (2013b) 2.

37 Cf. El Nossery/Hubbell (2013b) 9.

38 Tekleab (2014) 123.

into it) subjectively.³⁹ This is the only way to begin to comprehend the deeper emotional, psychological truth (subjectively understood) of what happened: “neutral” analysis simply will not do.⁴⁰ Not every such attempt at representing trauma may prove equally successful in achieving these aims, but they all bravely seek to bridge the “incommensurable gap” of speaking the unspeakable and bearing witness to a wound that dare not be forgotten.

III. Rome and Rwanda: Civil War as Collective Trauma

The Roman Civil Wars of the late Republic and the Rwandan genocide may at first seem odd bedfellows in a discussion of trauma representation. While there are many instructive differences, they display a surprising set of historical parallels, and both have shown the capacity to evoke similar kinds of literary efforts to bear witness to a perceived collective trauma. Some background on these events is thus in order.

The Rwandan genocide—lasting from April until July 1994—is often discussed as a stand-alone event, but it was in fact the culminating episode of a four-year civil war that began in late 1990. This civil war in turn was but the most recent of a series of ethnic conflicts over access to power that had its generational roots in European colonialism.⁴¹ Since the 1920s, during the era of Belgian

39 See also Sturken (1999) 235 on the essential role of crafting a narrative in the “working through” of traumatic memories: “The ‘work’ of confronting traumatic memories is thus to give them representational form and to integrate them into one’s life narrative.”

40 Cf. Syrotinski (2009) 432, commenting specifically on the power of fiction to bear witness to the Rwandan genocide: “Fiction, in its obliqueness...provides the space to say precisely what history—as the testimonial recounting or enumeration of objective facts and names—cannot say, or can only say in the mode of pathos that obscures the ‘truth’ of the event.”

41 The background essential to understanding the situation in Rwanda 1994 is complex; widespread Western ignorance of Rwanda’s history led at first to the general (and lethally incorrect) assumption that the genocide was just another case of localized African tribal violence. Prunier (1995) offers an excellent historical analysis; see also Prunier (2009) for an account of the aftermath of the genocide and its sociopolitical effects on the entirety of central Africa. For the factual details of the genocide itself, the most detailed account is the report published by Human Rights Watch (1999). Gourevitch (1998) provides an excellent account

colonial rule, Rwandans had been officially classified as either Tutsi (a generally wealthier, cattle-owning minority), Hutu (a generally poorer, agrarian majority), and Twa (small Pygmy minority). Traditionally, Hutu and Tutsi were as much (if not more) an economic distinction rather than an ethnic one, but the colonial system of identification cards cemented the notion of an innate ethnic distinction. The Belgians initially relied on the Tutsi elite to help govern the territory, but they reversed course on the eve of Rwandan independence in 1962 to support a new Hutu-dominated government. From 1959 onward, various Hutu groups (usually under the direction of the leading political parties) committed widespread atrocities against Tutsis every few years as payback for years of former domination. Each time, groups of Tutsis would flee as refugees to neighboring countries, and many began planning for the day when they could return. Early attempts in the 1960s to arm themselves and fight their way back failed, but such events fed a widespread Hutu fear—fostered as politically useful by the government—that the only way to ever be certain that the Tutsi could never dominate them again was to eliminate *all* of them. This became the ideological seed of the genocide. The 1990 invasion by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a well-organized and armed Tutsi refugee group based in Uganda intent on returning home and forcing an agreement to share power, was the fuel for the government to fan into flame a new round of mistrust and violence against those Tutsis still living in the country. The final catalyst was the shooting down of the plane of Rwandan President Habyarimana (himself a Hutu) as it was landing in the capital Kigali on April 6, 1994.⁴² By the next day, roadblocks had been set up all over the country and mass killings were already underway; the genocide was not a spontaneous outburst of anger but a highly organized event that had long been planned by the governing party. The RPF, eager to stop the genocidal killings, advanced on the capital as fast as they could. In this civil war they proved successful, but by the time that they had overtaken most of the country in late July, upwards of one million Rwandans (mostly Tutsi but also many moderate Hutus) had been brutally killed

of the genocide aimed at the general reader. Finally, see Hatzfeld (2005) and (2006) for stirring personal accounts from both the survivors and the killers.

- 42 The people responsible for firing the missile are still unknown; the most likely culprit was an element within the president's own political party intent on eliminating Habyarimana for moving ahead with international peace talks with the RPF (Prunier [1995] 221).

by their fellow Rwandans, often by their former friends and neighbors. The sheer scale of killing across the country was literally incomprehensible, and the way in which it took place was especially intimate: the vast majority were slaughtered not with bullets but up close with machetes, nail-spiked clubs, or other agricultural tools.

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 clearly qualifies as a collective trauma.⁴³ This self-destruction of the Rwandan people wreaked havoc on the very fabric of society, creating a deeply-felt traumatic rupture that haunts Rwanda to this day. In the terms proposed by Alexander for cultural trauma, the genocide has become a cultural trauma, as carrier groups (survivors, Rwandans abroad, and outside observers) have successfully established an accepted master narrative and the accompanying moral imperative to acknowledge and work through the impact of the nation's horrific experiences. Survivors live with the physical and psychological scars of what they witnessed as well as the often confusing (and guilt-laden) fact that they survived while other loved ones did not; in most cases several (or all) of their family members were murdered, often in front of them. Surviving perpetrators mostly fled their homeland for neighboring countries as the RPF won the ongoing civil war, carrying with them the horrors of what they did and witnessed. Those who later returned have endured jail or other punishments. Every family embraces some manner of irrecoverable loss, including the generation born after the genocide who carry no personal memories of it but remember it as part of their indelible identity all the same.

Recovery in the aftermath has been slow and painful. Notably, the post-genocide government, led by the Tutsi-dominated RPF, is now in the unique position of having won the civil war (and thus holding political power) despite being the side that was massacred during the genocide. Due to these circumstances, the current government has been in the position, unlike most other victims of horrific trauma, to invest great effort into commemorating the genocide, not only to provide continuing evidence that it did in fact happen and allow the nation—and the rest of the world—to bear witness to the trauma, but also to

43 Many studies of the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath in fact openly appropriate the term trauma in their titles: e.g. Dauge-Roth (2010), Mutabaruka et al. (2012), and Fegley (2016).

utilize this powerful arena of memory to help legitimize its own political power.⁴⁴ This means that in addition to the creation of six national genocide memorials (at Kigali, Bisesero, Murambi, Ntarama, Nyamata, and Nyarubuye) and countless local commemorations elsewhere, post-genocide Rwanda has welcomed and even fostered the artistic representation of their collective trauma in film, fiction, and poetry.⁴⁵ Almost all of these are aimed at outside audiences who were not there in 1994, written or directed by people who were not there, and they all have had to struggle with the challenge of representing such horrific *nefas* adequately. As Philip Gourevitch wrote when visiting the massacre site at Nyarubuye a year after the genocide, even though surrounded by still-unburied cadavers, the unimaginable extremity of what took place there meant that despite seeing firsthand the reality of the aftermath, seeing was not sufficient—he also had to imagine it to begin to comprehend.⁴⁶

Likewise, the Roman civil wars that began in 49 BC at the Rubicon and ended in 31 BC at Actium constitute a clear case of collective trauma for Roman society.⁴⁷ Perhaps due to the great historical distance involved, scholarship does not think often enough about the Roman civil wars in these terms, although modern civil wars are readily understood as deeply traumatic.⁴⁸ In her exploration of Lucan as a specimen of trauma literature, Christine Walde observes that the series of civil wars from 49–31 BC massively disrupted “the entire system of norms and values, causing long-lasting psychic and social disintegration” for

44 Post-genocide Rwanda offers a fascinating study on the powers and perils of collective memory, in particular memory politics. The current Tutsi-led government has a vested interest in shaping not only what is remembered about its founding traumatic rupture but also how it is remembered, which has led toward specific areas of sanctioned remembering and encouraged forgetting. On this complex topic, see the valuable studies by Vidal (2001), Brandstetter (2005), Guyer (2009), Dauge-Roth (2010), Meierhenrich (2011), and Nyirubugara (2013).

45 See Dauge-Roth (2010) for the fullest treatment of such creative works up to 2010.

46 Gourevitch (1998) 16.

47 This must include the many non-Romans who were caught up in the conflict, e.g. Lucan’s poignant portrayal of the Massiliotes who are left weeping over the unidentifiable headless corpses that wash up on shore at the end of Book 3.

48 On civil wars as inherently traumatic subjects, see e.g. Hunt (2010), Demertzis (2011), Lang (2016), Baer/Sznaider (2016), Peters (2016).

Roman society at all levels.⁴⁹ The political system collapsed into chaos as Caesar and Pompey led Roman against Roman in a tragedy of catastrophic proportion that Lucan famously sums up as “a powerful people turning the victorious sword-hand against its own guts” (*populumque potentem | in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, 1,2–3). A major part of the social trauma involved surely came from the disturbing paradox of being unable in a civil war to appropriate the traditional ideology of Roman victory in which suffering or temporary defeat at the hands of a foreign enemy is made part of the larger identity of Rome as a victorious people enjoying divine favor. Such suffering cannot be reconciled in a civil war, because the enemy is yourself.⁵⁰ Like the Rwandan genocide, the civil wars also became a cultural trauma as those who survived its tribulations became the carrier groups who presented the civil wars as a shattering and unavoidable part of collective Roman identity that demanded a collective response. Unlike the Rwandan situation, however, Roman cultural resolution of the trauma became interrupted; the ongoing cycle of civil wars followed by the emergence of Augustus and his own idiosyncratic “restoration” of the Republic left this shared sense of cultural trauma unresolved. It was into this cultural dynamic that Lucan offered his own new master narrative in epic form of the civil wars and their significance for the Roman world he lived in.

As we see from the works of those Romans who were writing under the generational shadow of the civil wars, the social effects upon Italy and its countryside, not to mention the long-term political effects of first Caesar’s and then later Augustus’s victories, were devastating upon the Roman world.⁵¹ Even before Caesar’s victory, an overwhelmed Cicero wrote to Atticus that the unleashing of civil war upon his beloved Rome was an incomprehensible reality that had overthrown not only the world but also himself with it: “The situation is now different, and my mind is as well. The sun, as you put it in one of your letters,

49 Walde (2011) 284.

50 Cf. Walde (2011) 285, Dinter (2012) 107–108, Day (2013) 191–192. On Roman victory ideology, see Fears (1981), Hölscher (2006), and Clark (2014).

51 See Breed/Damon/Rossi (2010) for the ways in which Rome conceived of and reflected upon the horror and tragedy of their civil wars.

seems to me to have fallen out of the universe.”⁵² Likewise, Vergil’s terrifying vision of the world collapsing into ruinous civil war at the close of *Georgics* 1 was no mere poetic exercise for this survivor as he pleaded with the gods to let Octavian at least come to the aid of a world in ruins (*hunc saltem everso iuvenem succurrere saeclo | ne prohibite*, 1,500–501). A few lines later he summed up civil war in a formula that would later be revived by Lucan as the very essence of his poetics: “This indeed is where the *speakeable* and the *unspeakable* are reversed: so many wars throughout the world, so many faces of evil.”⁵³ For Lucan, although writing almost ninety years after Vergil, we find that unspeakable *nefas* still reigns over his reactivated world of civil war. In his belated epic, Pharsalus becomes the place (in time and in memory) where Rome *got stuck* in a traumatic cycle; this helps us understand why he famously declares Pharsalus and Caesar’s victory as the *funus mundi* (7,617) that has overthrown the world for all time (*in totum mundi prosternimur aevum*, 7,640).⁵⁴

The sociopolitical situation naturally had a great impact on the civil wars’ literary representation. Once Octavian emerged triumphant from Actium and transformed into Augustus, the Roman world began to be remade in the new princeps’ image. This new regime had a vested interest in shaping the memory (and thus the narrative) of the civil wars and what they meant: as his *Res Gestae* make clear, Augustus presented them as the restoration of the *respublica* and its *libertas*, as a return to a gloriously renewed “normal.”⁵⁵ Actium became the sanctioned focus of cultural memory as a singular stand-in for the wars as a whole.⁵⁶ Remembering the larger cycle of civil wars after 31 BC thus became for

52 Cicero *Att.* 9,10,3 (SB 177): *alia res nunc tota est, alia mens mea. Sol, ut est in tua quadam epistula, excidisse mihi e mundo videtur.*

53 Vergil, *Georg.* 1,505–506: *quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem, | tam multae scelerum facies.*

54 Cf. Walde (2011) 293.

55 E.g. *R. Gest. Div. Aug.* 1,1: *rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi.*

56 Lange (2009) 95–123 gives a telling summary of Augustan commemoration of Actium. Cf. the important reminder of Walde (2011) 288 that the marginalization of the earlier rounds of civil war, especially that between Caesar and Pompey, “was neither connected to a general *damnatio memoriae* of the defeated side(s) nor to a total negation of the past. Instead, it materialized a shift in perspective, celebrating a single battle, Actium, rather than commemorating the entirety of the civil wars.”

most a exercise that kept within the larger established Augustan narrative.⁵⁷ For those writers who did tackle the tragic subject of the civil wars, their chosen modes of representation are instructive. Historians who treated this time period, while acknowledging their tragic nature, nevertheless chronicled the events according to the traditions of Greco-Roman historiography as “standard” events of great importance. Caesar’s *Bellum Civile*, for example, as the closest surviving parallel in subject matter, provides a cohesive narrative of the military struggle for domination of Rome, but the work’s literary goals enhance the author’s post-war authority and defend his actions rather than confront his audience with the *nefas* of national self-destruction (that he helped create).⁵⁸ It is instead among the creative expressions of poetry that we find deeper reflections upon the trauma of civil war, but they tend to do so obliquely.⁵⁹ The wound was there for these poets—indeed omnipresent—but it was too fresh and painful to choose to stay in, and at any rate the survivors now could enjoy peace again under Augustus. In ancient Rome, just as is still true in modern Rwanda, the easiest thing to do was to sideline those memories that went beyond what had been sanctioned by the men at top and get on with the business of finally moving on with life. Nevertheless, the trauma of civil war was never dealt with and remained unresolved business latent in Roman collective memory.

It is for these reasons that we should perhaps not be too surprised to find that in epic, it is not Vergil (who lived through them) but rather Lucan (who came several generations later) who chooses to confront head-on the belated trauma of Rome’s self-destruction which he has inherited. The concept of “postmemory” can prove particularly helpful here, as it describes “the resonant aftereffects of

57 Thorne (2011) 363–364. Interestingly, one place that mention of the civil wars as a whole does appear is in the Roman declamation schools, which likely offered a safer refuge and thus outlet for these memories given their relatively depoliticized context; see Bonner (1966/2010), Fehrle (1983) 22–27, and Hömke (2015).

58 See Grillo (2012) and Peer (2015) for excellent studies of Caesar’s rhetorical strategies in presenting his civil war narrative as he does. Portraying the civil war from which he emerged victor over the Roman state as a traumatic event would obviously have been counterproductive to his sociopolitical goals.

59 E.g. Vergil, *Ecl.* 1,71–72, *Georg.* 1,461–514; Propertius 1,22,4–5; Horace *Carm.* 2,1,24.

trauma” upon later generations.⁶⁰ Developed by Marianne Hirsch to explain the existence of traumatic memories carried by the children of Holocaust survivors even though they themselves were born after the events, postmemory can help explain why Lucan would write about events that happened roughly 110 years before his time as if he were still caught up in its traumatic presence.⁶¹ Hirsch explains that the reason why postmemory is such a potent force is because the later generations come to claim the traumatic past as their own through creative projection.⁶² As the generation of survivors begins to die out and personal memory fades, any traumatic event that is still considered important “must enter the realm of the imagination so as to be transmitted to subsequent generations,

60 Hirsch (2012) 4.

61 The temptation toward biographical readings of Lucan and his epic is as dangerous as it is unavoidable, but it is inevitable that Lucan heard stories growing up about the civil wars from his family and later on his rhetoric teachers; see Lintott (1971/2010) 240n7. We have happily moved on from Pichon’s outdated conviction that Livy must have been his only source; his first sources were the oral stories of his early life followed by historians (including Livy) and the works of Cicero. His uncle Seneca was born c. 4 BC and his own father Annaeus Mela not long after, both of whom would have heard many stories of the catastrophic civil wars from their father Seneca the Elder (Lucan’s grandfather, born in the late 50s BC), as well as from other older acquaintances who had lived through it. The historical and rhetorical traditions carried on the tradition as well. Lucan never got the chance to hear stories from his grandfather in person, since he died c. AD 39 around the time of Lucan’s birth, but he along with his uncles and many other people surely read the great history he wrote (now lost) that traced Rome’s history from the beginning of the civil wars in 49 BC (or possibly 43) down through the rest of Rome’s upheavals to the Augustan world of his own day. This history, unlike that of Livy, likely treated the experience of Roman civil war as the core organizing theme (see *FRHist* 505–508). It is reasonable to speculate the extent to which this history, along with the influence from his uncle Seneca’s obvious interest in civil war, played a significant role in shaping Lucan’s own conception of that former generation’s civil wars as the foundational set of events that created the world in which he now lived. Even beyond these possibilities, the fact that Lucan’s poetics bear many of the hallmarks of a literature of trauma in its formal characteristics is fascinating and worthy of our attention in its own right.

62 Hirsch (2012) 5 notes that these descendants of trauma survivors “‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.”

so as not to be forgotten.”⁶³ In Lucan, too, we find an epic representation of the civil wars his great-grandfathers fought, now encapsulated in the realm of poetic imagination and commemorated as Rome’s defining, founding, traumatizing event.⁶⁴ It is this traumatic dimension to Lucan’s epic narrative that informs and can help illuminate so many striking features of his poetics. Lucan boldly does nothing short of bringing vividly and disturbingly back to life Rome’s long-buried traumatic memory of self-destruction, forcing his audience right into the disorienting center of the madness of civil war’s *nefas* where he can speak to them the unspeakable.

IV. Machete Words: Speaking the Unspeakable

The full report published in 1999 by Human Rights Watch documenting the atrocities that took place during the 1994 Rwanda genocide is an impressive tome of meticulously researched data.⁶⁵ It is also an arresting exercise in attempting to speak the unspeakable. As befits a human rights organization, their approach to bearing witness primarily embraces the strategy of fact-accumulation. Anybody uncertain whether or not a full-scale genocide was under way in the country that spring and summer can read the report and find out the horrific truth. Its pages are filled with tales of dismemberment and corpses and evil; the following example of a survivor’s testimony will suffice as an example:

63 Howell (2013) 302; she discusses the transmission of postmemory in the context of French descendants of those who went through the traumatic rupture of French colonial identity during the Algerian War (1954–1962), but her observations are equally valid for Lucan’s ancient context.

64 If the gap of roughly a hundred years between Caesar’s victory at Pharsalus (48 BC) and the time of Lucan’s writing (early 60s AD) seems at first glance too great for a sense of traumatic rupture to still be potent, we may consider the modern-day Armenian descendants of those who survived the Armenian genocide (1915–1920). Nobody with personal memory of that catastrophe is alive anymore, but if you ask any Armenian today if that genocide from a hundred years ago still matters, you will hear a passionate “yes.” It, like the civil wars for Lucan, remains so traumatic precisely because its effects remain sufficiently unacknowledged and unresolved.

65 Human Rights Watch (1999).

Mark Thorne

“After we arrived in Nyarure, we were attacked by the local people who killed many among us. A military man from Gisororo...told everybody to sit down. Then they attacked. They shot and killed the three strong men who had been protecting the group and then the civilians attacked the group with machetes. I was already injured and I fell. I was with three children. They cut off the head of one of the children. My sister-in-law was killed with her whole family.”⁶⁶

This report and others like it is a powerful and necessary testimony to the reality of the traumatic events in Rwanda. It remains firmly grounded in facts, however, and those facts alone with their clinical precision have a tendency to engage the reader as a distanced spectator of the terrible events. We can look from the outside, but we can go no further. What is missing from this narrative is the realm of the imagination.

Fergal Keane’s memoir *Season of Blood*, a gripping account of his travels as a BBC journalist inside Rwanda during the genocide, suggests a different way of giving voice to unspeakable *nefas*. On the night before he enters Rwanda for the first time, unable to sleep in his nervousness for the road ahead, he recounts a conversation he had recently had in Nairobi with a friend who had just come out of Rwanda shortly after the genocidal violence had exploded. Eager to hear a first-hand account of what was going on inside, he instead found his friend exceptionally drunk and unwilling to talk about it—that is, until the final moment before they parted ways:

There were now only bursts of words, scrambled and squelched out in an agonizing rant. He knew he was too drunk to make much sense and got up, weaving through the tables towards the hotel lobby. I followed him, guiding him towards the elevator, where he turned to say goodnight. As the lift doors opened, he put his hand on my shoulder and blurted his goodbye message: “It’s in the fucking soul, man...spiritual damage is what it is.”⁶⁷

66 Human Rights Watch (1999) 399.

67 Keane (1995) 43.

The Human Rights Watch report is the fullest account when it comes to facts, but this conversation gets us closer to what a real encounter with *nefas* looks like. Keane, struggling with how to describe his own experience with unspeakable trauma, admits early on that he really cannot do it justice:

How can I best describe it? It is a mixture of dread fascination, sorry for what we learned and lost in the short weeks of chaos, a mind weariness that feeds itself by replaying the old tapes over and over. We reach for the off-switch but in the darkness cannot find it. I no longer run from the subject, although there is no way of conveying what it was really like without giving you my dreams. My journey into Rwanda was about following the lines of blood and history; about sleeping with the smell of death, fear and hatred; about exhaustion and loss and tears and in some strange ways even love. For me to make sense of that journey, however, I cannot write in terms of facts alone. So bear with me when the road runs down into the valleys of the heart and mind and soul. For this is a diary of an encounter with evil beyond any scope of reference I might have had when the journey began. Although I had seen war before, had seen the face of cruelty, Rwanda belonged in a nightmare zone where my capacity to understand, much less rationalize, was overwhelmed. This was a country of corpses and orphans and terrible absences. This was where the spirit withered.⁶⁸

Note his conclusion: the only way he thinks we as readers can begin to really comprehend what that realm of *nefas* was like is to give not his facts but his dreams. After this admission, he continues writing his memoir as best he can, but his subjective narrative proceeds in such a way that we travel those roads of haunting horror right alongside him. Keane's narrative style succeeds not just in showing us what he saw but much more in bringing us into the madness with him. This kind of narrative has the power, if we let ourselves fully enter the encounter, to flood our senses and in speak to our souls.

68 Keane (1995) 3–4.

This, I argue, is what Lucan's narrative is also trying to accomplish by creating a haunting encounter with the very heart of *nefas*. The *Bellum Civile* is a sensory epic, and its efforts to activate our senses and feelings as readers is a core concern.⁶⁹ Due to space considerations, here I will limit my analysis to a few selections in which the subjective dimension of Lucan's narrator(s) or characters interacts with the more traditional narration of events to play a central role in this goal. The *Bellum Civile* does present us, after a fashion, with the war's events, but it much more presents us with Lucan's dreams—indeed, his nightmares—of endless civil war which *appear* to have no end. The opening lines of the epic announce this clearly, if we are paying attention. *Nefas* appears right away in the proem at 1,6 as one of the definitions of civil war: *certatum totis concussi viribus orbis | in commune nefas*, 1,5–6). What is crucial, however, is the manner in which Lucan presents this *nefas*. Lucan's first seven lines mirror the length of the *Aeneid*'s proem, but their content is strikingly different: Vergil uses his proem to narrate events (*qui primus ab oris | Italiam fato profugus Laviniaque venit | litora... dum conderet urbem*, etc., *Aen.* 1,1–5) whereas Lucan uses his proem to interpret and evaluate events subjectively (*bella... plus quam civilia... | iusque datum scelerei canimus, populumque potentem | in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, etc., 1,1–3).⁷⁰ This pattern of subjectivity and emotion in Lucan continues in the narrator's question that immediately follows the proem. And where Vergil asks the Muse at *Aeneid* 1,8 to help him remember the causes for Juno's anger against Aeneas, Lucan does not need help remembering, for he is already too full of memory of this catastrophe. He instead lashes out in a furious rage, asking not the Muse but that long-gone generation the anguished question: "What madness is this, o fellow-citizens? What is this boundary-busting license to violence?" (*quis furor, o cives, quae tanta licentia*

69 E.g. Leigh (1997) 4: "In particular, he is alert to the possibility that his narrative will be treated not so much as something to be read, but as something to be watched." Cf. Walters (2013).

70 This pattern in fact repeats continuously throughout the epic; cf. Wick (2010) 107: "Dass Lukan Ereignisse und Handlungen eigentlich nicht erzählt, sondern sie lieber interpretiert und bewertet, fällt jedem Leser auf (man vergleiche etwa das Prooemium des *Bellum civile* mit dem der *Aeneis*). Anstatt objektive Distanz zu wahren und die Dinge in anschaulicher Schilderung aus sich selbst heraus wirken zu lassen, lässt Lukan sie zunächst auf sich wirken, bricht sie an seinem Empfinden und vermittelt eine stark stilisierte, höchst subjektive, in der Regel emotionsgeladene Sicht."

ferri? 1,8). The question involves a fascinating bit of temporal displacement, for Lucan's narrator here is speaking not to his contemporary readers but rather to those who were alive in his great-grandfather's time with the voice of the generations that inherited this traumatic memory across the previous century.⁷¹ He is asking this question to Caesar and Pompey, to the Senate and the soldiers, and ultimately to everyone who was responsible for unleashing civil war and all its traumatic legacy. Lucan wants everyone to know right from the start that the civil wars are still with his Neronian audience in the *present* because they remain unfinished business.

Significantly, this poetic collapsing of past and present places us right back there in the center of the experience. Indeed, Lucan's narrator frequently shifts temporal positions to enhance this kind of subjective awareness. The most striking example of this comes right at the moment before the battle of Pharsalus—Lucan's pivot point of history—when his narrator intrudes into the text (7,207–213):

*haec et apud seras gentes populosque nepotum,
sive sua tantum venient in saecula fama
sive aliquid magnis nostri quoque cura laboris
nominibus prodesse potest, cum bella legentur,
spesque metusque simul perituraque vota movebunt,
attonitique omnes veluti venientia fata,
non transmissa, legent et adhuc tibi, Magne, favebunt.*

Even among nations born too late, among the people of their grandchildren's generation—whether these wars will survive into later ages only by their own fame, or whether the care of our work can also somehow prove useful to such great names—when these wars will be read, they will create emotions of simultaneous hope and fear, along with prayers soon to perish, and everyone will be astonished when they read of these destined events as things still to come and not as things having already transpired, and they will still cheer on you, Magnus.

71 Cf. Walde (2011) 297–298.

Although ostensibly on the verge of narrating the battle itself, Lucan's narrator is once again preoccupied with subjective evaluation. Having just addressed Caesar before this passage (7,168–171), he now turns here to address Pompey. However, the true focal point of this remarkable passage is his Neronian audience (and by extension us), the *seras gentes* who were born too late to experience the first time around what Rome really lost on that battlefield where Caesar emerged as *victor* and tyrant, the model for all Caesars to come. This is a remarkable claim to transform the reading experience by a collapsing of time that makes the battle a constantly *present* event. The readers will become so immersed into the experience that they will be *attoniti* as they re-encounter, again and again, Rome's destiny as something that is *venientia non transmissa*.⁷² Civil war—but more specifically Lucan's epic representation of civil war—will generate hope and fear (*spesque metusque*).

The narrator's voice in the *Bellum Civile*, as has long been noted, is a crucial tool of Lucan's poetic program.⁷³ These frequent apostrophes to characters inside (and also his readers outside) the epic are one of the *Bellum Civile*'s key sources of pathos with which Lucan seeks to engage his audience.⁷⁴ At the same time, however, these authorial intrusions repeatedly interrupt the epic's narrative flow, as is the case with the passage cited above (7,207–213). Lucan has long been recognized for his ἐνάρχηα, a vividness of language that can render a textual representation of an event so real as to generate for readers a visual experience which, when successful, can “transport them as spectators to the scene of the events described.”⁷⁵ Lucan is a master at this, as so many of his memorable episodes make clear (e.g. the old man's flashback to Sulla and Marius in Book 2,

72 See on this passage Leigh (1997) 6–13; cf. also Ormand (1994/2010) 327–330, Walde (2011) 297, Bartsch (2011) 309–312, Fratantuono (2012) 279, Day (2013) 88–92.

73 On the important topic of Lucan's intrusive narrator and its role in shaping the reader's response, see Marti (1975), Ormand (1994/2010), Schlonski (1995), Leigh (1997), Bartsch (1997) 93–98, Effe (2004), D'Alessandro Behr (2007) and (2014), Asso (2008), Rolim de Moura (2010), and Kimmerle (2015).

74 Cf. Asso (2008) 163, Wick (2010) 105.

75 Leigh (1997) 12; cf. D'Alessandro Behr (2007) 60, 76–78. Day (2013) demonstrates Lucan's use of sublimity in language to help him achieve this kind of engagement of the reader's mind and senses on a topic that represents (like the sublime) something beyond normal comprehension.

the sea battle in Book 3, Scaeva and Erichtho in Book 6, etc.). Yet, Lucan's habit of narrator intrusion structurally interferes with the epic ἐνάργεια that he has been building up, creating in turn a distancing effect between reader and text. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Leigh argues that Lucan moves "beyond *enargeia*" in order to give the reader critical space to reflect on "the narcotic effect of imperial spectator society" and the distinct tension between distancing spectacle and immersive engagement.⁷⁶ Taking a somewhat different approach, D'Alessandro Behr reads Lucan as intentionally destroying the force of ἐνάργεια, focusing her argument on the role that the intrusive narrator's voice plays in achieving didactic persuasion, guiding the reader with its partisan voice through the chaotic space of civil war's *discors machina*.⁷⁷ These arguments both have merit, particularly through the ways in which they remind us just how much Lucan wants the realms of politics and history to matter to his readers.⁷⁸ I argue, however, that we can make better sense of passages like this by reading Lucan's narrative interruptions as attempts to communicate the reality of lingering trauma over the historical events described. Indeed, such an approach reveals the possibility, to borrow Leigh's categories, of both spectacle *and* engagement.

A comparison with our second Rwanda narrative can help illuminate this point. Boubabcar Boris Diop, in his 2000 novel *Murambi, Le Livre des Ossements*—translated in 2006 by Fiona Mc Laughlin as *Murambi, The Book of Bones*—uses the medium of fiction to tackle the challenge of representing unspeakable *nefas* of genocidal trauma.⁷⁹ Notably, Diop pursues a strategy of narrating from multiple

⁷⁶ Leigh (1997) 39.

⁷⁷ See in particular D'Alessandro Behr (2007) 1–15, 105; cf. D'Alessandro Behr (2014) 224.

⁷⁸ I ultimately do not find Lucan's subjective narrator—with his multiple focalizations and temporal perspectives—quite as consistent in steering the reader towards the pre-determined "right" conclusion as D'Alessandro Behr does; cf. Feeney (1991) 276–283.

⁷⁹ This novel emerged as the product of a visit he and several other African authors made to Rwanda in the summer of 1998, organized by Nocky Djedanoum and Maïmouna Coulibaly of Fest'Africa under the project heading "Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire" ("Rwanda: Writing as A Duty to Remember"). The organizers were conscious of the fact that in the four years since the genocide no African authors (let alone Rwandan) had written a major work about the subject, so they invited several African authors to join them on a tour of Rwanda with the intent that they would each produce some text based on their personal experiences.

viewpoints to help achieve immersive reader engagement. In his novel, Diop allows us to read each section from within the perspectives of no less than nine different characters caught up in the catastrophe. At turns we find ourselves inside the heads of a Tutsi terrified that he may be about to die, a Hutu psyching himself up for “the work” of genocide while trying to live up to his father’s murderous expectations, a Tutsi disguised as a Hutu working in horrifying danger behind the scenes for the RPF, a Hutu girl who watches her father move from refusing to help in the killing of Tutsis to becoming a killer himself so as to protect his family as well as the Tutsi children he is secretly hiding in his house, and so on. At the very center of the narrative, the thread that connects all the pieces is the main character of Cornelius, a Tutsi who has been living in exile in Djibouti for the past couple decades for his own safety. He is (like Diop) a writer, and although Rwandan by heritage, he is the outsider who (like Diop) returns to Rwanda in 1998 in order to try to make sense of what really happened. Significantly, he plans (again like Diop) to write a fiction story about the genocide and thus speak about the unspeakable. Cornelius thus becomes the only perspective in the story who looks in from the outside, and in this way he most shapes the ways in which we as fellow outside observers try to make sense of the *nefas* right along with him. Unlike Lucan, Diop’s novel does not have constant narrative intrusions, but the multiple perspectives generate a powerful multiplicity of focalizations which insert us into the catastrophe. To add to the immersion, all but one of the characters are written from a first-person perspective, merging reader and character, allowing us to witness *nefas* afresh through their eyes as something not past but as a horrifying present.⁸⁰ To give one poignant example, Diop lets us walk with Jessica, a Tutsi masquerading as a Hutu under false papers, up to one of the countless barricades set up during the genocide to facilitate the killing of any Tutsis caught out on the road:

See Dauge-Roth (2010) 89–113 for a thorough treatment of this project and its main concerns; see also Hitchcott (2009) 48–51.

80 Cf. Dauge-Roth (2010) 155, where he argues that through this strategy of presenting multiple voices “deeply immersed in the unwinding of the genocide, Diop’s narrative asserts the impossibility of remaining outside of history or of claiming the privilege of being a bystander who occupies a neutral position.”

Near Kyovu I see hundreds of corpses a few yards from the barricade. While his colleagues are slitting the throats of their victims or hacking them to bits with machetes close to the barricade, an Interahamwe militiaman is checking ID cards. The visor of his helmet is turned backwards, a cigarette dangles from his mouth, and he is sweating profusely. He asks to see my papers. As I take them out of my bag he doesn't take his eyes off me. The slightest sign of panic, and I'm done for. I manage to keep my composure. All around me there are screams coming from everywhere.

Only by the act of ignoring the brutal murder of her fellow Tutsis right next to her can she survive this crisis in order to help others escape further slaughter in the future. And we, by seeing through her eyes, co-live the same tension and are given space to reflect not just on the event but the full sensory and emotional experience of true *nefas*. It is only the main narrative of Cornelius, the outsider, which is written fittingly in the third person. We as fellow outsiders will process the search for meaning with him, but that perspective alone cannot suffice. It is rather the insiders who lived through it whom we must meet so intimately if we are to begin to gain some measure of understanding of the true experience of the unspeakable.

This shares some useful parallels with Lucan's use of multiple visual and emotional perspectives when narrating the horror of Pompey's beheading (8,560–5711), a deed that the narrator leads us to identify as “unspeakable” by using the word *nefas* first at 8,610 in an apostrophe to *Fortuna*, then again at 8,620 from the perspective of the dying Pompey, and finally at 8,638 from the perspective of his wife Cornelia. Lucan's rapid whirlwind of perspectives works to guide not only our emotions but also our senses into the space of overwhelming trauma. First the text leads us to see through Cornelia's terrified eyes as her husband boards the fatal boat—eyes that notably can neither truly gaze at the impending *nefas* nor can turn away: *attonitoque metu nec quoquam avertere visus | nec Magnum spectare potest* (8,591–2). Then, however, Lucan shifts the focalization over to Pompey himself (8,610–636) so that we can experience the actual moments of death from his

perspective.⁸¹ This is followed in turn by a rapid shift back to Cornelia's perspective (8,637–662) who now clearly *sees* the “savage *nefas*” she earlier could not quite look upon (*at non tam patiens Cornelia cernere saevum | quam perferre nefas*, 8,637–638). As she sees it, so do we. And yet, although directly confronting the unspeakable, she does find a voice to speak: her response is to mourn, giving representation not to the horror of the beheading but to the horror of the subjective *experience* of it. We too, as the audience, are invited to see through her eyes and mourn through our own experience of an encounter with the unspeakable.⁸²

Like Diop's *Murambi*, Lucan employs no omniscient, objective narrator but a series of subjective focalizations.⁸³ His diffusion of perspectives reinforces the sense that there is a seeming endlessness to the *Bellum Civile*, as many have noted.⁸⁴ I argue that this quality of Lucan's epic is better understood by recognizing the extent to which the greater instability of such a narrative *echoes* the instability of trauma. Lucan's subjective narrator, character focalizations, and verbal deconstruction (his “war of words”) thus more authentically represents its effects.⁸⁵ Rather than hindering our entry into the world of trauma, Lucan's subjective approach paradoxically facilitates it. Following the critical observation

81 Cf. Walker (1996) 79.

82 Erasmo (2008) 111 recognizes in this passage Lucan's shifting narratorial subjectivity, but he interprets it as guiding the reading audience into the “disengaged emotional response” of a distanced spectator. The inclusion here of the engaged response of Cornelia, the emotional insider, suggests rather Lucan's interest in allowing his audience to more fully engage with his representation of the horror of Pompey's decapitation.

83 Cf. Hitchcott (2009) 54, speaking about Diop's novel: “The effect of these multiple narrators is to encourage the reader to view the genocide from a variety of different angles and to resist a reductive interpretation of the events.” I see the same dynamic at work in Lucan as well.

84 See especially Masters (1992); also Henderson (1987/2010), Quint (1993) 147–149, Day (2013) 97–98.

85 Cf. El Nossery/Hubbell (2013b) 9, where they observe that “traumatic experience cannot be represented in a linear, cohesive and coherent narrative, but rather it is hinted at through overt silence, blanks, ellipses, and hesitations which point to the unspeakable and the unknown. And since trauma narratives are by nature incomplete, full of gaps and inconsistencies and are sometimes incoherent, they reflect systematic distortions of past memories.” For the classic treatment of Lucan's self-reflexive “war of words”, see Henderson (1987/2010).

by Henderson and Masters that Lucan's epic functions in such a way to enact what it is about—the *nefas* of civil war—I would like to propose reading Lucan's endlessness not as a pessimistic loop from which there is no escape but rather as the *perceived* endlessness typical of the traumatic experience. This ties back in with the kind of affective engagement that Lucan describes at 7,207–213, in which the epic declares its intention to transport the reader through time and space into the heart of re-presented catastrophe where the trauma is still ongoing: *venientia fata non transmissa*. Leigh's analysis on this passage focuses more on the ways in which this rendering of the past as a constant present time activates renewed political resistance against Caesar as victor of *nefas*.⁸⁶ I agree on this point, but I believe that scholarship has also overlooked just how much Lucan's *venientia non transmissa* suggests the actual experience of traumatic postmemory. As discussed earlier, trauma is a deeply wounding experience, one that is difficult to process because there are no adequate words for the task. By definition, it represents *unfinished business*.⁸⁷ The full impact of the civil wars were banished to the margins under the shadow of Actium, and Lucan's poetics of instability work earnestly not only to help his readers recover this buried memory but also to re-enter that catastrophic space and begin the process of working it out for themselves. The wound demands a witness.

Becoming a witness of *nefas*, however, requires an encounter with *nefas*. At first, the response may be a stunned inability to speak, as Lucan demonstrates in the Arruns episode (1,584–638). In performing his sacrifice, the seer is confronted with the most dire signs imaginable. Looking at them head on (*nefas...videt*, 1,626–627), he decides that he cannot give voice to the horror: “It is scarcely speakable, o gods, for me to reveal to the people what you have set in motion... What we fear is what is unspeakable, but greater things than our fear are coming” (*vix fas, superi, quaecumque movetis, | prodere me populis... non fanda timemus, sed venient maiora*

86 Leigh (1997) 6–13, 39–40.

87 This notion of Lucan's “unfinished business” manifests itself on many levels, e.g. the observations by Bernstein (2011) that Lucan's many ghosts or other ‘undead’ figures (the *imago Patriae*, Julia, Erichtho's corpse, Pompey's soul, etc.) represent “the ‘unfinished business’ that remains to be completed by survivors (260); he goes on to conclude, “The living characters’ interactions with the dead model the engaged interaction with the unresolved issues of the past that is repeatedly, and emphatically, enjoined upon the reader of the *Bellum Civile*” (279).

metu, 1,631–635). Arruns cannot (or will not) actually bear witness to the *nefas* he has witnessed; in this way he models one of the responses available to us as Lucan’s readers. He does, however, promise that “greater things are coming,” a prophecy that comes to fulfillment right away at the beginning of Book 2.

While Arruns’ poetry of *nefas* stays clear from engagement with the unspeakable (*tegens ambage canebat*, 1,638), we see a quite different potential response to *nefas* modeled in the Marius and Sulla flashback (2,67–233). Here is the epic’s single greatest explosion of traumatic memory, subjectively told by another internal narrator, an anonymous old Roman who was himself a survivor and witness to that earlier round of civil wars and its exemplary *nefas*.⁸⁸ On the verge of yet another round, the old man speaks out the unspeakable nature of civil war’s horror, unleashing a tidal wave of testimony that comprises what is significantly the longest speech in the entire epic (at 164,5 lines). Notably, the “greater things than our fear” that Arruns prophesied as coming turn out to be the unresolved business of Rome’s traumatic past. The old man’s tale immerses his audience within a traumatic memory of a world gone mad, full of murders, suicides, beheadings, massacres, and in the end a river dammed with corpses and blood overwhelming land and sea. This is a world in which “each one enacted the unspeakable for himself” (*fecit sibi quisque nefas*, 2,147).⁸⁹ We too are immersed in the sensory flood as this witness activates unspeakable *nefas* in all its mad fury. As Galtier’s recent study points out, this is a deeply subjective tour of Roman slaughter and self-destruction, one designed to confront the reader with the almost unbearable force of collective trauma.⁹⁰ Through the old man’s memory, we witness all over again Baebius as he is dismembered by the mob (2,119–121), Antonius as his severed head is placed still dripping on the festal table (2,121–124), and Scaevola as his aged throat is slit impiously over the holy flames of Vesta (2,126–129). The gruesome spectacle of the death of Marius Gratidianus offers the most arresting example of traumatic engagement as the rememberer-narrator lingers over each limb and facial feature while it is assaulted and hacked off

88 Galtier (2016) offers the best treatment of this Marius and Sulla episode as an embodiment of traumatic memory. See also Ambühl (2010) who helpfully reads the episode as invoking the devastation of the fall of Troy.

89 Cf. Fratantuono (2012) 63.

90 Galtier (2016) 18–19. Cf. Estèves (2009) 7–8.

(2,173–193). This crescendo of mutilation significantly culminates with the victim's eyes, which are pulled out and made to gaze back upon the ruin of his own body (*ultimaque effodit spectatis lumina membris*, 2,185). We as Lucan's "visual" audience witness in turn the victim's final act of witness. The old man pauses here to comment that so much mutilation had ironically worked against them, since such a ravaged head could no longer be recognized (and thus rewarded) by Sulla: *agnoscendus erat* (2,193). Through the old man's recall, however, we now clearly recognize both the name and the crime. By the episode's grisly end, our senses have been similarly overwhelmed, filled with the spectacle of suffering bodies afflicted by "the terrible habit of unspeakable savageness" (*moremque nefandae | dirum saevitiae*, 2,178–180). The old man, recalling for his audience their own traumatic past, functions as an *exemplum* of Lucan himself. Arruns's response to the unspeakable is perhaps more understandable, but Lucan's old man of Rome shows us the kind of response to the unspeakable that leads *through* the *nefas* into a place where the possibility for real understanding begins.

With this haunting encounter between Lucan's reader and the earlier eyewitness of horror in mind, let us return to Diop's novel one last time. At the end of the story, the returned exile Cornelius finally travels to Murambi, the site of the Tutsi massacre which gives the book its name. As a writer, he had come to Rwanda with the idea of composing a play about the genocide as a way of exploring the unspeakable through words. Earlier, while drunk one night, he had explained the idea of his play to a companion, and we find out how absurd (and absurdly inadequate) it is, involving a farcical French general who orders his soldiers to find his cat who has disappeared during the genocide and, if the cat has been killed, to bring to justice those responsible. However, at the Murambi Polytechnic School, where tens of thousands had been hacked to death by their countrymen, including his own mother and siblings, all those earlier theatrical pretensions melt away after coming face to face with the true horror of genocide. The new government had left many of the bodies, preserved intact in lime, inside the classrooms for the entire world to see. Immersed in their presence, Cornelius is truly *attonitus*: "In this place, amid sorrow and shame, his own life and the tragic history of his country met. Nothing spoke to him as much as these remains scattered on the naked ground... He was surprised not to be thinking of anything

in particular. He was satisfied to look, silent, horrified.”⁹¹ The museum guide intervenes, and Cornelius feels toward the unknown man who does not seem to understand him a sudden burst of anger that “revealed to him his own suffering, much more profound than he had thought.” He soon finds out to his astonishment that this guide, Gérard, is a survivor of that very massacre, a revelation that leads the visitor slowly towards a greater understanding of what he was actually seeing.

At a climax in their conversations, Gérard finally tells the story of how he survived by playing dead inside a heap of bodies as their fresh blood poured down onto him and into his mouth. It is at this point he proclaims to him: “And all the beautiful words of the poets, Cornelius, can say nothing, I swear to you, of the fifty thousand ways to die like a dog, within a few hours.” What is left to say in the face of such horror? Uncertain how to respond, Cornelius takes time to reflect on his encounter with his country’s traumatic past. In the end, he realizes that he too is now a witness to the indescribable; it is now a part of him. And so he resolves to speak:

Cornelius was slightly ashamed of having entertained the idea of a play. But he wasn’t giving up his enthusiasm for words, dictated by despair, helplessness before the sheer immensity of evil, and no doubt a nagging conscience. He did not intend to resign himself to the definitive victory of the murderers through silence... he reserved for himself a more modest role. He would tirelessly recount the horror. With machete words, club words, words studded with nails, naked words and—despite Gérard—words covered with blood and shit. That he could do, because he saw in the genocide of Rwandan Tutsis a great lesson in simplicity. Every chronicler could at least learn—something essential to his art—to call a monster by its name.⁹²

This act of bearing witness, with machete words, is what Lucan, Keane, and Diop work to accomplish through their subjective strategies of narration. In

91 Diop (2000) 146.

92 Diop (2000) 179.

confronting us with the unspeakable, they give us the opportunity to enter a world mediated by a narrative that, however imperfectly, mirrors the traumatic experience. These kinds of disturbing encounters thus serve as the entry point on our path to comprehension.⁹³ By reading literature of the Rwandan genocide, we can better see Lucan's epic goal of representing *nefas* as an affective experience that activates anew when his audience reads his text and then become astonished as the civil war comes alive and fills their senses. Words alone are not enough. There is simply no other way to help us, his readers, begin to comprehend the unresolved trauma than to draw us right into the subjective world of civil war so that we can immersively experience this Lucanian dream-nightmare of ongoing trauma right along with him in an epic that brings it back to life. By engaging us within the world of trauma, these texts present the horror to us and then allow us to respond. This is how to speak the unspeakable.⁹⁴

93 Cf. Dauge-Roth (2010) 28–29.

94 An earlier and much simplified version of this paper was delivered at the 2013 meeting of CAMWS in Iowa City, and I thank those in attendance for their perceptive feedback. I owe further debts of gratitude to Carsten Hjort Lange, Alexandra Eckert, Laura Zientek, Neil Bernstein, and Jung Eun Kim for reading earlier drafts and offering encouragement and suggestions for improvement.

Mark Thorne

Bibliography

- Alexander (2004). – Jeffrey C. Alexander, Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, in: Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka (eds), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley 2004) 1–30.
- Alexander (2012). – Jeffrey C. Alexander, Cultural Trauma: A Social Theory, in: Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory* (Cambridge 2012) 6–30.
- Ambühl (2010). – Annemarie Ambühl, Lucan's 'Ilioupersis' – Narrative Patterns from the Fall of Troy in Book 2 of the *Bellum civile*, in: Hömke/Reitz (2010) 17–38.
- Asso (2008). – Paolo Asso, The Intrusive Trope – Apostrophe in Lucan, *MD* 61 (2008) 161–173.
- Asso (2011). – Paolo Asso (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Lucan* (Leiden 2011).
- Baer/Sznaider (2016). – Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznaider, *Antigone* in Léon: The Drama of Trauma Politics, In: Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (London 2016) 181–192.
- Bartsch (1997). – Shadi Bartsch, *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's Civil War* (Cambridge 1997).
- Bartsch (2011). – Shadi Bartsch, Lucan and Historical Bias, in: Asso (2011) 303–316.
- Becker/Dochhorn/Holt (2014). – Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else K. Holt (eds.), *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond* (Göttingen 2014).
- Bennett (2005). – Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford 2005).
- Berger (1997). – James Berger, Trauma and Literary Theory, *Contemporary Literature* 38.3 (1997) 569–582.
- Bernstein (2011). – Neil W. Bernstein, The Dead and Their Ghosts in the *Bellum Civile*: Lucan's Visions of History, in: Asso (2011) 257–279.
- Bonner (1966/2010). – Stanley F. Bonner, Lucan and the Declamation Schools, in: Tesoriero (2010) 69–106.

- Brandstetter (2005). – Anna-Maria Brandstetter, Erinnern und trauern: Über Genozidgedenkstätten in Ruanda, in: Winfried Speitkamp (Hrsg.), *Beiträge zur transkulturellen Begegnung in Afrika* (Munich 2005) 219–324.
- Breed/Damon/Rossi (2010). – Brian W. Breed, Cynthia Damon, and Andreola Rossi (eds.), *Citizens of Discord: Rome and Its Civil Wars* (Oxford 2010).
- Caruth (1996). – Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore 1996).
- Caston/Weineck (2016). – Victor Caston and Silke-Maria Wineck (eds.), *Our Ancient Wars: Rethinking War through the Classics* (Ann Arbor 2016).
- Clark (2014). – Jessica Clark, *Triumph in Defeat: Military Loss and the Roman Republic* (Oxford 2014).
- D'Alessandro Behr (2007). – Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, *Feeling History: Lucan, Stoicism, and The Poetics of Passion* (Columbus 2007).
- D'Alessandro Behr (2014). – Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, Consolation, Rebellion, and Philosophy in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* Book 8, in: Myrto Garani and David Konstan (eds.), *The Philosophizing Muse: The Influence of Greek Philosophy on Roman Poetry* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2014) 218–244.
- Dauge-Roth (2010). – Alexandre Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History* (Lanham 2010).
- Day (2013). – Henry J. M. Day, *Lucan and the Sublime: Power, Representation and Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge 2013).
- De Jager (2012). – Marjolijn De Jager, Introduction, in: Gilbert Gatore, *The Past Ahead* (Bloomington 2012).
- Demertzis (2011). – Nicolas Demertzis, The Drama of the Greek Civil War Trauma, in: Ron Eyerman, Jeffrey C. Alexander, and Elizabeth Butler Breese (eds.), *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering* (Boulder 2011) 133–162.
- Derrida (1996). – Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris 1996).
- Diner (2000). – Dan Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley 2000).
- Dinter (2012). – Martin Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War: Studies in Lucan's Epic Technique* (Ann Arbor 2012).
- Diop (2000). – Boubacar Boris Diop, *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, Fiona Mc Laughlin (trans. 2006) (Bloomington 2006).

- Dudai (2015). – Rina Dudai, Pain and Pleasure in Poetic Representations of the Holocaust, in: Amos Goldberg and Haim Hazan (eds.), *Marking Evil: Holocaust Memory in The Global Age* (New York) 233–265.
- Eckert (2014). – Alexandra Eckert, Remembering Cultural Trauma: Sulla's Proscriptions, Roman Responses, and Christian Perspectives, in: Becker/Dochhorn/Holt (2014) 262–274.
- Effe (2004). – Bernd Effe, *Epische Objektivität und subjektives Erzählen: 'Auktoriale' Narrativik von Homer bis zum römischen Epos der Flavienzeit* (Trier 2004).
- El Nossery/Hubbell (2013a). – Névine El Nossery and Amy L. Hubbell (eds.), *The Unspeakable: Representations of Trauma in Francophone Literature and Art* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2013)
- El Nossery/Hubbell (2013b). – Névine El Nossery and Amy L. Hubbell, Introduction: Transmitting the Unspeakable through Literature and Art, in: El Nossery/Hubbell (2013a) 1–22.
- Erasmio (2008). – Mario Erasmio, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome* (Columbus, Ohio 2008).
- Estèves (2006). – Aline Estèves, Poétique de l'horreur dans l'épopée et l'historiographie latines, de l'époque cicéronienne à l'époque flavienne: imaginaire, esthétique, réception, *L'information littéraire* 58.2 (2006) 27–32.
- Estèves (2009). – Aline Estèves, Les témoins anonymes de l'histoire dans la *Pharsale* de Lucain, *Interférences* 5 (2009) 1–18.
- Fears (1981). – J. Rufus Fears, The Theology of Victory at Rome: Approaches and Problems, *ANRW* II,17,2 (1981) 736–826.
- Feeney (1991). – D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991).
- Fegley (2016). – Randall Fegley, *A History of Rwandan Identity and Trauma: The Mythmakers' Victims* (Lanham 2016).
- Fehrle (1983). – Rudolf Fehrle, *Cato Uticensis* (Darmstadt 1983).
- Fratantuono (2012). – Lee Fratantuono, *Madness Triumphant: A Reading of Lucan's Pharsalia* (Lanham 2012).
- Friedlander (1992). – Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA 1992).

- Galtier (2016). – Fabrice Galtier, Le conflit entre Marius et Sylla: un souvenir traumatique dans la *Pharsale*, in: Fabrice Galtier and Rémy Poignault (eds.), *Présence de Lucain* (Clermont-Ferrand 2016) 17–31.
- Gourevitch (1998). – Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York 1998).
- Grillo (2012). – Luca Grillo, *The Art of Caesar's Bellum Civile: Literature, Ideology, and Community* (Cambridge 2012).
- Guyer (2009). – Sara Guyer, Rwanda's Bones, *Boundary 2* 36.2 (2009) 155–175.
- Hatzfeld (2005). – Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season. The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, Linda Coverdale (trans.) (New York 2005).
- Hatzfeld (2006). – Jean Hatzfeld, *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak*, Linda Coverdale (trans.) (New York 2006).
- Henderson (1987/2010). – John Henderson, Lucan/The Word at War, in: Tesoriero (2010) 433–491.
- Hirsch (2012). – Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* (New York 2012).
- Hitchcott (2009). – Nicki Hitchcott, Writing on Bones: Commemorating Genocide in Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi*, *Research in African Literatures* 40.3 (2009) 48–61.
- Hölscher (2006). – Tonio Hölscher, The Transformation of Victory into Power: From Event to Structure, in: Sheila Dillon and Katherine E. Welch (eds.), *Representations of War in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge 2006) 27–48.
- Hömke (2015). – Nicola Hömke, Lucan's Cato, or: Burying the *Exemplum Moriendi*, in: Rémy Poignault and Catherine Schneider (eds.), *Présence de la déclamation antique: controverses et suasoires* (Clermont-Ferrand 2015) 235–252.
- Hömke/Reitz (2010). – Nicola Hömke and Christiane Reitz (eds.), *Lucan's Bellum Civile: Between Epic Tradition and Aesthetic Innovation* (Berlin 2010).
- Howell (2013). – Jennifer Howell, A Father's Pain, A Daughter's Story: Transcending the Trauma of Loss, in: El Nossery/Hubbell (2013a) 285–304.
- Human Rights Watch (1999). – Human Rights Watch, *Leave None To Tell The Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York 1999).
- Hunt (2010). – Nigel Hunt, *Memory, War, and Trauma* (Cambridge 2010).
- Kansteiner (2004). – Wulf Kansteiner, Genealogy of a Category Mistake: A Critical Intellectual History of the Cultural Trauma Metaphor, *Rethinking History* 8 (2004), 193–221.

- Keane (1995). – Fergal Keane, *Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey* (London 1995).
- Kimmerle (2015). – Nadja Kimmerle, *Lucan und der Prinzipat. Inkonsistenz und unzuverlässiges Erzählen im Bellum Civile* (Berlin 2015).
- LaCapra (1994). – Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca 1994).
- LaCapra (2001). – Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore 2001).
- Lang (2016). – Felix Lang, *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital* (New York 2016).
- Lange (2009). – Carsten Hjort Lange, *Res Publica Constituta: Actium, Apollo, and the Accomplishment of the Triumviral Assignment* (Leiden 2009).
- Leigh (1997). – Matthew Leigh, *Lucan: Spectacle and Engagement* (Oxford 1997).
- Lintott (1971/2010). – Andrew Lintott, Lucan and the History of the Civil War, in: Tesoriero (2010) 239–268.
- Low/Oliver/Rhodes (2013). – Polly Low, Graham Oliver, and P. J. Rhodes (eds.), *Cultures of Commemoration: War Memorials Ancient and Modern* (Oxford 2013).
- Marti (1975). – Berthe M. Marti, Lucan's Narrative Techniques, *Parola del Passato* 30 (1975) 74–90.
- Masters (1992). – Jaime Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's Bellum Civile* (Cambridge 1992).
- Matus (1998). – Jill L. Matus, *Toni Morrison* (Manchester 1998).
- Meierhenrich (2011). – Jens Meierhenrich, Topographies of Remembering and Forgetting: The Transformation of Lieux de Mémoire in Rwanda, in: Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf (eds.), *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence* (Madison 2011) 283–296.
- Meineck/Konstan (2014). – Peter Meineck and David Konstan (eds.), *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks* (New York 2014).
- Möller (2010). – Frank Möller, Rwanda Revisualized: Genocide, Photography, and the Era of the Witness, *Alternatives* 35 (2010) 113–136.
- Mutabaruka et al. (2012). – Jean Mutabaruka, Nathalie Séjourné, Eric Bui, Philippe Birmes, and Henri Chabrol, Traumatic Grief and Traumatic Stress in Survivors 12 Years after the Genocide in Rwanda, *Stress and Health* 28 (2012) 289–296.

- Nyirubugara (2013). – Olivier Nyirubugara, *Complexities and Dangers of Remembering and Forgetting in Rwanda* (Leiden 2013).
- O'Higgins (1988). – Dolores O'Higgins, Lucan as *Vates*, *Classical Antiquity* 7.2 (1988) 208–226.
- Ormand (1994/2010). – Kirk Ormand, Lucan's *Auctor vix fidelis*, in: Tesoriero (2010) 324–345.
- Peer (2015). – Ayelet Peer, *Julius Caesar's Bellum Civile and the Composition of a New Reality* (New York 2015).
- Peters (2016). – Erin Peters, Trauma Narratives of the English Civil War, *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16.1 (2016), 78–94.
- Potter (2016). – David Potter, "War Guilt," "National Character," "Inevitable Forces," and the Problematic Historiography of "Unnecessary Wars", in: Caston/Weineck (2016) 75–95.
- Prunier (1995). – Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York 1995).
- Prunier (2009). – Gérard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (Oxford 2009).
- Quint (1993). – David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form From Vergil to Milton* (Princeton 1993).
- Roche (2009). – Paul Roche, *Lucan, De Bello Civili Book 1* (Oxford 2009).
- Rolim de Moura (2010). – Alessandro Rolim de Moura, Lucan 7: Speeches at War, in: Hömke/Reitz (2010) 71–90.
- Roth/Salas (2001). – Michael S. Roth and Charles G. Salas, Introduction, in: Michael S. Roth and Charles G. Salas (eds.), *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles 2001) 1–13.
- Rothberg (2000). – Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis 2000).
- Saby (2014). – Marjolaine Saby, Nefas ou la violation de l'ordre du monde dans les tragédies de Sénèque, *Neronia Electronica* 3 (2014) 28–58.
- Schlonski (1995). – Frank Schlonski, *Studien zum Erzählerstandort bei Lucan* (Trier 1995).
- Schrijvers (1988). – P. H. Schrijvers, Deuil, désespoir, destruction (Lucain, *La Pharsale* II 1–234), *Mnemosyne* 41 (1988) 341–354.

- Shay (1994). – Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York 1994).
- Stroińska/Szymanski/Cecchetto (2014). – Magda Stroińska, Kate Szymanski, and Vikki Cecchetto, Introduction: We Need to Talk about Trauma, In: Magda Stroińska, Kate Szymanski, and Vikki Cecchetto (eds.), *The Unspeakable: Narratives of Trauma* (Frankfurt am Main 2014) 13–18.
- Sturken (1999). – Marita Sturken, Narrative of Recovery: Repressed Memory as Cultural Memory, in: Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover 1999) 231–248.
- Syrotinski (2009). – Michael Syrotinski, Monstrous Fictions: Testifying to the Rwandan Genocide in Tierno Monénembo's *L'ainé des Orphelins*, *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45.4 (2009) 427–440.
- Tal (1996). – Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge 1996).
- Tekleab (2014). – Kebedech Tekleab, Exploring the Edge of Trauma: The Differing Dynamics of Tragedy and the Sublime, in: Magda Stroińska, Kate Szymanski, and Vikki Cecchetto (eds.), *The Unspeakable: Narratives of Trauma* (Frankfurt am Main 2014) 123–139.
- Tesoriero (2010). – Charles Tesoriero (ed.), *Lucan. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* (Oxford 2010).
- Thorne (2011). – Mark Thorne, *Memoria Redux: Memory in Lucan*, in: Asso (2011) 363–381.
- Toremans (2003). – Tom Toremans, Trauma: Theory – Reading (and) Literary Theory in the Wake of Trauma, *European Journal of English Studies* 7.3 (2013) 333–351.
- Tritle (2000). – *From Melos to My Lai: War and Survival* (London 2000).
- Vidal (2001). – Claudine Vidal, Les commémorations du génocide au Rwanda, *Les temps modernes* 613 (2001) 1–46.
- Walde (2011). – Christine Walde, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*: A Specimen of a Roman "Literature of Trauma", in: Asso (2011) 283–302.
- Walker (1996). – Andrew D. Walker, Lucan's Legends of the Fall, *Ramus* 25.1 (1996) 65–87.

Speaking the Unspeakable: Engaging Nefas in Lucan and Rwanda 1994

- Walters (2013). – Brian Walters, Reading Death and the Senses in Lucan and Lucretius, in: Shane Butler and Alex Purves (eds.), *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses* (Durham 2013) 115–126.
- Wick (2010). – Claudia Wick, *plus quam visibilia* – Lukans suggestive Nichtbeschreibungen, in: Hömke/Reitz (2010) 105–117.