

## XXI. The Vocabulary of Fear in Latin Epic Poetry

L. A. MACKAY

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

This study investigates some aspects of the poetic technique and emotional processes of Vergil, Lucan, and Statius by an examination of the frequency, concentration, and diversity of their references to fear, and their choice of words. Ovid is added for comparison as an example of extended non-epic narrative verse. The kinship of epic and tragedy suggested pity and fear as themes for investigation. Pity was omitted, partly in the interests of concentration, partly because fear is more adequately reflected in the vocabulary of the Latin hexameter, which cannot call a man *misericors*, or refer to his *misericordia*. The vocabulary of fear, on the contrary, is reasonably rich.

In the *Aeneid*, the *Pharsalia*, the *Thebaid*, and the *Metamorphoses*, 59 words were recognised as evoking the idea of fear, in a total of 1,731 occurrences. Borderline cases (in such words as *horreo*, *tremo*, etc.) make it impossible to regard the totals as absolutely precise, but the margin of error is not great enough to be significant.

In 9,896 lines of text, Vergil has 333 occurrences, using 38 words; Lucan in 8,060 lines has 408 occurrences, using 30 words; Statius in 9,748 lines has 538 occurrences, using 44 words; Ovid in 11,995 lines has 452 occurrences, using 43 words. Total vocabulary used bears no simple relation to total words used; it may be noted however that in fewer lines Statius uses more different words than Vergil, and Lucan's noticeably lower number may indicate a comparative paucity of vocabulary; but to demonstrate this would require a fuller study in other fields.

Since the use of words in this particular category is a matter of the poet's choice, not of statistical probability, the total number of occurrences, though not the number of different words used by each poet, may be reduced to an equivalent basis. How much more present fear was to the minds of the Silver Latin poets is evident from the fact that for an equivalent number of lines, Lucan's figure would be 500, Statius' 546, as against Vergil's 333 and Ovid's 373.

For poetic technique, gross figures are less revealing than distribution. Since the books differ considerably in length, their saturation may be better expressed by ratio per thousand lines than by brute totals. For ease of comparison, the fifth book of the *Aeneid* has been assigned an arbitrary figure of 10; on this basis the works studied run as follows, to the nearest whole number:

<i>Aen.</i>	21	41	36	31	10	33	27	37	39	15	29	37
<i>Phars.</i>	55	43	47	42	66	45	46	43	27	29		
<i>Theb.</i>	46	61	56	45	35	38	59	37	48	55	49	54
<i>Metam.</i>	42	39	30	34	33	33	30	29	43	39	27	15 33 37 27

On the same basis, the averages are: *Aen.* 29, *Phars.* 44, *Theb.* 48, *Metam.* 33. It will be noticed that in the *Metamorphoses*, as might be expected in a collection of separate stories, the ratio varies comparatively little from the average, with the surprising exception of Book 12. Why this book, which tells the stories of Iphigenia, Cygnus, Caeneus, the Centaurs and Lapiths, should fall so far below the average, I cannot explain. It will be noticed also that whereas Vergil's curve shows two troughs of relaxation, in Book 5 and Book 10, with the crests of 2 and 9 almost four times the height of the lowest trough, Lucan rises to a crest in Book 5, trailing off at the end to a trough from which perhaps he would have risen if he had completed the work; as it stands, the crest is only about two and a half times the height of the trough. Statius never really relaxes at all; his greatest frequency is less than twice his least. Like Vergil, he rises to a peak in his second book, and drops off in his fifth, precisely where Lucan intensifies; but his last six books do not at all reproduce the Vergilian pattern. For those who are interested in such things, the coefficients of variation have been worked out as follows: Vergil 31.8, Lucan 24.3, Statius 17.0, Ovid 21.3. As might be expected, Vergil secures variety in saturation by leaving out, Lucan by cramming more in.

Examination of the spaces between consecutive references shows, as might be expected, considerable differences in dispersion and concentration. If the spaces are divided into four groups, 0-4, 5-14, 15-34, 35+, where 0=two or more fear-words in the same line, the figures for the four works, expressed as percentages, are:

<i>Aen.</i>	24	23	26	27
<i>Phars.</i>	34	28	22	16
<i>Theb.</i>	30	28	26	16
<i>Metam.</i>	32	21	22	25

That is, the other three are distinctly more inclined than Vergil to reinforce one word of fear with another, or others, in close proximity, and Lucan and Statius are both more inclined than Vergil or Ovid to let no long time go by without an allusion to fear. Ovid, as might be expected, is particularly prone to reinforcement in the same line; he does it 39 times, Statius 29, Lucan 27, Vergil 17. Ovid in fact manages to get four references into one line: *sit timor et pavida trepidet formidine pectus* (*Metam.* 2.66). Vergil does not use this reinforcement at all in the first, third, seventh, tenth, or eleventh books, but he uses it four times in eight, one of the most fear-ridden books. Lucan is most inclined to reinforcement in succeeding lines; he uses this device 51 times. Statius runs him close with 46, Ovid and Vergil trail with 31 and 25 respectively.

The gaps in Vergil run from 0 to 230, in Lucan from 0 to 319, in Statius to 116, in Ovid to 271. The great gap in Lucan comes in the tenth book, with the feast of Caesar and Cleopatra, and the digression on the Nile; his next largest gap, 214, comes in the latter part of the third book, where he pays the desperate resistance of the Massiliots the compliment of omitting all reference to fear. Lucan has nine gaps of 100 lines or more. Vergil's largest gap is in the races of Book Five; one almost as large, 223 as compared with 230 lines, comes at the end of Book Ten, encompassing Aeneas' duel with Mezentius; indeed this gap is closed only by a negation of fear: *quid me, saevissime, terres? . . . nec mortem horremus* (*Aen.* 10. 878-80). It is an interesting aspect of Vergil's remarkable tribute to the *contemptor deorum*. Vergil has 15 gaps of 100 lines or more. Statius, keeping a more even pulse or pressure of fear, has only one gap of more than 100 lines. Ovid has 21.

The words investigated as suggestive of fear are: *dirus, formido, horreo, metuo, palleo, paveo, periculum, terreo, timeo, tremo, trepido, vereor*, and their derivatives. Numbers following a word indicate the frequency of its appearance in the previously mentioned works of Vergil, Lucan, Statius, Ovid, in that order. The *metuo* group is a favorite with all; otherwise Vergil particularly favors *horreo* and *terreo*, Lucan *timeo* and *paveo*, Statius *horreo* and *timeo*,

Ovid *timeo* and *terreo*. In several groups there is, as might be expected, marked correspondence between Statius and Vergil, Lucan and Ovid.

*dirus*: 33 37 51 27

The associations of this word in a given passage may be either secular or supernatural. In Vergil and Ovid the former sense predominates (Vergil, 20:13, Ovid, 16:11). Already in Lucan the sense of merely "dreadful" begins to yield ground before that of "awful, uncanny, ominous, accursed" (20:17), and in Statius the latter clearly predominates (21:30).

*formido* (vb.): 1 0 10 1; (n.) 19 6 9 5; —*abilis*: 0 0  
3 3

GROUP TOTALS: 20 6 22 9

In his free use of the verb, Statius is exceptional. The noun, which appears almost always in the ablative, is used by Vergil almost as often as by all the other three together. One of his 19 uses escapes from the position after the hephthemimeral caesura to the penthemimeral; of Lucan's six, none escape; of Statius' nine, two escape, and two of Ovid's five.

*horreo*: 30 9 42 17; —*esco*: 4 0 5 0; *ex-* 1 0 0 1;  
*in-* 0 0 1 0; *per-* 0 0 0 2; *horrifico*: 1 0 0 0

*horror*: 7 6 28 3

*horribilis*: 1 0 0 0; —*idus*: 6 1 13 2; —*ifer*: 1 0 0 1;  
—*ificus*: 3 0 1 0; —*isonus*: 2 1 0 0

GROUP TOTALS: 56 17 90 26

Only some uses of the words in this group carry the implication of fear. Vergil has also 14 uses in which physical description alone is involved, or some emotion other than fear, e.g. anger; Statius has 12, Ovid 5. Lucan ignores all other forms of the verb; Vergil has *horrescit seges*, *inhorrui unda* (twice), *inhorrui armos* (*aper*); Statius has one physical use of *exhorrui*, two of *inhorrui*; Ovid two of *horrescere*, one of *perhorrui*. The noun Statius uses almost twice as often as the other three together; he and Lucan have each one purely descriptive use. Vergil uses the adjectives somewhat more freely than the others do; he has also eight purely descriptive uses of *horridus*, Lucan has two, Statius seven, Ovid

four. Statius clearly has a particular liking for this group; a total of 90 uses against Vergil's 56, Lucan's 17. Here as elsewhere it may be noticed how little Lucan is inclined to evoke the idea by concomitant physical manifestations. Ovid is temperate. Statius follows and goes beyond Vergil's exploitation of physical symptoms.

*metuo*: 11 36 15 29

*metus*: 39 37 52 42

GROUP TOTALS 50 73 67 71

Lucan appears to be happier with this more mental verb; Statius uses it only in the present participle and the gerundive. Lucan uses verb and noun almost equally; the others use the noun much more freely. The noun is indeed a popular work-horse with all four, considerably more popular than *timor* (170 uses in all against 97).

*palleo*: 0 1 15 10; *-esco*: 0 0 0 1; *ex-* 0 0 1 3

*pallor*: 0 3 5 3

*pallidus*: 0 0 4 2

GROUP TOTALS: 0 4 25 19

This group shows again the fondness of Statius for indicating emotion by physical concomitants. In the other poets, these words are used chiefly of things naturally bloodless, or of human beings or spirits as a consequence, accompaniment, or portent of death. *Palleo* is so used by Vergil six times, by Lucan nine times, by Statius sixteen, by Ovid ten. Statius has *pallesco* once in this sense, Lucan and Ovid *expallesco* once each. Vergil uses *pallor* twice, *pallidus* six times, Lucan *pallor* five, *pallidus* six, Statius *pallor* seven times, *pallidus* twice, Ovid *pallor* eight times, *pallidus* twice, in these non-timorous senses.

*paveo*: 0 21 16 22; *-esco*: 0 0 1 0; *ex-* 0 3 10 0

*pavito*: 3 0 0 0; *pavefacio*: 0 0 0 3

*pavor*: 4 11 7 5

*pavidus*: 9 22 3 12

GROUP TOTALS: 16 57 37 42

Why Vergil apparently avoided this group, I cannot hazard a

guess, nor why Statius, inverting Vergil's practice, uses the verbs much more freely than the adjective. Lucan is more consistent, and his fairly copious use fits in with the pattern of preferring words of mental activity. Ovid's considerable use seems to show that the difference is personal, not a matter of chronological fashion. *Pavor* in *Aen.* 5.38 and *pavidus* in *Aen.* 5.575 indicate merely excitement.

*periculum*: 25 16 5 19

This, though not precisely a fear-word, is so closely connected with occasions of fear as to justify passing reference. The marked infrequency in Statius of a fairly frequent Vergilian word is odd. Vergil uses it only in the *Aeneid*, where it appears ten times in the fifth foot (n. pl.) fifteen times, shortened, in the sixth foot of the verse. Lucan seems to disapprove of the shortening; he has it only twice, both times with reference to Cato, in the ninth book (but Cato also uses *pericula* twice). Statius disdains the word (short form three times); Ovid comes closer to Vergil's pattern with seven short.

*terreo*: 24 10 13 36; *abs-* 0 2 0 0; *con-* 4 3 0 1  
*ex-* 0 0 5 4; *per-* 1 0 1 4; *pro-* (?) 0 0 1 0  
*territo*: 4 1 5 0; *terrifico*: 1 0 1 0  
*terror*: 8 11 13 7  
*terribilis*: 9 7 9 11; *-ificus*: 3 1 5 1

GROUP TOTALS: 54 35 53 64

Lucan falls off a little here; but there is not much that calls for explicit comment, except that all these poets apparently considered *terribilis* a particularly effective word. Except for one Ennian imitation in Vergil, it invariably begins a verse in Vergil, Lucan, and Statius; Ovid, however, four times relegates it to the second foot. This is not merely a question of metrical pattern; *terrificus* in Vergil appears in the first, second, or third foot, in Lucan in the second, in Statius four times in the second, once in the first. *Horribilis* in Vergil's one use appears in the second foot, *horrificus* twice in the first, once in the third; the only appearances of *horrificus* in Lucan and Statius are in the second foot. In all these poets, incidentally, adjectives in *-ificus* have a strong affinity for situations involving the supernatural.

*timeo*: 15 83 43 54; *extimesco*: 1 1 2 4;  
*per-* 0 0 0 7  
*timor*: 12 23 31 31  
*timidus*: 1 2 16 21

GROUP TOTALS: 29 109 92 117

Vergil perhaps thought this word too colorless and ordinary, even prosaic. Was that why Lucan preferred it? At any rate, it indicates forcibly his disregard of sensuous effects and pre-occupation with meaning; "what he's said, he'll say again, hard facts, like biscuits." But why he should agree with Vergil in disdaining the adjective, which Ovid and Statius found quite usable, I cannot explain.

*tremo*: 8 11 17 11; *-esco*: 3 0 6 1; *con-* 0 0 0 1;  
*in-* 0 0 1 2  
*tremefacio*: 4 0 1 0  
*tremor*: 5 0 2 4  
*tremibundus*: 0 0 1 0; *tremulus*: 0 0 0 3

GROUP TOTALS: 20 11 28 22

These words are more often used of purely physical commotion than with any reference to fear. For *tremo*, for example, in this sense the figures are: 15 7 18 9. Vergil also has nine uses of four derivative verbs, Statius five, Ovid five. For *tremor* in the purely physical sense the figures are 0 1 4 4; for *tremibundus* 1 0 2 1; for *tremulus* 3 6 3 8. We may conclude therefore that when these words were used to convey fear, the image was strongly felt.

*trepido*: 7 10 7 14  
*trepidus*: 19 23 59 15

GROUP TOTALS: 26 33 66 29

In this group too a good number of instances are purely physical, 13 altogether in the verb, 21 in the adjective (divided 7 4 8 2). Statius runs wild on this adjective, in keeping with his liking for physical concomitants. *Intrepidus*, incidentally, is not used at all by Vergil, five times by Lucan, twice by Statius, twice by Ovid.

*vereor*: 4 10 2 7

Vergil uses this verb only in the sense of "fear"; Lucan has also five uses, Statius fourteen, in which the predominant sense is

“respect, revere”; Ovid has this sense twice. A wider investigation would be needed to determine whether this indicates, as it suggests, a shift in the commonly accepted shade of meaning.

In one stock rhetorical device, the use of the amplificatory plural, there seems to be a mild increase from Golden to Silver Latin. Expressed as a ratio of amplificatory plurals to total uses, the figures are:

<i>metus</i>	5:39	11:37	19:52	6:42
<i>pavor</i>	0:4	1:11	2:7	0:5
<i>terror</i>	4:8	1:11	2:13	0:7
<i>timor</i>	1:12	3:23	5:31	1:31

or, roughly, for Vergil, about one in six, Lucan one in five, Statius a little more than one in four, Ovid only one in twelve.

As the accompanying table shows, all four poets in conveying this emotion depend chiefly on verbs, least on adjectives (adverbs are hardly used at all). Reliance on the verb is most marked in Ovid and Lucan; Vergil and Statius come closer to an even distribution, but Vergil is clearly ahead in the use of nouns, and Statius is rather more adjectival than the others. (Participles were counted as verbs; something might be said for counting them also as adjectives, or giving them half-value in either category.)

	Vergil	Lucan	Statius	Ovid
Verb	127	201	221	235
Noun	119	113	152	119
Adjective	87	94	165	98

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL USE (ROUGHLY)

Verb	38	49	41	52
Noun	36	28	28	26
Adjective	26	23	31	22

Many of the differences here noted appear to be the result of differences in personal temperament and talent. Vergil emerges, as might be expected, at once the most temperate and the most varied. If we set together the writer of national epic and the teller of Greek tales from the earlier period, against the writer of national epic and the teller of Greek tales from the later period, the obsessive dominance of fear in the later writers is very marked.



Whether this reflects a change in the temper of the time, or a stage in rhetorical elaboration, can hardly be determined without more investigation in this and other areas of expression.

SOURCES USED

P. Vergili Maronis *Opera*, ed. F. A. Hirtzel (Oxford n.d.); M. Annaei Lucani *Belli civilis libri decem*, ed. A. E. Housman (Oxford 1926); P. Papini Stati *Thebais*, ed. A. Klotz (Leipzig 1908); P. Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, ed. R. Ehwald (Leipzig 1915); M. N. Wetmore, *Index verborum Vergilianus* (New Haven 1930); Deferrari, Fanning, Sullivan, *A Concordance of Lucan* (Washington 1940); Deferrari, Eagan, *A Concordance of Statius* (Washington 1942); Deferrari, Barry, McGuire, *A Concordance of Ovid* (Washington 1939).