

BOOK REVIEW

The Epic Gaze: Vision, Gender and Narrative in Ancient Epic. By HELEN LOVATT. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. x + 414. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-1-107-01611-8.

This stimulating book explores how characteristic types of viewing in epic construct or undermine power and authority both within the narratives of specific poems and within the generic discourse more broadly. As Lovatt's use of the term "the gaze" suggests, psychoanalytic and feminist film theories, narratology, and ancient theories of vision inform her analysis throughout, with positive results. Lovatt successfully incorporates an impressive number of works into her discussion from Homer to Nonnus, with Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Silius Italicus, Statius' *Thebaid*, and Valerius Flaccus returned to repeatedly. In addition, specific chapters have in depth discussions of Lucan, Nonnus, Lucretius, Apollonius, and Quintus Smyrnaeus. It is beyond the scope of this review to mention every text discussed in every chapter, reflecting Lovatt's deep engagement with all these texts. Instead, I will focus on each chapter's main arguments.

In the introductory first chapter Lovatt explains her theoretical framework and summarizes subsequent chapters. "The gaze" refers to the reciprocal act of looking and being looked at, and the power structures revealed therein, such as in Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory approach of the active male gaze that objectifies the passive female, or as in Lacanian terms of the self and the ultimately unknowable other.

In the second chapter, "The Divine Gaze," Lovatt focuses on how the act of viewing from on high establishes the gods' authority within epic and as such mediates between narrator and external audience. Lovatt then connects the relationship between the divine gaze—power—to gender through a discussion of divine rape.

Once the authoritative role of the divine has been laid out, in the next chapter, "The Mortal Gaze," Lovatt considers the gods' "passive visual power and mortal attempts to appropriate the divine gaze" (78). Chapter 3 explores the ways that mortal characters and epic narrators have moments of seeing the world from the

point of view of the gods, how this can be used to highlight the limits of their mortality, and how the philosopher can assume the divine gaze to replace the gods in epic. The chapter concludes with a reading of Caesar's and Pompey's relationships to the divine gaze and the philosopher's gaze in Lucan.

After showing how humans draw upon the divine gaze, Lovatt turns to the figure that bridges human and divine, the prophet. In chapter 4, "The Prophetic Gaze," Lovatt considers the prophetic gaze's power and limits. The prophet has insight into the divine but the insight's authenticity and therefore power are marginalized through the physical manifestations of the price the prophets paid for their insights: the blind and socially excluded male prophet and the frenzied, sexually violated female prophet.

Once the divine, prophetic, and passive female gazes have been introduced, in "Ecphrasis and the Other" (chapter 5) Lovatt assesses how the different types of ecphrasis connect to these gazes and viewing within epic more generally. Lovatt demonstrates that shields tend to share in the divine gaze, while cloaks tend to share in the female, erotic gaze. Next, Lovatt examines how several texts complicate this relationship to reveal the connection between power and powerlessness, viewing and being viewed and women and the defeated Other. Finally, Lovatt shows that the assaultive gaze of the object is dramatized through its gleam or emitted light, causing the viewer to flee or be paralyzed in fear. The gleam is the object's gaze and the fear it produces in others signifies the hero's power.

Building on the previous chapter's discussion of the Other, "The Female Gaze" considers how the female gaze participates in the Other while potentially challenging the power structures of the text. Like objects of ecphrasis, women in epic are both objects of others' gaze and gaze back. Lovatt focuses her discussion on three topics: dreams, viewing from the walls (including a brief discussion of Propertius Book 4), and lamentation. The chapter closes with an illuminating discussion of how Silius' Hannibal is feminized through these three mechanisms.

Chapter 7, "Heroic Bodies on Display," draws upon the discussion of women as both objects and viewers to treat the objectification of the heroic body. Lovatt productively incorporates film theory on fetishism and masochism into her analysis to address how the narrative focus on anatomical violence creates pleasure in the reader through alternating the gaze between the attacker and the victim. Finally, Lovatt examines how Camilla and Penthesilea complicate the heroic body on display by blending traditional epic gender roles.

Continuing her focus on the hero, in "The Assaultive Gaze" (chapter 8) Lovatt shows how the poetics of epic draw attention to heroes' actions through

their gazes. Using ancient theories of how the eyes emit and receive physical matter, Lovatt argues that the heroic gaze itself is harmful: the eyes participate in the attack because they are sites of both power and vulnerability.

In the final chapter, "Fixing It for Good: Medusa and Monumentality," Lovatt illustrates the tensions within epic between male and female viewing by analyzing Perseus and Medusa in epic. In conclusion, Lovatt argues that the visual monumentalization of death in Lucan, Homer and the *Posthomeric* reflects the genre's conception of itself as a monument. This concluding discussion neatly ties together the relationship between gaze, power, and genre.

This brief overview cannot do justice to Lovatt's many stimulating and challenging insights. Advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars working on epic, vision and viewing in classical literature, literary representations of gender, literary genre, or applying film theory to classical literature are sure to benefit from this engaging book.

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