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978-1-107-01611-8 - The Epic Gaze: Vision, Gender and Narrative in Ancient Epic

Helen Lovatt

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## THE EPIC GAZE

The epic genre has at its heart a fascination with the horror of viewing death. Epic heroes have active visual power, yet become objects, turned into monuments, watched by two main audiences: the gods above and the women on the sidelines. This stimulating, ambitious study investigates the theme of vision in Greek and Latin epic from Homer to Nonnus, bringing the edges of epic into dialogue with the most celebrated moments (the visual confrontation of Hector and Achilles, the failure of Turnus' gaze), revealing epic as massive assertion of authority and fractured representation. Helen Lovatt demonstrates the complexity of epic constructions of gender: from Apollonius' Medea toppling Talos with her eyes to Parthenopaeus as object of desire. She discusses mortals appropriating the divine gaze, prophets as both penetrative viewers and rape victims, explores the divine authority of epic ecphrasis, and exposes the way that heroic bodies are fragmented and fetishised.

HELEN LOVATT is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Nottingham and her teaching includes epic and its reception. She is the author of *Statius and Epic Games* (Cambridge, 2005), and co-editor, with Caroline Vout, of *Epic Visions* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

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While I was writing this book, I was diagnosed with a visual impairment. Since I am already very short-sighted and now in addition suffer from retinitis pigmentosa, a progressive eye condition in which parts of your retina (the edges, to start with) simply cease to work, there is a certain irony in writing a book on vision. Do I have the requisite clarity of perception to make declarations on the workings of viewing and visual power? Or should I hurry it along while I can still watch films and see my computer screen? Or are the lurking measles on my retina as meaningless as the lichen on a gravestone? Am I going blind, or am I only just a bit more blind than I was before? Or will I fall off a cliff tomorrow, not seeing it beneath my feet, leaving only this unfinished manuscript as my own monument?

This project has been an epic of everyday life, attempting to juggle all the commitments of academic, personal and family life. I owe thanks to many people for helping to create the space and time for thinking and writing, as well as the impetus and stimulus for actually doing it. Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, gave me a Junior Research Fellowship, which allowed me to start thinking, and meant that I was able to stay in the game at all. The Dean's Fund at the University of Nottingham and the generosity of my colleagues at the department of Classics cleared me an extra semester of much-needed time, without which this book would be much poorer, if not still stuck indefinitely in never-land. It is my particular pleasure to thank friends and colleagues at the University of Sydney, who flew me out, put me up, showed me around, listened to me and fed me exceptionally well – Alastair Blanshard, Bob Cowan, Paul Roche, Frances Muecke and especially Anne Rogerson. My colleagues past and present have made me think: especially Carrie Vout, Lynn Fotheringham, Susanne Turner and Katharina Lorenz. Students have argued with me and inspired me: I can pick out my third-year special subject group of 2007–8, and Alice White and Andy Valner in 2009. Audiences in various locations (Groningen, Manchester, Exeter, Lampeter, Cork, Cardiff, Santiago de Compostela, and especially

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Sydney) have listened and viewed with scepticism and enthusiasm: Hans Smolenaars, Federico Santangelo, Douglas Cairns and Daniel Ogden offered helpful thoughts and advice. Stephen Wheeler helped kick me off in the right direction. Tim Stover, Tobias Myers and Robin Osborne kindly allowed me to look at work in advance of publication. Mentors and friends have cast sharp eyes over drafts: John Henderson, Helen Van Noorden, Helen Asquith, Judith Mossman, Alan Sommerstein, Patrick Finglass. The anonymous reader for Cambridge University Press provided very constructive and helpful comments. Michael Sharp has been supportive, patient and encouraging. Thank you to Anna Hodson for keen-eyed copy-editing. In particular I would like to thank Philip Hardie for making me feel perennially inadequate in the best possible way, who has read it all, some of it several times, and improved it immeasurably. The (no doubt many) errors that still remain, are, of course, my own responsibility. Most importantly my love and thanks go to my family for support and encouragement: from parents to children and children to parents. My mother, who voluntarily reads my work; my father, who is always there; Andrew, who took the strain when I was out of the picture; Jonathan, who looks at the world with bright eyes; and Caroline, who enjoys being looked at but is equally capable of turning her gaze away: it is to them that I dedicate this book.



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[More information](#)*Texts and abbreviations*

For the main epic poems in this study the following texts have been used:

Homer: Monro, D. B. and Allen, T. W. (1920) *Homeri Opera*. Oxford.

Apollonius: Fraenkel, H. (1961) *Apollonii Rhodii Argonautica*. Oxford.

Lucretius: Martin, J. (1969) *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura*. Leipzig.

Virgil *Georgics*: Mynors, R. A. B. (1969) *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*. Oxford.

*Aeneid*: Conte, G. B. (2009) *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis*. Berlin.

Ovid: Tarrant, R. J. (2004) *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses*. Oxford.

Lucan: Housman, A. E. (1927) *M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis Libri Decem*. Oxford.

Valerius Flaccus: Liberman, G. (1997–2002) *Valerius Flaccus: Argonautiques*. Paris.

Statius *Thebaid*: Hill, D. E. (ed.) (1983) *P. Papinii Stati Thebaidos Libri XII*. Leiden.

*Achilleid*: Shackleton Bailey, D. R. (2003) *Statius Achilleid*. Cambridge, MA.

Silius Italicus: Delz, J. (1987) *Silius Italicus Punica*. Stuttgart.

Quintus Smyrnaeus: Vian, F. (1963–9) *Quintus de Smyrne: La Suite d'Homère*. Paris.

Nonnus: Gerbeau, J. and Vian, F. (1992) *Nonnos de Panopolis: Les Dionysiaques, Tome VII, Chants XVIII–XIX*. Paris.

Vian, F. (1990) *Nonnos de Panopolis: Les Dionysiaques, Tome IX, Chants XXV–XXIX*. Paris.

Frangoulis, H. and Gerlaud, B. (2006) *Nonnos de Panopolis: Les Dionysiaques, Tome XII, Chants XXXV et XXXVI*. Paris.

Fayant, M.-C. (2000) *Nonnos de Panopolis: Les Dionysiaques, Tome XVII, Chant XLVII*. Paris.

Abbreviations in general follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, but be aware of the following:

AR            Apollonius of Rhodes

BC            Lucan, *Bellum civile*

x	<i>List of texts and abbreviations</i>
<i>LfrgrE</i>	Snell, B., Fleischer, U. and Mette, H. J. (eds.) (1959) <i>Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos</i> . Göttingen.
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> (1981–2009). Zurich.
LSJ	Liddell and Scott, <i>Greek–English Lexicon</i> , rev. H. Stuart Jones (1925–40); Supplement by E. A. Barber and others (1968). Oxford.
<i>OLD</i>	Glare, P. G. W. (ed.) (1982) <i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> . Oxford.
<i>PH</i>	<i>Posthomeric</i>
QS	Quintus Smyrnaeus
VF	Valerius Flaccus