

Introduction

Ancient epic about war is a genre often viewed as hypermasculine. Many modern scholars regard it as exemplifying the kind of poetry that was not only written by men, for men and about men, but that also actively constructed models and standards of masculinity for its audience.¹ These ideals included both military courage and civic leadership. The Homeric hero was “a speaker of words and doer of deeds”—he was one among his peers but at the same time outstanding in his virtue; “the first of the Achaeans”.² *Roman* war epic, then, while it drew heavily on the Homeric and the Hellenistic models of masculinity, was not only a continuation of this tradition, but also a reformulation and an update of the ideals of manliness, designed particularly for the needs of an empire.³ From Virgil to the Flavians, Roman epic poets strove to establish a new, imperial identity based on the ideals of masculinity—to construct a model of *Romanitas*⁴ based on manly *virtus*.⁵ War as a subject matter provided prolific material for the discussion of these themes, since it was a milieu where the concepts of manliness and patriotism interrelated. War was a business of men and a business of Rome, a device through which ‘male’ and ‘Roman’ were established as the dominating ideals in the world and as central to epic discourse.⁶

In a genre where men and masculinity are such crucial themes, a closer look at women and femininity, in comparison, can reveal something crucial about the ideological frameworks of the poems. The Roman war epics are, as it has

1 See Arthur 1981, 24–26; Nugent 1994, 179; Keith 1999, 214; Keith 2000, 2–3, 8–35; Foley 2005, 105; Syed 2005, 13–19; Skempis & Ziogas 2009, 238–240.

2 Klooster 2018, 67; Martin 1989, 22–25, 92; Nagy 2013, 26–28.

3 For further discussion of the variations of the above-mentioned Homeric models in Flavian war epic, see Pyy 2018a, 200–212.

4 The concept of *Romanitas* does not exist in the sources of the early Principate; the first surviving mention can be found in Tertullian's *De pallio* 4.1. In the study of Roman imperial literature, the concept is often used to discuss literary construction of identities; Antony Augoustakis, for example, uses it as an all-encompassing concept for the Roman ideals *virtus*, *pietas* and *fides*, and William Dominik uses it to refer to the idea of Roman-ness that is related to the “customs and institutions of the Romans”. Augoustakis 2010, 8, n. 18; Dominik 2003, 474, n. 8. For further discussion, see Kramer 1998, 81–82. *Romanitas* is applied to the study of epic, e.g., in Burck 1981, 633–645; Galinsky 1981; Dewar 2003; Syed 2005, 194–223 and Spentzou 2008.

5 Keith 2000, 5–35; Syed 2005, 194–223; van Nortwick 2013, 146–149.

6 For further discussion, see Syed 2005, e.g., 116–135.

been widely acknowledged, full of complex and intriguing female characters whose role is not limited to observing the male action, but who also participate in the action in various ways. Despite the visible role of women in epic, in the long tradition of research on Roman epic, female characters have almost invariably been labeled as ‘marginal’ to the teleological, heroic and patriotic drive of the poem, or as opposed to it. This book was born out my curiosity in the face of this marginality—it is an attempt to clarify and scrutinise what it actually means to be marginal in the epic narrative, and how this narrative position is constructed. In the chapters that follow, I aim to look beyond the binary oppositions and juxtapositions that are characteristic of gender-focused readings of war epic. Instead, my purpose is to dig deeper into the grey area between the supposedly male and female roles and functions in war epic. In this way, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics of these poems—and to scrutinise to what extent gendered subjectivity is actually a factor in the ideological frameworks and the narrative techniques of imperial epic. The question is: is the alleged male vantage point of war epic trite but true—or just trite? How do gender and ethnicity as components of identity complement each other in the Roman epics’ construction of Roman-ness and otherness? Is there a noticeable change or continuity in the way the imperial war epics utilise gender in their narrative strategies?

Chronologically, this study covers roughly the first century of the Principate, from the beginning of Augustus’ reign to the death of Domitian in 96 CE. This period of time is characterised, on the one hand, by the aftermath of civil struggles and on the other, by the strengthening of the Roman imperial dominion on three continents. This means that these decades can be considered crucial to the development of ideas concerning *Romanitas*, and to the formation of imperial ideology. Notably, the first century of the Principate was also a particularly productive time in the field of epic poetry, since all of the six surviving Roman war epics date to this period of time: Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Statius’ *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*,⁷ Silius Italicus’ *Punica* and Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*.⁸ These works are the main sources for this study,

7 This fragmentary poem includes only two books, the second of which is incomplete. The prevailing opinion among scholars is that the work was left unfinished by the poet. See, e.g., Aricò 1986; Heslin 2005; 57–58.

8 The fragmentary state of surviving poetry earlier than the Augustan period means that our knowledge of pre-Virgilian war epics is relatively incomplete. Marks lists seventy-eight Roman epics, dating from the mid-to-late third century BCE to the late second century CE: twenty-four of these date to the Republican period, and nothing at all survives of the majority of them. Marks 2010, 200–205.

and together, they form a subspecies of Roman epic that is often referred to as ‘war-centred epic’ or simply ‘war epic’.⁹

It is irrefutable that the borders of this group are somewhat unstable and open for discussion. Ovid’s membership in this category, for instance, is a matter that could be, and has been, much disputed. In one sense, I will include Ovid’s poetry throughout the book, since many comparisons to his epic are unavoidable and genuinely useful to my understanding of the genre in general. I have, however, decided to leave the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* out of the primary source material, mainly for reasons related to the narrative structure of these works. Although he was one of the most influential epic poets of the Principate, Ovid deliberately distanced himself from the tradition of Roman war-centred epic—that is, from the structural pattern where the narrative follows a coherent plotline book by book in a chronological order. As a highly self-conscious poet, he avoided competition with Virgil’s canonical work,¹⁰ and generated a new kind of epic that was both complementary to and, at times, subtly ironic towards post-Homeric war epic.¹¹ Arguably, Ovid can with good reason be considered the greatest postmodernist of antiquity, and in this, he differs from the continuum of Roman war-centred epic (Virgil-Lucan-Statius-Valerius Flaccus-Silius Italicus)—a tradition that could be described as forming one (more or less coherent) master narrative, ‘a great story’ within which individual works complete each other in an ongoing intertextual play.¹²

This intra- and intertextual discourse can be considered as one of the most defining characteristics of the genre. What marks the Roman imperial war epics is the poets’ self-aware pursuit of aligning themselves with the historical predecessors of the genre—the lofty names of Homer, Naevius and Ennius represen-

9 ‘National’, ‘heroic’, or ‘narrative’ or ‘historical’ are also sometimes used as epithets for this particular type of epic poetry, depending on whether the reader chooses to lay the emphasis on the form or on the (ideological) content of the poem. Hardie 2007, 91–94; Kennedy 1997; Toll 1997, 34 n. 1. ‘Heroic epic’ derives from *carmen heroum*, used, e.g., in Prop. 3.3.15–16; Ov. *Tr.* 4.10.47–48; Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.5. Boyle 1993, 2–3, 16 n. 2; von Albrecht 1999, 81; Syed 2005, 18, 166.

10 Classen 2002, 22–24.

11 For further discussion, see Hardie 1990, *passim*; Hardie 1993, 105–108; Baldo 1995, *passim*; Smith 1997, 16; Hinds 1998, 104–107; Keith 2002, 236–245; Papaioannou 2005, 1–3; Jenkyns 2005, 570–571; O’Hara 2007, 104–130.

12 This is not to claim that Ovid’s poetry (not only his epic, but his elegy too) did not belong to the intertextual tradition of Roman epic: in particular, the strong influence of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Amores* on Statius’ epic style has been pointed out several times. However, the structural differences in the narrative tradition clearly set these works apart from the linear and teleological tradition of war-centred epic. For further analysis, see Davis 2006; Spentzou 2003; Heslin 2005.

ted a literary tradition that the epic poets of the Principate longed to become part of.¹³ Although the works composed under the Principate naturally responded to different cultural needs than their Homeric, Hellenistic or Republican models, the tradition weighs heavily on them and is reflected in various stylistic details.¹⁴ This allusive interplay that marks the genre is one of the things I will be focusing on throughout this study. I believe that by paying attention to the poetic interaction between the Roman war epics and to the development of the genre from Virgil to the Flavian poets, crucial insights can be gleaned about the role of epic in the construction of Roman-ness, and about the ways in which gender functioned in this process.

Another feature that marks all Roman war epics from the Principate is their strong investment in the theme of civil war. The *Aeneid* was composed in the 20s BCE, after the turbulent decades of the civil wars, and the collective memory of the destruction was still fresh when Lucan wrote the *Pharsalia* in the early 60s CE. As for the Flavian poets, the confusion of the years 68 and 69 following the death of Nero created an atmosphere of civil discord, insecurity and chaos that is comparable to a civil war. All in all, it is not in the least surprising that all the epics of the early Principate are deeply involved in the process of restoration and healing—of reconstructing cultural identity and fashioning a common value system for a people torn apart by war or civil struggle.¹⁵ In civil war, the dissolving of unity—of ‘the collective sense of the self’—is far more complete than when the threat to community comes from the outside. It is a situation that, on the one hand, forces the community to apply exceptional operational modes; on the other hand, it creates an urge to treasure the values viewed as traditional and most essential. The search for a balance between these two is one of the distinguishing characteristics in Roman war-centred epic.¹⁶

13 Boyle 1993, 2–8. See also von Albrecht, who studies the intertextual tradition in Roman epic and demonstrates how the epic poets generated a new kind of poetry by recycling ideas of their predecessors. von Albrecht 1999, 13–21.

14 For further discussion of the development of archaic elements in Roman epic, see Boyle 1993, 1–13; von Albrecht 1999, 1–32; Leigh 1997, 6–40; Classen 2002, 20. De Jong speaks of the “feigned orality” of the genre. De Jong 2004, 549.

15 The post-war theme in Roman epic has been discussed in various studies; see, e.g., Gurval 1995, 209–247; Henderson 1998, 165–256; Finiello 2005; McNelis 2007, 2–8.

16 See Farrell and Nelis, who perceptively point out that in order to understand poetry of the early Principate, one must be sensitive to the tension between the attempt to idealise the legendary past, on the one hand, and the need to depict the past as an endless civil strife leading to the need for a radical renewal of the political system, on the other. Farrell & Nelis 2013, 3.

Besides the aftermath of the civil wars, another historical factor that is crucial for the mental ambience of the Roman war epics is, of course, the imperial ideology—the multicultural atmosphere of the Empire. While the civil wars inevitably destroyed the illusion of unity of the Roman people, constant encounters with alien cultures, on the other hand, forced the Romans to reconsider their values, customs and ideals, as well as to justify them in comparison with non-Romans.¹⁷ This development raised questions about what it meant to be Roman in the immense Empire.¹⁸ The two sides of the identity issue—the question of whom the Romans were willing to accept amongst them, and the question of whether the non-Romans wanted to become Romans or not—are ever-present in the tradition of imperial war epic.¹⁹ As I will explain in the following chapters, these questions were of indispensable significance to the literary construction of subjectivity in the imperial war epics, and they are closely related to the construction of gendered otherness (and sameness) in the genre.

1 Subjects, Objects and Others: The Narrative Construction of Subject Positions in War Epic

‘Subjectivity’ is a concept that I will be using throughout this work, as a term that defines presence and consciousness in the epic narrative. The notion of ‘subject’ has different connotations and meanings within the humanities, depending strongly on the field of research—the subject of linguistics, for instance, is not the same as the subject of narratology, and both differ from the subject of semiotics. In this work, I draw on the subjectivity theory developed by the philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, to examine the connections among gender, presence and consciousness in Roman war epic.

Often, when applying contemporary theory to the study of ancient sources, classicists and ancient historians feel the need to justify our choices somehow, as if we were not quite entitled to steal from the battle arsenal of neighbouring fields. While this feeling can be traced back to the centuries of a distinctively non-theoretical past of Classics, and to the development of our professional identities as a result,²⁰ this obviously does not mean that there would not be

17 Forsén & Salmeri 2008, 7; Gruen 2011, 1–5.

18 See Huskinson 2000, 7–14, 20–25.

19 Ando 2002, 127–128; Bessone 2013, 89–92, 101–105; Penwill 2013, 29–54.

20 See my more thorough analysis in Pyy 2018b, 3–7. For further discussion, see also Peradotto 1989, 180–187, DuBois 1991, Sullivan 1994, 9–15.

actual concerns and challenges to consider when trying to marry contemporary theory to ancient sources. There is a real and ever-present danger that writing by classicists may turn into a hollow verbiage that does justice neither to the sources nor to the theory. No theory is universal, and the ideas concerning language and psyche always speak volumes about the particular historical and cultural circumstances in which they first came into being. These issues notwithstanding, I do not believe that the positivist distancing of oneself from contemporary critical theory is beneficial for our understanding of the ancient texts. Nor am I in any way alone in this belief, or a pioneer in this field. The suitability of the Kristevan theory to the study of ancient literature has been demonstrated in the past two decades by Antony Augoustakis, Mairéad McAuley and Efrossini Spentzou, and the Freudian and the Lacanian traditions—on which Kristeva’s thinking is strongly based—have been convincingly applied to Classics by scholars such as Ellen Oliensis, Miriam Leonard, and Peter Heslin.²¹ This is a research tradition with which I align myself. I strongly believe that, when accompanied with a constant awareness of the differences between the cultural contexts of the sources and the theory, the Kristevan framework can considerably widen our understanding of the aspects of Roman war epic that have so far been little examined.

In its core, Kristeva’s theory on subjectivity is a post-Lacanian theory about the formation of the self through language use and acquisition. In her work, Kristeva has generally preferred the term ‘subject’ over the notion of the ‘self’, in order to emphasise the unconscious nature of the process by which subjects come to be.²² In fact, the Kristevan subject is anything but a self-aware and stable entity: it is *le-sujet-en-procès*, or ‘the subject on trial’.²³ “The subject never is,” Kristeva writes, “[he] is only the signifying process and he appears only as a signifying practice”.²⁴

This signifying practice can be defined as a dynamic interaction between the two modalities of communication: the symbolic and the semiotic, which Kristeva develops from Lacan’s symbolic and imaginary orders.²⁵ The symbolic is the sphere of language, defined and dominated by meaning, logic, grammar, and syntax. Not only is it necessary for any human communication; it is also

21 Augoustakis 2010, McAuley 2015, Spentzou 2003; Oliensis 2001; Oliensis 2009; Oliensis 2010; Heslin 2005; Leonard 2006. For my use of critical theory on ancient sources, other influential models have also been Pollock 2006 and Rimell 2015.

22 McAfee 2004, 1–2.

23 See e.g., Smith 1998, 24.

24 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 215.

25 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 23–24.

indispensable for the speaking subject to insert logic into her psyche. Without the transition and entry into the symbolic order—which happens gradually, as the child acquires understanding of the language and of herself—all speech would be reduced to meaningless babble, and the mind would crumble into a psychotic state.

The semiotic, for its part, is, “a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process”,²⁶ It precedes the acquisition of language and draws upon the “corporeal memory”. While the symbolic is verbal and logical, the semiotic is preverbal, asymbolic and material. It is powerfully present in all kinds of non-symbolic communication, such as music, rhythm and baby babble; it can also be observed *within* the symbolic language as meaninglessness, disruptions, silences and absences.²⁷ In *New Maladies of the Soul*, Kristeva speaks of “bodily drives” that are discharged through the semiotic sphere of communication. These drives, she explains, are “instinctual energies that operate between biology and culture”, “a pivot between soma and psyche, between biology and representation”,²⁸ and they are the underlying incentive for all human communication. This means that, while the symbolic is necessary in order for the communication to ‘make sense’, the semiotic is necessary because it provides the motivation for engaging in the signifying process. As Kelly Oliver has aptly put it, in her analysis on Kristeva’s thinking, “we have a bodily need to communicate”,²⁹

By arguing that the symbolic and the semiotic are interdependent and inseparable, Kristeva challenges the structuralist divide between the mind and the body (or culture and nature) that marks the Western philosophical discourses from Plato onwards. For this reason, she has been given credit for “bringing the body back to theory” and “language back into the body”, and for seeking a middle ground where the humanities and the sciences could meet, in their shared attempt to understand human communication.³⁰ For Kristeva, the semiotic and the symbolic cannot exist without each other: the signifying process is a result of both, and hence, the subject is also always both—as she puts it, “language is not divorced from the body; ‘word’ and ‘flesh’ can meet at any moment for better or worse”.³¹ This notion is of crucial importance for this study, because this is indeed what often appears to happen in Roman war

26 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 23–30.

27 See, e.g., Moi 1986, 13.

28 Kristeva 1993 (in Oliver 2002, 203–224; see also xvii).

29 Oliver 2002, xv.

30 Oliver 2002, xvii, xxii.

31 Ruthrof 2015, 15–16.

epic. The genre is marked by recurrent moments where the strict formal rules of epic fall apart: the flow of the hexameter is interrupted by breaks that do not seem to ‘make sense’, or the structure of the teleological narrative is placed under pressure by meaningless endings, disruptions and unfinished storylines. For several decades, researchers in classical philology have tried to explain away these uncomfortable aspects of Roman epic, or have striven to make sense of them in one way or another. The application of the Kristevan theory, instead, enables the reader to accept these uncomfortable elements as the living genotext of Roman epic—as a continuous pulsation of the semiotic *chôra*—and allows him or her to appreciate them as an indispensable part of the poetic communication.³²

Nevertheless, while the semiotic genotext is evidently present in the Roman imperial epics, it should be acknowledged that war epic as a genre does not seamlessly fall into Kristeva’s textual categories in terms of the semiotic-symbolic divide. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva classifies different texts depending on the dynamics between the semiotic and the symbolic in them. She argues that the dialectic between the two modalities determines the type of discourse in question: while the discourse of scientists, for example, exemplifies the symbolic mode, the creative expressions of musicians, dancers, and poets represent the semiotic.³³ In *Powers of Horror*, she further discusses poetry as a prime example of a discourse that is heavy on the genotext and driven by the semiotic, and emphasises poetry’s willingness to play with grammar, metaphor and meaning, thus laying bare the fact that language is, indeed, arbitrary.³⁴

There is no denying that Kristeva’s approach is somewhat unhistorical: she romanticises poetry’s ‘original’ ritualistic function as “the bringing into play of the vehemence of drives”, and argues for its decline into “linguistic formalisation” from the Renaissance onwards.³⁵ This approach, however, fails to acknowledge the strictly formal nature of most Greek and Roman poetic genres. The

32 ‘Phenotext’ and ‘genotext’ are among the central concepts of Kristeva’s thinking. The pair corresponds roughly (and is closely related) to the symbolic and semiotic modalities. ‘Phenotext’ can be understood to be the perceivable signifying system, language that serves to communicate. ‘Genotext’, then, exists *within* the phenotext, and is the process by which the self is in fact generated: it draws heavily on the bodily drives and their disposition, and operates ‘underneath the surface’, continuously generating the subject of enunciation which the phenotext presupposes.

33 See Beardsworth 2004, 12–16.

34 J. Kristeva, “Powers of Horror” (orig. *Pouvoirs de l’horreur. Essai sur l’abjection*, 1980: in Oliver 2002, 229–263).

35 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 83.

rhythmic elements in ancient Graeco-Roman poetry were certainly rooted in the oral tradition and can be observed as traces of the genre's original ritualistic function; it is, however, arguable that by the time of the Principate, these elements had lost all of their ritual bearing and had, for the most part, become an expression of the same bourgeois "decorative uselessness" that Kristeva sees as a blemish in the European tradition.³⁶ This concerns Roman epic more than other genres, since it is highly dependent on clearly articulated rules and 'weighed down' by the high moral bearing of the hexameter.

While Kristeva's understanding of the functions of ancient poetry in general therefore perhaps does not say all that could be said, the special position of epic among the poetic genres becomes evident in her work. It seems reasonable that Kristeva does not in fact map epic together with poetry, but places it into the signifying practice of 'narrative', a discourse dominated by correlations between the opposites (good/bad, inside/outside etc.), where the "social organism is dominated, ruled by, and finally reduced to or viewed through the structure of the family/clan".³⁷ According to this definition, 'narratives' are texts largely shaped by the symbolic modality and in which the semiotic drive flow is subordinated, giving only a "faint indication" of the signifying process.³⁸ For Kristeva, therefore, epic is in reality no poetry at all, but a story, comparable to myths and legends. This definition seems to make sense with regard to the inner structural logic of Roman war epic—a genre that is, in its very core, about storytelling, and not far estranged from the traditions of ancient historiography.

Here, however, one comes face to face with the Kristevan concept of 'intertextuality'. Instead of the conventional meaning of the word (an allusive interaction between literary works), Kristeva uses intertextuality/transposition to refer to the ability of a signifying practice to pass from one sign-system to another, or to switch between different sign systems within one text.³⁹ This is something that Roman war epic arguably does superbly, repeatedly breaking free from the signifying practice of narrative and amalgamating into itself elements of poetry. This practice very often appears to be inspired by the civil war theme of the poems: above all, the structural breaks, the meaningless endings and the contradictions are often related to depictions of *nefas* and *furor* that tear the community apart. Thus, the disturbance of the logic of the social order was what gave Roman war epic its creative power to give birth to meaninglessness and ruptures—elements that go against the formal tradition of 'narrative',

36 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 83.

37 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 90–92.

38 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 92.

39 Moi 1986, 111–112.

and that can be read as the pulsational pressure of the semiotic on the symbolic logic of epic.⁴⁰ The result is the rich genotext of Roman war epic, unapologetic in its contradictions and illogicalities.

For this study, the questions of how this genotext of epic is related to gender, and what is the relationship between gender and epic subjectivity, are of primary importance. The role of gender in Kristeva's thinking, and the relationship between her semiotic and symbolic modalities and the issue of sexual difference, are much-disputed topics.⁴¹ The question is rooted in Kristeva's development of the concept of semiotic *chôra*—a term she borrows from Plato's *Timaeus*, and that she describes as “a sensory cavern”, and as “a non-expressive totality formed by the [semiotic] drives and their stases”.⁴² *Chôra* is the location and the origin of bodily drives—as Lynne Huffer has said, it is “the space of mediation” that regulates the semiotic drives that precede the forming of the speaking subject.⁴³ Because Kristeva describes the *chôra* as a maternal space, the semiotic modality has understandably often been associated with the female—and the symbolic, building on Freud and Lacan, has been examined as a paternal sphere, dominated by the Law of the Father. Consequently, the entire Kristevan theory has sometimes been criticised for ostensibly challenging, but actually reproducing the binary oppositions and the hierarchic relations between male-female/culture-nature/mind-body—the ontological differentiation that inevitably reinforces the political structures of oppression.⁴⁴ Judith Butler, for example, has argued that for Kristeva, language is a system in which the symbolic (male) remains hegemonic, while the bodily drives (female) can only temporarily and in vain disturb the hegemony of the Law of the Father.⁴⁵ According to Butler, Kristeva's strategic task is “neither to replace the symbolic with the semiotic nor to establish the semiotic as a rival cultural possibility”, but mainly to manifest the borders which divide the two

40 According to Kristeva, in order to ‘penetrate the era’, poetry needs to disturb the logic that dominates the social order, and to do so through that logic itself. In her analysis of some of the ‘truly revolutionary’ poets of the nineteenth century (Lautréamont and Mallarmé), she pays attention to the social, political and historical contexts which allowed these writers to allow the charge of the *chôra* to mark their language. Kristeva 1974 (1984), 82–83; Moi 1986, 89.

41 Kristeva's complicated relationship with feminism and feminist philosophy is discussed in Moi 1985, 163–172. For a more in-depth analysis, see Schippers 2011.

42 Kristeva 1974 (1984), 25. For further analysis, see Huffer 1998, 77–87; Smith 1998, 21–22; Moi 1985, 161–162.

43 Huffer 1998, 82–83.

44 Butler 1990, 111–112.

45 Butler 1990, 102–103, 111–113.

modalities.⁴⁶ This is why, in her view, Kristeva’s “political strategy” lacks subversive power and fails on a very fundamental level.

It is, however, worth asking whether Kristeva has a political strategy in the first place. Butler’s critique appears to be based at least partly on her way of reading Kristeva’s work as a theory of gender rather than as a theory of language—this can be observed in her attempt to politicise Kristeva’s aims, as well as in her reluctance to understand her definition of language as a dynamic process, and not as a system. This way of reading can be considered at least partially a result of aligning Kristeva with the other French ‘feminist’ philosophers, especially H el ene Cixous and Luce Irigaray.⁴⁷ However, while for Cixous and Irigaray, sexual difference is the grounding principle that drives their thinking about language, for Kristeva, the relationship between the two appears to be reversed—language takes precedence over gender. She has openly argued against a universal notion of ‘women’ and against the understanding of the semiotic as a representative of the female, stating that if ‘women’ have something in common with each other *and* something to do with the semiotic, it is in fact their marginality.⁴⁸ In other words, the semiotic is marginal to the symbolic in the same way that the female is marginal to the male within the patriarchy—but the modalities themselves have no gender, and the speaking subject is dependent on both.⁴⁹

The idea that marginality could be viewed as the lowest common denominator for ‘women’ is of crucial importance for this study, since this idea particularly well reflects the hierarchic gender dynamics in Roman war epic. In the narrative universe of epic, the definition of ‘male’ and ‘female’, or the differentiation between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, is anything but clear-cut and unproblematic—in addition to modest matrons and heroic super-warriors, there are Amazonic warrior maidens, fetishised hermaphrodites and castrated priests (to mention only the most extreme examples). Instead of a binary system, gender appears as a spectrum of different experiences and performances. Therefore, instead of assigning one categorisation to men and another to women, a more useful way

46 Butler 1990, 108–109.

47 See Moi 1985, 151–156, 163–167.

48 Moi 1985, 166; see also Gambaudo 2007, 16–17.

49 As Smith points out, Kristeva’s semiotic *ch ora* “is a maternal space from which the figure of the father is not absent, but rather prefigured”. Smith 1998, 60. In the same way, the entry into the symbolic is a function of the maternal as well as of the paternal; it does not happen solely in the “violent break” of the Oedipal stage, but begins earlier, in the semiotic sphere—in this, Kristeva differs from both Lacan and Freud. Gambaudo 2007, 23–29, 51–57.

of looking at the issue—and one that takes into consideration the gendered power structures in the genre—could be a distinction drawn between *viri* and non-*viri*: that is, ‘real’ men as the unquestionable subjects of epic, versus those falling short of the requirements of epic masculinity. Apart from women, the large and ambiguous group of non-*viri* could include those with non-binary experiences, but also characters who are represented as ‘biologically’ male but who ‘fail’ or choose not to perform masculinity the way it is expected to be performed (this could mean, for instance, slaves, young boys, or cowardly warriors—technically, anyone literally or metaphorically penetrated). On the one hand, therefore, Roman war epic leaves a lot of room for gender performances and experiences to travel between and beyond ‘male’ and ‘female’—but on the other hand, it makes stricter the criteria of ‘manliness’, requiring both a credible biological background *and* a plausible social performance in order for a character to ‘pass’. If characters are lacking in one or both of these, they are likely to fall into the large and ambiguous group of non-*viri*—those marginalised by the patriarchal power structures and by the omnipotent male gaze of the projected reader.

As many earlier studies of Roman epic have pointed out, this marginalisation happens on the level of the narrative: it is due to the character’s inability to ‘convince’ the projected (male, elite, citizen Roman) reader of his or her manliness and to invite the reader to identify and relate.⁵⁰ Alison Keith, in particular, has stressed the strongly gendered focalisation of epic as a reason for the androcentric perspective of the genre: Keith speaks of the “male, mobile hero of epic”, whose subjectivity is constructed through contrast with the female.⁵¹ Similar

50 While the Roman audience in the imperial period was actually rather heterogeneous, it is, however, justifiable to imagine the primary projected reader—the addressee—of imperial war epic as “male, élite, Italian, middle-aged and citizen Roman”. As Dixon somewhat provocatively argues, these are the denominators that define the epic voice and gaze, and everything that falls outside these categories is inevitably marginalised. Dixon 2001, 21. Keith has likewise argued that war epic as a genre was addressed to a male audience: she stresses the position of epic in the Roman curriculum, and argues that it was one of the main devices that indoctrinated Roman pupils with the ideals of masculinity. Keith 2000, 2–3.

51 Keith 1999, 216–218, 228–230. In particular, Keith observes a correlation between masculine subject position and the male gaze, “which come together in the visual objectification of women”. Keith 1999, 222. Keith’s reading is influenced by Teresa de Lauretis, who has famously argued that “the hero, the mythical subject” of Western narratives is “constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture—”. De Lauretis 1984, 119–121; on the connection between gaze and objectification, see also Fredrick 2002, 1–2, 10–24.

arguments have been made by Georgia Nugent, who states that “the self and the subject of classical epic is always male”,⁵² and by Yasmin Syed, who stresses the male vantage point of the *Aeneid*, arguing that Virgil deliberately strives to alienate the reader from the female characters.⁵³

According to these views, the most crucial narrative technique that works to alienate the reader from the non-*viri* is related to the representation of their emotional lives. It is intriguing that, while the delivering of the literary character’s emotion to the reader can be one of the most powerful ways to invite the reader to identify with that specific character, in the universe of Roman epic—marked by the Stoic ideals of manhood and self-control—the effect of emotions often appears to be the opposite. The uncontrollable expressions of grief, anger, or affection often appear to the male subjects and heroes of Roman epic as ‘threatening’ and ‘alien’: and because the reactions of the internal audience tend to guide those of the external audience, the epic hero’s aversion in the face of strong emotions is likely to discourage the reader from identifying with characters who express these feelings.⁵⁴ This marginalisation is both enforced and underlined by the non-verbal elements present in the extreme expressions of emotion: the weeping, the screaming and the physical self-harm. From the Kristevan viewpoint, these are all natural expressions of the semiotic pressure on the logic of the symbolic order: in moments of emotional turmoil, words tend to fail the speaking subject, and this is when the bodily need to express what is ‘beyond words’ can come to the rescue. But in the universe of epic, dominated on both narrative and ideological levels by the Law of the Father, this recourse to the semiotic might easily end up alienating the reader and constructing textual otherness and objectification.

It is important to stress, however, that ‘marginality’, as defined here, does not necessarily mean an unimportant role in the narrative; on the contrary,

52 Nugent 1994, 179. See also Bakhtin, who regards classical epic as consisting of male-oriented foundation legends that legitimate and explain the patriarchal social order. Bakhtin 1981, 13–15.

53 Syed 2005, 53–54, 57–58, 63–74, 103.

54 Naturally, it should be acknowledged that gendering of emotions in any genre of ancient literature is a risky and difficult pursuit, considering the long philosophical tradition concerning the subject. Emotions and the need/ability to control them constitute such an important part of Graeco-Roman philosophical discourse that it is inevitably an oversimplification to establish one comprehensive view of the matter in any given source group. As O’Hara points out, the purpose of epic is not to establish a coherent moral or philosophical model and, in the end, none of the Roman epic poets can be considered as devoted to any single philosophical framework. O’Hara 2007, 2–7. For further discussion, see Venini 1964, Gill 1997, Wright 1997; Hershkovitz 1998; LaCourse Munteanu 2011.

‘the Other’ can be a very visible character and temporarily even become the protagonist of the story—it is the author’s construction of a standpoint and the reader’s identification that define otherness and subjectivity in epic.⁵⁵ This dual position of ‘the Other’ as simultaneously both central and marginalised is the core idea in Antony Augoustakis’ brilliant study of motherhood in Flavian epic. Augoustakis points out that “the paradoxical status of women as both central but, at the same time marginalised—is key to our understanding of the role of women in Flavian epic”.⁵⁶ In his view, ‘central’ and ‘marginal’ are not mutually exclusive positions—neither in narratological terms, nor from the perspective of psychological subjectivity. A similar idea can be observed in Mairéad McAuley’s excellent study of motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and Statius, where she speaks of mothers as occupying a double position, as “figures marginal to epic’s narrative structures yet central to its ideology, responsible for the production of warriors for the state”.⁵⁷

This phenomenon can be observed in many epic women whose turbulent emotional lives dominate the narrative, and who often end up being the most memorable characters of the poems: Virgil’s Dido and Amata, and Statius’ Jocasta are perhaps the best examples. These women have often been labeled as ‘transgressive’, or as ‘opposers’ of the hyper-masculine universe of war epic. Many scholars—Keith, Nugent and Perkell, in particular—have examined epic women as having two options: they can either become absorbed into the male, patriotic ideology of the poem, or they can stand against this heroic drive and consequently become erased from the narrative. This kind of a clear-cut distinction between the ‘absorbed’ and ‘erased’ women is especially in line with Kristeva’s view of the role and position of women as marginalised within the patriarchy. In *On Chinese Women*, Kristeva writes that

[W]e cannot gain access to the temporal scene, i.e. to political affairs, except by identifying with the values considered to be masculine—some women “play supermen”—others, more bound to the mother, and more tuned in to their unconscious drives, refuse this role and sullenly hold back, neither speaking nor writing, in a permanent state of expectation, occasionally punctuated by some kind of outburst: a cry, a refusal, “hysterical symptoms”. These two extremes condemn us either to being

55 See, e.g., Ganiban’s, Spentzou’s and Tipping’s discussions of Hannibal as the hero of the *Punica*, Ganiban 2009; Spentzou 2008; Tipping 2009.

56 Augoustakis 2010, 16.

57 McAuley 2015, 23.

the most passionate servants of the temporal order and its apparatus of consolidation—or of subversion—.⁵⁸

Kristeva's argument bears a clear resemblance to the above-mentioned readings of Roman war epic: both views observe women as having a choice between two options, neither of which is satisfying or leads to full subjectivity. As Oliver puts it, "[e]ither women can enter the symbolic—language, politics, time, culture—only by identifying as men, or they can withdraw into their silent bodies as hysterics".⁵⁹ In Roman war-centred epic, examples of both tactics are numerous. On the one hand, we have women like Lucan's Marcia and Cornelia: model matrons who perform masculinity by manifesting almost superhuman Stoic self-control and devotion to the *patria*, and who do so without questioning or transgressing the female role assigned to them.⁶⁰ On the other, we have out-of-control women like Virgil's Dido and Amata, who violently oppose the preordained course of events and—in Kristevan terms—"take their jouissance in an anti-Apollonian, Dionysian orgy".⁶¹ In both of these roles, however, epic women have usually been considered as doomed to a lack of textual subjectivity: they are the unrelatable others to the internal male audience of the poems as well as to the projected male reader. It is the classic 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' double-bind that makes it impossible for the woman to win: her only options are to become an inferior version of the Man, or to become the villain of the story, who needs to be silenced.

In this study, however, I am more interested in using the Kristevan framework to complicate the strict juxtaposition between the categories of male and female, self and other. Arguably, there *are* women in Roman war epic who manage to avoid the above-mentioned double bind, to break free from the roles prescribed to them by the patriarchy and, consequently, to achieve tex-

58 J. Kristeva, "About Chinese Women" (orig. *Des Chinoises* 1974), in *Moi* 1985, 138–159 (transl. Seán Hand): 155–156.

59 Oliver 1993, 108.

60 These kinds of exemplary female characters are frequent in Roman historiographic tradition, where they mark the Roman legendary history, in particular. The most articulate example of a woman 'rising above her gender' is Cloelia, a legendary virgin who demonstrated 'manly courage' by escaping from an enemy camp. See Liv. 2.13.11 (*novam in femina virtutem*); Cic. *Off.* 1.61 (*vos enim iuvenes animum geritis muliebrem, illa virgo viri*); Val. Max. 3.2.2.15 (*viris puella lumen virtutis praeferendo*); Sen. *Marc.* 6.16.2; Marcus Manilius, 1.780 (*maiorque viris et Cloelia virgo*) and Florus 1.4.3 (*ecce et virginum virtus*). In Cloelia's story, *Romanitas* is constructed in terms of manliness; however, the authors assert that a woman, too, can become representative of this quality, and without compromising her *pudicitia*. See also Roller 2004, 35–36; McDonnell 2006, 154–158.

61 Kristeva 1974 (in *Moi* 1986, 154).

tual subjectivity. Likewise, there are men who at first sight might seem to be heroes and subjects of the poems, but who under closer scrutiny turn out to be non-*viri*: the marginalised others. These kinds of characters are extremely interesting, because they reveal the underlying sameness between the subject and the other: they reveal that the other is, in fact, always a construction, designed to protect the fragile self.

A crucial concept to this part of my reading and thinking is the Kristevan notion of *abject*. According to Kristeva, the ‘marginality’ of women within the patriarchy is due in its very core to the fact that the woman is not really the other, but an *abject*: something that was formerly part of the self but that has been alienated and rejected. Following Lacan, she suggests that the very first abjection happens when the child abjects the mother’s body and constructs herself as an “I”. This rejection, Kristeva claims, is subsequently repeated on the macrolevel of society: as Oliver has put it, “an individual identity is constructed against the exclusion of the abject maternal body to the way in which a cultural or national identity is constructed against the exclusion of maternity and the feminine”.⁶² However, this alienation is never successful: because the mother was first abject, and not object, this relationship is tense and conflicted. The woman is always part of “I”.

The same applies to the ethnic other. As Butler points out, the rejection of certain people because of their racial ‘difference’ is a way of alienation, on which culturally hegemonic identities are based.⁶³ In Roman epic, race and gender can often be observed working as background for one another: the understanding of Roman world dominion as something natural is in direct interplay with the ideology that establishes male control over the female in Roman society.⁶⁴ In Roman war epic, the most extreme example of this phenomenon is the literary archetype of the Absolute Other. This is a character who appears to embody all the characteristics that the subject wants to exclude and

62 Oliver 2002, 226.

63 Butler 1990, 169–171.

64 Keith 2000, 40–64; Keith 1999, 221–222. Keith defines these power dynamics following de Lauretis’ argument about the gendered dichotomy in Western narratives; “male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; and female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other”. Keith 1999, 216–217. As Keith points out, the association between femininity and *locus* does not require a mythological framework, but can be implemented in historical epic, too. Keith 2000, 55. This idea can be observed also in Syed 2005, 137–149, 171–176; Augoustakis 2003, 237–252; Augoustakis 2010, 125–128, and especially in Van Nortwick (2013), who argues that the key element in the *Aeneid*’s ideal of masculine heroism is “the control of women and *all things feminine*” [my emphasis]. Van Nortwick 2013, 145, 149. For further discussion of the colonial discourses of sexuality, see Mattingly 2011, 99–105.

distinguish from himself—that is, in Kristeva’s words, “the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder”.⁶⁵ In the Absolute Other, the categories of otherness merge and create an antithesis against which the projected Roman reader can reflect himself and construct his identity.⁶⁶ Lucan’s Cleopatra as an oriental seductress queen, and Silius’ Asbythe as a fetishised Amazonic warrior, are prime examples of this kind of character. Nevertheless, over and over again in Roman war epic, these Absolute Others turn out to be in reality *abject* others—forcibly created antitheses of the self/subject of epic. The deceptive nature of abjection is revealed when the line that separates the abject other from the Roman citizen male is blurred and the underlying sameness of the other and the self is revealed.

When reading the works of Virgil, Lucan, Statius, Silius and Valerius Flaccus, what I have found most intriguing are the narrative moments where the semiotic pressure on the symbolic language cannot be easily gendered or defined as ‘feminine rebellion’ against the male Roman mission, but where the semiotic *chôra* makes itself heard in unexpected characters and storylines. When Lucan’s Caesar, trapped in a corner and out of his mind through panic, is compared to murderous Medea, the reader can observe the semiotic ‘leaking into’ the character of a Roman citizen male. And when Statius’ Tydeus’ celebrated martial *virtus* turns into savagery and *crudelitas*, he becomes the embodiment of the Kristevan abject: something that “evokes horror as it makes the subject feel her mortality and her limits”.⁶⁷ The difference between the self and the other is dissolved when one of the most crucial building blocks of Roman identity—martial *virtus*—is represented as the quickest and easiest way to the all-consuming darkness of the *chôra*.⁶⁸ These ‘failures’ of the epic heroes to live up to the role expected from them manifest the underlying similarity between the ‘transgressive women’ of epic and its male subjects. In the chapters that follow, I focus on the narrative moments where this happens, with the aim of complicating the juxtaposition between the male, epic, Roman mission and the feminine, threatening, subversive otherness that has marked most of the previous studies of gender in Roman war epic.

In the war-centred epic of the early Principate, the communication of values and ideals that are crucial to the construction of both textual subjectivity

65 Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 229–263).

66 Syed 2005, 136. Sannicandro, too, when discussing women in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, considers these characters as instrumental to the establishment of the model of the male, Roman ‘Self’. Sannicandro 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2011.

67 Kristeva 1980 (in Oliver 2002, 232).

68 Ripoll 1998, 327–332; Masterson 2005, 298–307; Alston & Spentzou 2011, 44–64.

and cultural identity seems to be emphasised in certain structural points of the narrative. The episodes that mark the beginning of the action or a significant turning point in the plot are most likely to discuss the conflict between tradition and reformation, or between continuity and change. They are also the narrative points in which, arguably, the reader can most clearly observe the semiotic pressure on the logic of symbolic order. In war epic, of course, the development of the military crisis is what determines these decisive moments. The beginning and the end of the conflict (as well as its decisive battles) can be considered turning points where the limits of heroism, virtue and humanity are blurred and redefined. And these are the most crucial moments when we examine the representation and assessment of ideas concerning gender and Roman-ness.

This study is structured around these decisive moments; I begin by examining the gender dynamics in the beginning of war, paying particular attention to the theme of the just war and the guilt caused by an unjust conflict. In chapter two, I examine the two roles most typical of women in the Roman epic tradition: the passive and instrumental *casus belli*, and the active inciter of war and violence. These archetypal female roles, I will argue, demonstrate the two different ways of marginalising women in an epic narrative, while simultaneously granting them considerable narrative power in driving the story forward. In neither of these roles, I will argue, can epic women be considered as easy scapegoats for war on the grounds of their sex: even at their most frenzied and uncontrolled—out of touch with the symbolic logic—female characters of Roman war epic are political agents responsible for their actions in the temporal scene. This is something that is further reflected in the following chapters, where the women responsible for the beginning of war face the consequences and pay the price of their actions.

Chapter three examines the emotional responses of women when the war is already on its way or just about to begin. Overwhelming and uncontrollable emotions, as noted above, have usually been considered as the female domain in war epic. In particular, it has often been argued that negative emotions such as fear, grief and desperation constitute ‘the female voice’ in the genre—that is, a counterforce to the dynamic, teleological drive of the epic and something that questions the meaning of it all.⁶⁹ This kind of reading obviously grants little textual subjectivity to women in epic, and usually marks them as figures of pathos whose suffering is quietly pushed to the margins or written out of the narrative. In this chapter, however, I will argue that the matter of female emotions

69 Thus, e.g., Nugent 1992; Mack 1999; Dietrich 1999; Syed 2005.

in war epic is more complex than this and that, at times, fear, grief and suffering actually appear as phenomena that clearly construct subjectivity for the character who expresses them. By making the anxious women powerful focalisers, the narrators utilise their distress to construct a subject position for the reader, and to invite him to identify with these ‘figures of pathos’. The female fear and suffering do not necessarily or self-evidently mean an opposition to the heroic drive of the epic: they can exist and be acknowledged without considering them a revolutionary force or a hindrance to the teleological patriotic narrative. As I will show, on many occasions, the suffering of victimised women comes in effect to embody the crumbling Roman virtues and the very essence of *Romanitas*, which is under threat from an unjust war. Moreover, it is also crucial to notice that the male and female roles in war epic are not as drastically different in this respect as often has been believed: by taking a closer look at the figures of anxious and fearful fathers in Roman war epic, I will demonstrate that the categories of rational/political/epic and emotional/private/tragic cannot be easily gendered as male versus female—a character’s dedication to the temporal scene and their ability to subscribe to its symbolic logic are not self-evidently male phenomena, nor are semiotic frenzy and the confinement in one’s personal suffering female phenomena.

Chapter four will elaborate on this point, by examining more closely a few examples of epic women who, in Kristevan terms, “play supermen”. By identifying with the values of the epic universe that are traditionally considered as ‘masculine’ and by dedicating themselves entirely to the service of the temporal scene, the ‘manly matrons’ of epic manifest the alternative to the semiotic frenzy and uncontrollable *furor*. However, as I will attempt to show, these women *are* in fact inevitably marginalised by the patriarchal society and value system: at their very best, they manage to become reflections of their husbands’ virtue (or weaknesses), and sounding boards to their grandeur. The couples such as Pompey and Cornelia or Cato and Marcia in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* manifest the gender complementary nature of virtues and weaknesses in the Roman value system: in this equation, however, there seems to be no room for femininity as an independent phenomenon. The best of women, in fact, appear to be those who can perform masculine high-mindedness to its fullest, and turn their marital love into political dedication—without actually transgressing the female roles assigned to them by the patriarchal society. As I will argue, the marginalisation of the manly matrons is, in the end, more complete than that of many other epic women, since they do not even temporarily reveal the hierarchy and the imbalance that underlie the patriarchal value system and the epic narrative. Content with their fate to be lauded as almost as good as men, they disappear from the pages of the epics.

Chapter five focuses on a different kind of female activity in the times of war, discussing the connection between gender and violence—in particular, the complicated topic of women in arms. I will look at the phenomenon through a theoretical lens that is popular in feminist classical studies: a theory that views the polarisation of genders as rooted in the alleged functions of male and female bodies. According to a culturally deep-rooted belief that marks most premodern patriarchal societies, the female body is a means of production, whereas the male body is a weapon of destruction—in other words, there are two genders, one that gives birth and the other one that kills. In Roman epic, this ideology is most evident in the episodes where its transgressions are discussed, or where it is questioned, challenged, or defended. One expression of this discourse is violent women, such as epic warrior maidens, or murderous matrons who take up arms; another is men who ‘fail’ to perform masculine bellicosity in a manner expected of them. In chapter five, I will discuss both phenomena and examine how the expectations targeted at gendered conduct are related to the ethnic and cultural stereotypes and presumptions in the process of constructing *Romanitas*.

Chapter six brings this study to another theme that is structurally just as important as the beginning of war—its end. I examine the epic endings and closures (or the lack thereof) from the viewpoint of gender, focusing on epic women’s roles as arbiters and mediators for peace. In this chapter, my focus will be on the ways in which the Roman epic poets both exploit and challenge earlier Graeco-Roman literary traditions, drawing influence especially from Athenian tragedy and Roman historiography. I will demonstrate how precisely those episodes where the previous literary models are challenged and questioned are essential for the Roman epics’ ideological content: the fact that there are no Sabine successors who could stand in the way of war and bring the conflict to its end, tells us a great deal about the mental ambience of the epics of the early Principate. While the surviving Roman war epics greatly differ from one another in the level of optimism and cynicism, what they have in common is the fact that the female role in them is more strongly connected to war than to peace—neither at the beginning of war nor at its end can epic women appear as non-political creatures who could make use of their impartiality to maintain peace in the society. By examining the women’s various failed efforts to delay war or to end it—Amata in the *Aeneid*, Julia in the *Pharsalia*, Venus, Jocasta and Antigone in the *Thebaid*—I will demonstrate that epic women, burdened with the guilt of war, are generally unable to fulfill the exemplary roles offered by Athenian drama and by the Roman historiographic tradition. However, because of this failure, they turn out to be more complex and multifaceted characters than their literary models in other genres.

The last chapter examines the marginalisation of women and the female subjectivity in epic through a theme that is central to each Roman war epic: death. Deaths of women, as has often been demonstrated, tend to wield great narrative significance in Roman narrative literature, including epic. In this chapter, I will pay attention to how very different the Roman historiographic and epic traditions are when it comes to this matter. Whereas historiography tends to represent dead female bodies as *loci* and as a ground for male (imperial) action, epic remarkably often appears to empower the dying female object, instead. I use the cases of Creusa, Dido and Amata in the *Aeneid*, as well as Jocasta in the *Thebaid*, to discuss the different ways of dealing with a woman's death in the epic tradition: while some of these deaths marginalise and erase the woman in the favour of the heroic drive of the epic, others grant the dying woman an agency and subjectivity that reveal the underlying sameness between the subject and the putative other. Furthermore, it is notable that all of these episodes wield considerable narrative power: they denote how the deaths of women in Roman war epic tend to become structural turning points that drive the narrative forward, marking the end of one storyline and the beginning of something new.

The concluding remarks will sum up some of my thoughts on gender, emotions and subjectivity that have in one way or another played a crucial role in all the previous chapters. I will discuss in more detail the alleged marginality of women in epic, and analyse the difference between the so-called 'narrative marginality' and the 'psychological marginality' (that is, a lack of epic subjectivity). Moreover, I will pay attention to how these two, in fact, often appear to conflict in Roman war-centred epic: arguably, epic *furor*, while it is likely to distance and alienate the reader, is the most important dynamic force in the genre, since it drives the narrative towards its ultimate telos. By examining in a little more depth the connection between this epic *force majeure* and the Kristevan *chôra*, I will demonstrate how the semiotic pressure is, in fact, an essential element in the narrative tradition of Roman war epic—and, moreover, a phenomenon that cannot be easily or unambiguously gendered as 'feminine'.