

## » **Medical Knowledge and its ‚Sitz im Leben‘: Body and Horror in Antiquity** ‹

**Claire Bubb**

(Assistant Professor, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World,  
New York University)

### *At the Borders of Horror and Science: The Social Contexts of Roman Dissection*

The notion of human dissection and especially vivisection was horrifying to the ancient Romans, even in a culture where mutilation and violent death were par for the course. Nevertheless, knowledge of the insides of the body held an intellectual fascination to doctors and laymen alike. Roman anatomists reconciled these two facts by practicing comparative anatomy, dissecting monkeys and other mammals as proxies for human structures. In fact, they performed both dissections and vivisections for public edification and entertainment. This paper interrogates the boundaries of this compromise and charts moments where dissectors veer to one direction or the other in their effort to find a balance between underscoring homologies and maintaining emotional distance.

**Sean Coughlin**

(Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic)

### *Recipes for Horror*

The collection known as the Magical Greek Papyri contains many recipes for things like inks, ointments and charms that seem as if they were intended to occasion feelings of horror and revulsion. Not only the ingredients these recipes contain—e.g. from human corpses, from animals by vivisection, from human and animal excrement—, but also the way they are ritually used and the harmful and often violent goals they serve, are horrifying; and, like the later and perhaps more familiar unguents associated with early modern witchcraft, these ingredients, practices and aims seem to encode simultaneously for a variety of social and individual fears and desires. What I want to do in this talk is to take one such horrifying recipe as an example and present it in detail: first, I explore the ingredients, contextualizing them with reference to how they appear in magical and medical texts of the same period; second, I will invite conference members to perform the recipe together, in order to become acquainted through scent, touch and sight with those horrifying properties of the ingredients that exist off the page. The precise recipe will be revealed at the presentation.

**Maria Gerolemou**

(Dr., Research Associate, University of Exeter)

### *Heracles' automatic body: Madness, Horror and Laughter in Euripides' HF*

Important for the understanding of the body in classical antiquity is the notion of automatism; this is often attested in the Hippocratic corpus, and signifies bodily functions that are held responsible for the vitality of the human body, and that, though defined through regularity and repetition (e.g. breathing), elude conscious control. This figure of the automaton in the body, though it resists explanation and it's actually concealed, is detected in cases of tragic madness which exhibit a disconnection between the

mind and body; detached from the intellect, bodily movements seem to be merely mechanical and automatic. In Euripides' *Heracles*, it is clearly stated that by losing your mind you simultaneously lose control over your body or vice versa (HF 865-871). Heracles, madden by Lyssa, is transformed into an automaton: Madness makes his body malleable; specifically, it causes his muscles to contract violently; he is tossing his head, rolling his eyes and cannot control his breath. After his crisis of madness is over he stands in silence (867-71), as if someone has unplugged him (929f.). In v. 931 is stated that "he wasn't he anymore" (ὁ δ' οὐκέθ' αὐτὸς ἦν). Heracles' silence indicates his complete loss of consciousness; he is neither present nor he can perform. Loss of control over the body can be funny, horrific, or both. Indeed, the servants watching Heracles simultaneously laugh and are horrified (950). They laugh over his dissolving limbs credited with independent activity, like an automaton (he dances, he undertakes imaginative travels) and they, simultaneously, fear the possibility of someone losing contact with his own subjectivity; according to the play, the latter can happen anytime and to anyone; after all, Heracles' madness is not caused by his deeds, οὐδὲν ὦν αἴτιος (1310, 1393).

**Lutz Alexander Graumann**  
(Dr. med., Justus-Liebig-University Gießen, University Hospital)

## *Overcoming Horror: Faintness and Medical Agents. Some Tentative Thoughts on Antiquity and Today*

Physicians and of course also their medical assistants in both Antiquity and today were and are confronted from early on with horrific medical scenes: badly suffering, crying and dying patients, strange flows, swells and smells, ugly deformed bodies with congenital or acquired conditions. Especially surgeons are conditioned to act on human conditions that normally no ordinary fellow human being comes up with or even can stand, e.g. strange conditions inside the opened (operated) human body. Thus, overcoming the encounter of medical horror is one of the principles and prerequisites in medical careers. Sometimes, this comparable 'too much' faintness can lead to stress reactions like burn-out in the medical professional. As pediatric surgeon I would like to present some specific cases from both ancient and modern medical context including my own medical career with this question of horrific encounter in mind. Realizing today's knowledge of coping strategies in medical professionals I will draw some conclusions about the possible conduct of ancient doctors and their staff with an anthropological outlook.

**Sophia Luise Häberle**  
(Humboldt Universität, Berlin, Germany)

## *Naming the Monster: A Practice of Forensic Horror in Cicero's Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino*

A tantalizing tale of horror from 80 BC... A man is murdered in a dark alley, and his son stands accused of the most unspeakable crime, parricidium. Young lawyer Marcus Tullius Cicero takes it upon himself to defend an innocent man against a powerful enemy. But has he bitten off more than he can chew? Can he name the true monster without losing his tongue? And, when civil war rages, is anyone really innocent? How can a monster become a monstrum, how can a name be spoken without being proscribed? Will a language of horror be able to express a traumatic truth? Dark omens! Bloody knives! Evil twins! Piles of bodies on the Forum! In his first criminal case, Cicero takes it up with the most terrible monster of all: the parricidal city herself – Rome.

**Lutz Käppel**  
(Prof., Roots Exzellenzcluster, University of Kiel)

## *Roots of Horror: Environment, Bodies, Societies*

**George Kazantzidis**  
(Assistant Professor of Latin Literature, University of Patras) (organizer)

## *Horror and the Body in Early Greek Paradoxography*

Although there is no such thing as ‘horror fiction’ in antiquity, paradoxography is still worth looking at as a distant forerunner of the genre (H. P. Lovecraft, whose work had a tremendous impact on our modern concept of horror, appropriately includes a significant reference to Phlegon of Tralles in his essay ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, published in 1927). Thaumata/thaumasia is a complex term: it can be used to indicate wonder and informed admiration but it can also be found in contexts of sheer mental confusion and blind terror (see especially Aesch. Eum. 34-54). The aim of this paper is to collect and discuss ‘marvellous’ stories from early Greek paradoxographical collections, in which the human body is seen to interact with the natural wonders around it in ways that usually result in gruesome forms of incapacitation and death. The world of paradox remains in essence an inhospitable landscape; it is a world in which spatial and conceptual boundaries have been breached, often at the cost of exposing us to new, unimaginable dangers. In this context, I will focus my attention on how the mental pleasure of discovering bizarre facts about nature goes hand in hand with an increasing awareness of our vulnerability as humans; I will subsequently discuss how the blend of thrill and extreme uneasiness that shapes our encounter with the semi-fictional/semi-real ‘facts’ of paradoxography might help to open a window on ancient notions of the horrific.

**Dunstan Lowe**  
(Dr., Lecturer, Kent University)

## *Hot and Cold Blood in Lucan’s Civil War*

War and violence always feature in classical epic, but Lucan’s Civil War is exceptionally full of the imagery of bodies undergoing horrific trauma. This occurs both in the narrative and in metaphors, and has been convincingly read as political and metapoetic allegory (Bartsch 1997, Henderson 1998, Dinter 2012). I propose to expand this critical conversation to include blood, the liquid form of corporeal transgression. This adds something distinctive to both political and metapoetic readings, especially in the important distinction between vital, vigorous blood (sanguis, cruor) and its seeping, sickly opposite (sanies, tabes). The first of these often represents traditional Roman bravery and stamina (virtus and vis), converted by violence into fuel for Caesar’s unstoppable energy. The second represents vitality turned to decay, in moments of horror and disgust that reflect a more profound dread about the Rome of the text.

**Nick Lowe**  
(Dr., Reader, Royal Holloway University of London)

## *A Terrible History of Classical Horror*

Modern horror theory has been comfortable with claiming that the modern transmedial genre which emerges under that name in the 1950s has classical and early modern ancestors, and that genre-historical narratives which locate its modern origins in the gothic risk erasing the debt to classical antecedents. But the examples habitually cited, from Odyssean monsters to Roman ghost stories, are a haphazard selection, with little sense of literary-historical through line or the continuity of surrounding ancient critical discourse. There is in fact a rich tradition of ancient horror theory and poetics, which is strongly aligned with a counter-Aristotelian strand in the history and poetics of tragedy that culminates in, and is transmitted to posterity through, the distinctive Senecan model in which cosmic and somatic horror are integrated in a universal moral physics. Attention to the high- and low-cultural reaches of this tradition

(which culminate respectively in Senecan tragedy and Lucian's Philopseudes), together with consideration of the Greek and Latin lexicon of horror terms, can not only indicate the lines on which a history of classical horror might be written, but can shed important transhistorical light on key questions in present-day horror studies, including the relationship to the historically constructed post-Romantic categories of the sublime, the grotesque, and the uncanny; the relationship between somatic and supernatural horror; and the interaction between cognitive and affective dimensions of response.

**Glenn Most**  
(Prof., Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa/Chicago)

### *The Horrific Body in Sophocles*

More even than the other two great Athenian tragedians, Sophocles stages the suffering human body so drastically and so effectively as to produce profound horror in the other characters, the chorus, and presumably the audience. This article discusses the mechanisms and possible motivations for this tragic theme and its relation to contemporary medical practice and theory, focusing on the Trachinians and Philoctetes but with reference to the other tragedies as well.

**Michael Puett**  
(Harvard University, Cambridge, USA)

### *Demon Hordes and the Coming Apocalypse: The Limits of the Human in Chinese Late Antiquity*

This talk will take its point of departure from moments in Chinese late antiquity when ritual practices aimed at domesticating ghosts were seen to be failing – when the ghosts were seen as becoming so numerous and so dangerous as to overwhelm all human attempts to control them. This point of departure will allow a reflection on the ways that ghosts and humans were understood at the time and will help to explain the sense of horror that ghosts have had in the Chinese tradition.

**Evina Sistikou**  
(Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

### *The Visceral Thrills of Tragedy: Flesh, Blood and Guts Off and On the Tragic Stage*

The paper focuses on passages from all three tragedians that depict bodies disintegrating into their components (flesh, blood and guts), being mutilated or dismembered, bodies melting after poisoning or suffering extreme physical pathos—what I shall call ‘the horrific bodies’. Tragedy abounds with such bodies, either in explicit descriptions or integrated into metaphoric language and imagery; however, it is especially in the messenger speeches that the most extreme representations of horrific bodies can be found. In addition to the verbal representations, tragedy also exploited a visual means to put on display horrific bodies in the theater, i.e. the ekkyklema. The paper argues that Greek tragedy thus explored a dual way of steering the audience's attention towards the horrific body, a verbal and a visual, by first hinting at the horrific bodies offstage and then revealing them onstage. As is the case with modern horror too, the spectator in the ancient theatre was initially called to imagine the horror through words and then to experience it through vision. Rather than attempting to give definite answers, the paper poses questions regarding the effect of horror on ancient spectators: Did gore and graphic violence hold a central place in Greek theater? Was horror an effect sought after by the tragedians? How does modern horror relate to the ‘pity-and-fear’ theory introduced by Aristotle? Did the social and cultural contexts, the ‘Sitz im Leben’, of the ancient theater encourage the engagement with horror? Did horror trigger a pleasurable response in ancient audiences?

**Alessandro Schiesaro**  
(University of Manchester, UK)

## *Apocalypse: Horror and Divine Pleasure*

The ‘apocalyptic sublime’ represents a distinctive strand in the reception of the classical sublime in modern culture. This form of the sublime shares in the linguistic ambiguity of the term ‘apocalypse’, thus straddling the line between the revelatory and the catastrophic. A key element in its development is to be found in Lucretius’ bold extension of the sublime to the revelation of a varied set of fundamental material truths in both space and time, and his linking it with horror. Horror is defined as a physical experience of boundlessness and fragility which is inextricably connected, he explains, with pleasure (both cognitive and, we must infer, physical), and anticipates some of the key elements of the modern ‘architectural sublime’, while at the same time providing an unusual form of embodied aesthetic experience.

**Rodrigo Sigala**  
(Dr., University of Tübingen; independent)

## *The Thrilling Forces behind Horrific Experiences: A Neuroscientific Approach*

Phenomena perceived to be horrific can give rise to a strong fascination and may exert intense attraction over many people from different backgrounds and cultures. Characters perceived as (physically and morally) monstrous can become fulcrums of creative endeavors; fear and pain, while being negative experiences, are also primitive instinctual reactions which offer a prominent ethological advantage for adaptation and survival. Although the attraction towards supernatural phenomena and horrific experiences has variously emerged to be rooted in scientific facts, their relation and interactions among themselves are not commonly considered. In this talk I propose to approach this human trait, the attraction to horrific phenomena in the multidisciplinary perspective of the neurosciences, with a focus on the nervous system, on evolutionary aspects, and on perceptual mechanisms. By reviewing acquired scientific findings such as those related to supernormal stimuli, the fight-or-flight reaction, the concept of ‘hopeful-monsters’ or the differential susceptibility hypothesis, I shall shed some light over the neuroscientific mechanisms underlying human fascination and attraction to horrific experiences.

**Dimos Spatharas**  
(University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece)

## *Enargeia, Disgust and Visceral Abhorrence*

In this paper, I propose to explore the ways in which enactive understandings of enargeia enhance emotional scripts of horror, I will emphasize the implications of disgust, a particularly visceral emotion, for ancient scripts of phrike and audiences’ aesthetic responses to narratives so designed as to cause knee jerk feelings.

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For more information regarding the event please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/65h3sa2h>  
(Fieldwork and Activities of the Cluster ROOTS)