CHAPTER 1

In Rufinum

Heroes, Monsters, and the Universe in the Balance

Introduction

In the years 395–97, Claudian wrote an invective against Flavius Rufinus, Praetorian Prefect of the East, who was murdered by his own troops in 396. He had been Theodosius' most trusted minister, and became consul in 392, then Praetorian Prefect, to the resentment of Theodosius' military leaders, including Stilicho.[1] Upon the death of Theodosius, perhaps the catalyst for the eventual split between East and West becoming inevitable,[2] Stilicho and Rufinus developed from personal enemies into political rivals, with Rufinus holding principal power in the East and functioning as regent for the eastern emperor Arcadius,[3] albeit that Arcadius had less confidence in Rufinus than Theodosius had had, and that Stilicho was claiming regency over Arcadius as well as Honorius for himself.[4] Rufinus may even have intended that Arcadius be married to his daughter,[5] or have had aspirations to the purple himself.[6] Claudian specifically harnessed the rivalry between Stilicho and Rufinus for his invective – Rufinus was a perfect foil to be developed as the opposite to Stilicho – but he also recognized Rufinus' waning popularity. With a wave of barbarian invasions into the eastern provinces, and no army with which to deal with it (since Theodosius had led the eastern army into Italy in 394 where it remained), Rufinus had less control than Stilicho, who had all the imperial army under his command.

In 395, therefore, Stilicho led these combined troops to Thessaly, to intervene with Alaric and his Gothic forces. The Goths were blockaded, but,

[1] Alan Cameron 1970: 63, and further Chapter 4 passim. [2] Randers-Pehrson 1983: 83.
[3] In the fourth century the Praetorian Prefect ranked as the highest official of the empire, originally a military command but, after Constantine, the foremost civil magistracy. Levy 1971: 229–31.
[4] Levy 1971: 225. Garambois-Vasquez 2007: 14–16 provides a detailed outline of what else is known about the situation between Stilicho and Rufinus.
[5] Cf. *Ruf.* 2.14. Arcadius was in fact married in 395 to Eudoxia, daughter of a Frankish general in the Roman army, a match apparently arranged by Eutropius to undermine Rufinus (Holum 1989: 52). She appears to have been an influential force over him, and was made *Augusta* in 400.
[6] Levy 1971: 238.

according to Claudian, just upon the point of joining battle, which would have led to Alaric's defeat, a message arrived from Arcadius (prevailed upon by Rufinus who feared Stilicho's success and pretensions to power in the East) demanding the return of the eastern troops to Constantinople. Certainly, the Goths were eventually allowed, for reasons uncertain (but perhaps not to Stilicho's credit), to retreat, whereupon the eastern Roman troops were dispatched back to Arcadius. Upon arrival there, Arcadius, with Rufinus, came outside to inspect the troops, who tore Rufinus to pieces, just as Claudian celebrates in his invective, in which he sees the fall of Rufinus as a validation of the gods' beneficence. Notably, however, the failure by Stilicho to destroy Alaric when he had the chance, whether actually attributable to Rufinus (as Claudian proposes) or not, was critical to the dealings with the barbarians subsequently, as the Goths rampaged through Greece, controlled neither by Stilicho nor by Eutropius, Rufinus' successor.

The *In Rufinum* is written in two books, the first a more typical invective produced early in 396 (probably immediately after Rufinus' death), the second a historical narrative of the downfall of Rufinus, written over a year later, which may have been produced to counteract the effects of Stilicho's apparent failure to destroy Alaric in 395.[7] Each book is preceded by a separate preface, the first based on the defeat of Python by Apollo and the subsequent celebrations, and the second addressed directly to Stilicho, whose labours have restored the safety of the Muses. In book 1, Claudian covers the rise of Rufinus to power by exploring the different stages of his life and character suggested by rhetoricians for a panegyric or invective, but attributes this rise to the man's upbringing by Furies who wanted to use him to release infernal chaos into an ordered universe. In book 2 he covers, in chronological order, the events which led up to Rufinus' doom, going back to cover each stage of 395 rather than engage directly with the criticisms of Stilicho which had emerged subsequently.

On account of the two very different halves to the poem, Claudian has received criticism for its lack of unity. The first book of the poem draws its structure from the '*psogos* structure' proposed by rhetorical handbooks for the creation of invective, whereas the second book seems more closely affiliated to the genre of historical epic. It would be wrong to claim that book 1 adheres strictly to the rhetorical form, but the influence is palpable. The recommended structure for epideictic, which is inverted for

[7] Alan Cameron 1970: 85.

invective, according to our main surviving rhetorical handbooks, instructs the panegyrist to treat his *laudandus* by different categories related to his life and character. The scheme is presented in a clear way by Aphthonius as starting with an introduction, ending with an epilogue, and comprising in between sections on 'origins', 'upbringing', 'exploits', and a general comparison.[8] The version presented by Menander is similar and maintains the same order but includes a separate heading for 'birth' after 'origins', and another for 'pursuits as evidence of character', which was a subheading of 'upbringing' for Aphthonius, as a section of its own between 'upbringing' and 'exploits'.[9] In both versions of the scheme, 'exploits' is the most significant of the sections. For the creation of invective instead of panegyric the architecture is exactly the same except that each section contains vituperation rather than praise. Undoubtedly Claudian's *Ruf.*, or at least its first book, contains material which could be classified under each of these headings, especially with regard to Claudian's invention of Rufinus' upbringing by the Furies;[10] however, this material is not ordered according to the scheme and significant sections of the poem can hardly be made to fit within it.

The second book, in particular, has been shown hardly to utilize the structure at all, and chooses events for their place in the chronological narrative rather than for their contribution to an overview of Rufinus for the purpose of vilification.[11] Indeed, Barnes argues for the whole of the *Ruf.* as a historical epic by means of a reassessment of the datable events identified in the work.[12] The second book is an explicit chronological account of events from the death of Theodosius on 17 January 395 to the lynching of Rufinus on 27 November 395. Barnes reads book 1 as a treatment of Rufinus' career down to 393 with some explicitly marked forward references to 395 based upon his identification of 1.230ff as the fall of Tatianus, Praetorian Prefect of the East, who was dismissed in September 392, 234ff as the execution of Lucianus which he dates to 393, and 245ff as the death of Proculus, son of Tatianus, on 6 December 393.[13] This respect of chronological sequence in the first book, if rather more covertly than in the second, further suggests that the *Ruf.* is influenced by but not based upon the *psogos* structure.

[8] *Rhetores Graeci* 2.36.7–19. On Claudian's use of this general comparison (*synkrisis*) see Prenner 2003a: 58.
[9] *Rhetores Graeci* 3.413.10 f., 420.11–421.3. [10] Levy 1946.
[11] See also Alan Cameron 1970: 82–89 on the different influences on each book; Barr 1979, who establishes that the *Ruf.* does not, overall, adhere to the *psogos* structure; and Barnes 1984 who argues for the whole poem as historical epic.
[12] Barnes 1984: 227. [13] Barnes 1984: 228–30.

There is, however, a single agenda for the poem, albeit it is manifested differently in each book. Claudian needs to defend Stilicho against allegations of mishandling Alaric, and to restore him to the status of Roman saviour in the eyes of the audience. In the first book he exploits Rufinus' death as a culmination of a comparison between Stilicho as the saviour of the empire and Rufinus as his opposite; in the second book he returns to this theme but with a more explicit association of Rufinus with the cause for the continued threat from Alaric, in order to perpetuate the message that Stilicho is responsible for Rome's salvation, not its mishandling of the barbarians. In spite of the key differences between the books, each of them has a similar agenda and achieves it in the same way. It is by means of recurrent signifiers across both books that the view of Stilicho as a hero is perpetuated.

This chapter, therefore, serves to exemplify a methodology of reading a poem, however disjointed, in terms of the signifiers that accumulate to form a united message. However, it also provides a way of reading the *Ruf.* that demonstrates how the same message of Stilicho's heroism can be transmitted, whatever the circumstances and genre of the poem's original composition. I intend to identify the individual episodes, and the key signifying elements within them, which best illustrate the way in which the compositional units, from which the poem is constructed, combine at an overarching level to convey a message that corresponds to the poet's agenda; in this case, it is a political agenda concerning the particular view of Stilicho and Rufinus in the universe which would benefit Stilicho. Claudian (re)performs recent history regarding Stilicho and Rufinus at the level of the story-world, transforming them respectively into a hero who saves the universe and a monster which threatens it, by means of reference to mythological imagery. As will be seen in the other political poems, it is particularly this use of mythological elements and other signifiers specifically associated with the poetic story-world which permits Claudian to (re)perform 'real life' by means of the poem, and in doing so influence the audience's view of 'real life' towards the version he wishes them to take away with them. In particular, by adopting the expected apparatus for the poetic performance space, but manipulating both it and the expectations surrounding occasional poetry in particular to function propagandistically, he is able to engage and exploit his audience's engagement with his poetics towards his political ends.

The universe in Claudian's poems is a place at risk from the forces of evil, whose potential to release chaos threatens the right order on which the forces of good depend. These forces of evil are principally depicted as

monsters, and the 'real life' enemies of Rome are depicted in monstrous terms, in particular by reference to underworld forces, chaotic forces, and gigantomachy.[14] In opposition to this, Claudian constructs Stilicho as a hero who defends the universe against the monstrous threat and restores harmony, a state often linked with the return of the Golden Age. Of all the political poems, it is the *In Rufinum* which best serves to illustrate the importance of these aspects, all of which contribute to the poem's overarching and unifying theme that the universe is at risk from boundary breakdown by evil forces, which Stilicho alone can counter. Specifically, in this instance, he has successfully restored the harmony that had been under threat from Rufinus. In the same way that a man becomes a hero by slaying a monster, so the death of Rufinus, at the hands of his own soldiers upon their return from campaign against Alaric under Stilicho in 395, is used to make Stilicho into a universal saviour (while the transfer of events to the level of the story-world also allows Claudian to maintain crucial distance between the western general and the eastern prefect's actual murder).[15]

In order to construct this view of Rufinus as a force of evil threatening the universe, Claudian (re)performs his story within a carefully constructed story-world. To achieve this he uses the recurring myth of the snake-monster to depict Rufinus, associating him with the underworld, gigantomachy, and darkness. The world in which Rufinus acts is one which features two levels of harmony: first, opposing forces of good and evil provide a dualistic view of the universe, in which the evil forces must be kept in their rightful place if good is to remain dominant; second, the sense of right place and necessary boundaries is created by means of the theme of the balanced elements which represent the harmonized universe (which equates to the triumph of the force of good). The hero, who corresponds to the good in opposition to the evil monster, has the task of restoring the correct order and replacing the boundaries that keep evil at bay.[16]

[14] The nature of monstrosity in Claudian receives fuller treatment in Chapter 3. However, the term monster applies particularly to that which is 'other', dwelling upon the margins, threatening borders through its liminality, and intending to reverse normal order. On the discussion concerning the definition of the 'monster' in the ancient world, see Atherton 2002.

[15] While Claudian may wish to harness the worth of the murder, it is unlikely that he would want it to be attributed too closely to Stilicho; it is also possible that Stilicho did not order Rufinus' death, not least since Eutropius, the eunuch who took power over Arcadius upon Rufinus' death, was not only present on the day but had much more to gain.

[16] This is also linked to the idea of the restoration of national unity under a single leader (Stilicho). Potz 1990: 67.

Python-Apollo: The Lens of the Preface

In the *Ruf.*, as in other poems, Claudian guides the audience into his story-world by means of the poem's opening.[17] In the case of the *Ruf.*, this takes two forms. There is an initial preface retelling the myth of Python and Apollo, which provides a lens through which the rest of the poem is to be read:[18] this introduces the theme of dualism in terms of the hero-monster pairing. However, the preface is followed by a proemic passage to the poem proper which contains an explanation of the story-world's universal construct by means of a comparison between Stoic and Epicurean viewpoints, albeit most likely functioning as literary means of describing Claudian's story-worlds based on historical rather than live philosophical ideologies, with a conclusion opting for the Stoic world-view. It focuses especially on the concept of the concordant elements, with an explicit link between the story-world universe and the 'real life' fact of Rufinus' death which restored the universal harmony. I shall return to this proem in order to consider the story-world universe further below.

The preface, striking for its opening use of a mythological scene, should be seen as a lens for viewing the poem, since it provides a series of signifiers for an overarching theme of threatened universal harmony: it contains characters which prefigure the historical characters, but it also plays out their conflict upon a consciously mythological plane, before revealing that this is a (re)performance of the 'real life' conflict which is the subject of the poem. The Python-Apollo pairing of the preface both transforms Stilicho and Rufinus into hero and monster, and situates them within the story-world universe. The pairing of Stilicho/Apollo-Rufinus/Python encapsulates the dualism of the story-world, paralleling the opposition of universal good and evil, light and dark;[19] however, even within this brief scene from the preface, Claudian also introduces the broadly Stoic view of the universe he will explain in the proem, constructed from the four elements which must maintain their correct balance. Sometimes these are strictly represented in the *Ruf.* in terms of symbols of earth, air, fire, and water, whereas at other times, such as in the first preface, they are implied in the different

[17] Felgentreu, in particular, has dedicated himself to the study of Claudian's prefatory passages, understanding them as functioning as a genre in their own right. While his book is very detailed, and reflects the importance of privileging aspects of the prefatory material, there are also certain risks in isolating the prefaces, albeit they frequently are metaliterary and supply information about the main text. Felgentreu 1999: 19–36 for theory of preface *qua* genre, especially 29.

[18] For approaches to this sort of preface, in which a link is made between the mythological or allegorical and the 'real life' situation or performance, and which is most notably also used in *Get.*, see Brocca 2002: 40; Felgentreu 1999: 187–88.

[19] Gualandri 2002a: 55. Ware 2012: 124 sees this as a tension between *furor* and *concordia*.

aspects of the universe such as its different regions: the stars, the rivers, and the mountains. Stilicho's success as a hero depends upon both the restoration of universal harmony, or the Golden Age, and, to achieve this, the specific removal of the monster which is placing the universe at risk; the greater the monster, the greater the hero Stilicho proves to be, explaining the importance from the preface onwards of the successful characterization of Rufinus.

The preface introduces the two characters with the focus on the victorious Apollo lording it over the recently killed Python:

> Phoebeo domitus Python cum decidit arcu[.]
> (*Ruf.* 1.pr1)
>
> When Python fell, conquered by Phoebus' bow[.]

The focus on Python's death is fitting for the occasion of writing which follows the death of Rufinus. Claudian describes the event in the second book (2.404), both explicitly dissociated from Stilicho by his absence from the murder scene, and implicitly ascribed to him through his influence over the angry men who commit the murder and the worthy intention behind the deed (2.402–03).[20] It is appropriate, therefore, that the events on the mythological plane associate Apollo not with the killing itself, as in the other main versions of the myth,[21] but with the effect upon the world that comes with ridding it of a monster:

> iam liber Parnasus erat, nexuque soluto
> coeperat erecta surgere fronde nemus,
> concussaeque diu spatiosis tractibus orni
> securas ventis explicuere comas. (*Ruf.* 1.pr5–8)
>
> Then Parnassus was free, and the forest, loosed from its bonds,
> began to rouse itself with lifted leaves,
> and the ashes, long struck by his wide trail,
> spread their leaves safely in the wind.

The natural world is released from bondage, with the trees symbolizing the whole of the region which can return to its rightful behaviour, the forest lifting its leaves and the ashes enjoying the freedom of the wind.

[20] Ware 2012: 45 notes the cleverness with which Claudian utilizes the techniques of epic to influence how the death is viewed: 'The poet's skill has invoked the right hand of the hero and destroyed his opponent. The audience does not notice that there is no epic duel, that the hero retreats halfway through and the villain dies as a result of quite different, and unexplained, circumstances.'

[21] The appearances in Claudian's frequent models: Ovid *Met.* 1.438–51, Statius *Theb.* 6.562–71, Lucan *DBC.* 6.497–509. On the epic origins of Apollo-Python, see Ware 2006: 31–32.

In describing the defeated Python, *domitus*, *decidit*, and *fudit* all give the impression of the monster fallen and spread across the ground, the opposite to the huge heights he reached while he dominated the region, invading even the stars to suggest a threat to the gods themselves:

> Phoebeo **domitus** Python cum **decidit** arcu
> membraque Cirrhaeo **fudit** anhela iugo,
> qui spiris **tegeret montes**, hauriret hiatu
> flumina, sanguineis **tangeret astra** iubis. (*Ruf.* 1.pr1–4)
>
> When Python fell, conquered by Phoebus' bow,
> and spread his gasping limbs over Cirrha's ridges,
> who could cover mountains with his coils, drain rivers
> with his open jaw, touch the stars with his bloody crest.

The magnitude of the defeated monster and his devastating effect on the world are further emphasized by the jaws that could drain rivers: *hauriret hiatu/flumina*. The effect of Python upon the mountains, stars, and rivers is appropriate to a depiction of Rufinus as a universal danger, penetrating the different regions and elements. Furthermore, Claudian contrasts the poison which the monster spread with the purity which Apollo now brings, the poisoned spring and the effect on its surroundings reminding the audience of the poison and lies Rufinus had spread about Stilicho and the west among his court and in the ears of Arcadius, which become not merely personal to Stilicho but dangerous to the world:

> et qui **vipereo** spumavit saepe **veneno**
> Cephisos **nitidis purior** ibat **aquis**. (*Ruf.* 1.pr9–10)
>
> and Cephisus, who often foamed with the viper's venom,
> flowed more pure with glittering water.

Apollo/Stilicho, on the other hand, is hailed by his epithet as healer (*io Paean*, pr11), the antidote to the monster's poison. The frothing of the venom is starkly contrasted with the flow of purer water, with the use of *nitidis* both vivid and reminiscent of the power of light, which Apollo represents in victory over the forces of darkness, a means by which both character and universe are presented in the poem.

With the first fourteen lines of the preface having focused on the mythological scene, the final four make the explicit engagement between the hero and monster and their contemporary counterparts:

> nunc alio domini telis Pythone perempto[.] (*Ruf.* 1.pr15)
>
> now that another Python is dead at the weapons of the master[.]

Stilicho is not named but neither does he need to be. The parallel is made clear by the verbal reminiscences of *domini*, at line 15, recalling *domitus* of line 1, as well as the repetition of Python's name from the first line as *alio . . . Pythone*. While elsewhere Claudian avoids the direct attribution of Rufinus' death to Stilicho per se,[22] here the destruction of the 'monster' is made clear in *perempto* and the recollection of *domitus*. However, the creation of an isolated episode in the prologue in which Stilicho is so clearly a dragon-slayer protecting his people (far removed from politically motivated homicide) creates a distinct world within which the poem functions, and its introduction in the preface, with its reminiscences of the scene of poetic performance, invites the audience into that world. The story-world both mirrors real life (as Claudian would portray it) and is simultaneously distanced from it by its distinct place in the sphere of poetic performance, as the preface also points out by reference to the poet and his audience. The scene of the last four lines of the prologue establishes this parallel between the story-world of Apollo and Python and the 'real life' world in which the audience exists, by presenting equivalent supporting characters and setting its own scene:

> auditoque procul Musarum carmine dulci
> ad Themidis coeunt antra seuera dei.
> nunc alio domini telis Pythone perempto
> convenit ad nostram sacra caterva lyram,
> qui stabilem servans Augustis fratribus orbem
> iustitia pacem, viribus arma regit. (*Ruf.* 1.pr13–18)
>
> and, having heard from far off the sweet song of the Muses,
> the gods gather in the forbidding caves of Themis.
> Now that another Python is dead at the weapons of the master,
> a holy company comes together at my lyre,
> who, preserving a stable world for the brother Emperors,
> rules peace with justice and war with strength.

Just as the gods gather at the caves of Themis (pr14), called by the song of the Muses (pr13), so the *sacra caterva* come together at Claudian's lyre, implicitly gathering in the real place and situation in which Claudian is reciting his poem (pr16). Likewise, as the whole region rang with cries of celebration and the singing of Phoebus' name (pr11), so Claudian will reflect such hero-worship in his praise of Stilicho, whose role in the poem is set out by his depiction in the prologue's final two lines (pr17–18), preserving a stable world and ruling with justice and strength. This final image

[22] Ware 2012: 44–45.

establishes the role of the hero, engaging the story-world with the 'real life' Stilicho, who slays monsters in order that the world may remain stable, not for his own sake but for the sake of the emperors he serves. The reference to the brother emperors emphasizes that his task is universal, and that in saving the world from Rufinus he has done his duty both to Honorius and, unlike Rufinus, also to Arcadius. Similarly, as we enter the poem proper, this duty and his role as story-world hero will combine, so that he literally holds up the very world:[23]

> qua dignum te laude feram, qui paene ruenti
> lapsuroque tuos umeros obieceris orbi? (*Ruf.* 1.273–74)
>
> How may I praise you worthily, who have cast your shoulders
> beneath a world about to fall headlong?

Rufinus the Monster: Python

By experiencing the poem through the lens of the preface, Claudian's audience is led to accept that Rufinus, in the story-world of the poem into which they step by engaging with the performance (and which the preface makes clear is a (re)performance of the 'real life' world in which they already function), is a monster. Specifically he is Python, a snake-monster who has a universal effect, who poisons the environment around him, drains the sources of goodness, and whose magnitude threatens even the heavens. The choice of the Python myth, with its familiar and wide-reaching connotations, also informs the character of Rufinus more widely than simply the details emphasized in the analysis of the preface, reflecting accounts of gigantomachy, other dragon myths, and underworld monsters from art and literature; these too, therefore, influence the characterization of Rufinus as monster in the rest of the poem.

One of the primary features of the Apollo-Python pairing is the opposition of light and dark. Although Sol also appears widely in Claudian's poems, Apollo retains associations with the sun; Python, on the other hand, has earthly, dark connotations. Traditionally he is born of Gaia, physically making him earth-born.[24] (This also supports his relationship to the giants, on which more below.) As an earth-born monster, he has crossed the boundary from beneath earth's surface, and it is on this plane that

[23] Levy suggests *stabilem servans . . . orbem* may intend an allusion to Atlas which would add to the importance of Stilicho's role and his quasi-divine qualities. Levy 1971: 7. In the same vein, it may recall Hercules, adding to Stilicho's depiction as a hero.

[24] For Python born of Gaia/Terra/Tellus, see Pseudo-Hyginus, *Preface* and *Fabulae* 140; Ovid *Met.* 1.438–40; Statius *Theb.* 1.561–62.