



Book Review: Representations of Fear

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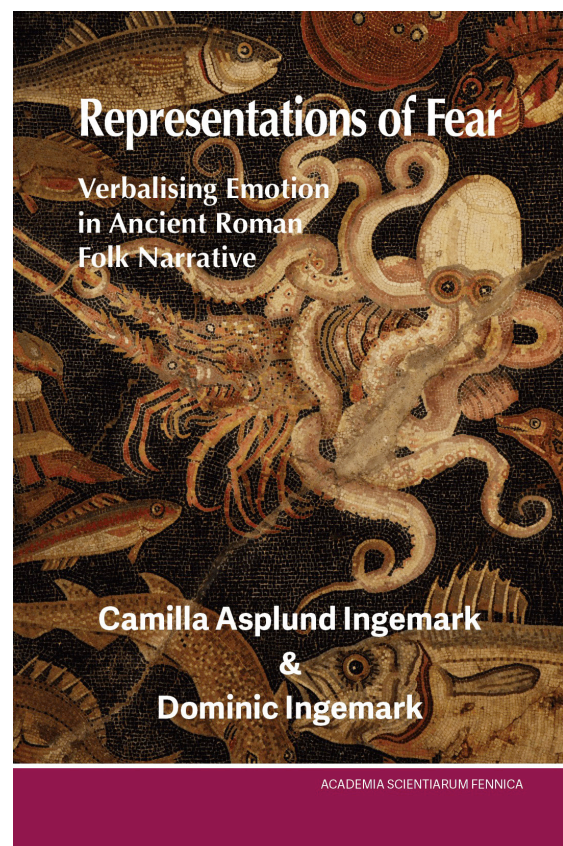
Camilla Asplund Ingemark and Dominic Ingemark, *Representations of Fear: Verbalising Emotion in Ancient Roman Folk Narrative*, FF Communications 320, Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2020.

R*epresentations of Fear* is an extremely impressive and accessible piece of scholarship. Camilla Asplund Ingemark and Dominic Ingemark demonstrate mastery of their primary and secondary source material, with exceptionally thorough and careful research on ancient Roman folklore and how it verbalised the emotion of fear “in the form of stories of demons, witches, ghosts and wild animals” (13). Their attention to detail, along with their convincing arguments and clear writing, results in a wonderful study that explicates the connections between the ancient stories, the emotions the stories evoke, and how the stories and these emotions act as therapies. Even given its focus on classical antiquity, this volume will be of great use to a broad audience interested in oral narratives and how they work in society.

As outlined in the Introduction, the authors begin by explaining that the stories singled out for analysis were chosen based on two principal characteristics: their oral origin and their focus on fear. The authors’ methodology was threefold: first, a close reading of the texts “in terms of Roman social history”, then an analysis of the emotions “verbalised in the texts and elicited in the audience”, and last, discussion of the stories “as therapeutic tools” (14). The authors adduce a wide range of source material on which to base their interpretation of the stories’ emotional content and therapeutic functions, including ancient philosophies of the emo

Introduction also provides background on oral traditions in ancient literature, explaining the functions and characteristics of folklore as well as the nature of storytelling in the Roman World; the information provided here allows the study to be accessible to folklorists who have had little exposure to the ancient world as well as to classical scholars who have no training in folklore or narrative studies.

After the Introduction, the book presents three parts: “Coping with Emotions”, “The Family under Threat”, and “Loci of Fear in and outside the City”, in addition to a concluding section. “Coping with Emotions,” the shortest part, presents the theoretical background for studying the emotion of fear, providing not only a discussion of what constitutes the emotion of “fear” but also a helpful introduction to various



approaches in the study of emotion, including the constructionist and cognitivist. Moving next to ancient philosophies of emotion, the authors provide what proves to be an exceptionally accessible introduction to a normally difficult subject – abstract philosophical discourse. Aristotle's theory may be the most familiar, inasmuch as he emphasised the concept of emotional catharsis (as via tragedy), while the Epicureans "stressed the detrimental effects of fear to an unusually high degree" (66), and the Stoics – expressed a wide variety of views on the topic, including the possibility of fostering emotional detachment as a kind of therapy.

The section "The Family under Threat" deals with stories "in which the survival of the family is a persistent theme." Starting with one of the most potent fears, that of losing a child (and thus possibly an heir), the authors demonstrate how stories of child-killing demons (such as *lamiae*, *gelloudes*, and *mormones*) and witches (*striges*) acted as principal representations of that fear, as evidenced by stories that made their way into the writings of Ovid, Diodorus Siculus, and other authors writing during the Roman period. Similarly, the discussion of negligent nurses and "other careless child-minders" explores the anxieties produced by having to entrust one's child to a caretaker (109); Aelian's tale of an ape who unexpectedly took over childcare duties is a neat little one-paragraph horror story, comparable to the contemporary legend of "The Hippy Baby-sitter" that circulated in North America in the 1970s (111). Moving on from threats to children, this section also includes a chapter on witches and demons that pose threats to men and the sanctity of marriage. While most of the stories about these creatures appear in literary Roman works, the volume's author takes pains to explain that even within these works the stories clearly have oral origins, being referred to in their literary contexts as *fabula* ("a traditional story") or the like. Here we find witches such as Meroe, from Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, and a *lamia* that feeds on the blood of young men, from Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Part of the moral of such stories is that people—particularly men—must control their passions, or at least discern the difference between erotic love, which can be highly destructive, and "good love", which "aims for friendship and social bonding, not simply physical satisfaction" (153), the latter being much more appropriate for a lasting marriage.

In contrast to "The Family under Threat", which focuses on personal relationships and metaphors for their destruction, "Loci of Fear in and outside of the City" explores the relationship between people and their surroundings – the connection between emotions and places, or what the authors term "emotional topography" (167). As one of their principal inspirations for investigating the spatiality and temporality of emotions, the authors cite Jochum Stättin's folkloristic study of fear in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sweden, which examined how different places in the countryside as well as in towns "were charged with different emotions" at different times (167); this included shifts

in perception relating to times of day and year. Fear may be heightened at night, for example; this was certainly true in ancient Roman society, which associated darkness with all sorts of dangers, from cutthroats to supernatural creatures. Various other places that invoked a sense of unease included liminal locations such as cemeteries and crossroads, where restless spirits were thought to roam. Moving on from considerations of ghosts, whether the spirit survives death, and whether the ancient philosophers thought that the concept of death should invoke fear or dispel it, the authors then consider various fears specifically related to Empire's urban centres. The last chapter in this section thus focuses on unexpected intrusions of octopuses and killer whales (orcas being the largest members of the dolphin family). Aelian tells a story about an octopus that breaks into a warehouse via the sewer in the harbour city of Puteoli, providing an early analogue to the twentieth-century contemporary legend of alligators in the sewers of New York, while Pliny the Elder provides an anecdote about a killer whale that wreaked havoc in Rome's port of Ostia. The intrusion of marine animals into a man-made, urban environment evoked fear and disgust in the spectators, playing on the fear that nature could at any moment undermine civilisation.

The authors conclude with a discussion of how storytelling can function therapeutically to comfort those who have suffered loss or fear for the future. The stories discussed in this volume provide examples of how "the verbalisation of emotions [...] was accomplished by inserting emotion-laden elements into traditional plot outlines of these originally oral stories" (244). Such elements are not only attributed to the characters in the stories, but also elicited in the audience. Moreover, stories that focus on anxiety and fear allow the audience to realise that similar misfortunes could happen to them, while also allowing the audience to distance themselves, "so as not to be overpowered by the miseries of others" (252). This distancing is part of the therapeutic process.

In short, this excellent, meticulous study – a very timely one in terms of the current trend in emotion studies – not only makes a crucial contribution to classical studies, but has a broad interdisciplinary appeal, and should be especially useful to anyone studying oral narratives. The stories alone make for a wonderful reading experience; folklore scholars in particular may be surprised by how many early analogues of later tale types appear here, and the volume's authors make clear the function of such narratives within the context of the stories' societies. This is an impressive achievement.