Catullus 64 and Lucan's *Pharsalia*

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The relationship between Lucan's *De Bello Civili* and its poetic predecessors has been the source of much study, and the poet's many references to Virgil's *Aeneid* in particular have been addressed in some detail. This paper will address Lucan's use of a less obvious model, Catullus 64. Commentators have made note of several Catullan tags in Lucan's epic (cf., e.g., J.E.G. Zetzel 1980), and while such verbal echoes may be perhaps be coincidental, modern studies (R.F. Thomas 1982, S.E. Hinds 1998) have illuminated the many ways in which well-known words, phrases, and *topoi* can to be deployed to enrich a text. Lucan's allusions to Catullus are occasionally warranted by the subject matter; it is not surprising that a reference to Theseus (*BC* 2.612) alludes to Catullus' *epyllion*, which was the *locus classicus* of the story of Theseus and Ariadne in Roman literature; likewise, a reference to the Argo (*BC* 3.193) echoes the language of the beginning of Catullus 64, a familiar telling of the myth of the Argonauts. In this paper, I would like to look beyond the verbal echoes of Catullus, and suggest that Lucan's allusions to the language of Catullus 64 summon that poem's themes as well, and that by alluding to Catullus 64, Lucan draws upon Catullus to mythologize the characters and actions of the *De Bello Civili.*

It is purely coincidental that an historical battle would be fought near the Thessalian town of Pharsalus, the very place where Catullus locates the wedding party of Peleus and Thetis (64.37). But the mythological location of such a portentous wedding, I argue, gives Lucan much material for his own narration of the similarly portentous battle between Caesar and Pompey that took place there in 48 BCE. Lucan's lengthy excursus on the topography of Thessaly (*BC* 6.333-412) recounts the region's troubled history. But Pharsalus would have been marked as an especially inauspicious locale, for in the mythological aftermath of Catullus 64, the goddess of Strife comes to the wedding party with her golden apple, thus precipitating the judgment of Paris, the abduction of Helen, and the Trojan War with all its concomitant death and suffering. Catullus' increasingly foreboding description of the wedding concludes with the song of the Parcae (which foretells rivers of blood and human sacrifice) and an epilogue which bleakly suggests that the gods no longer appear on earth due to human depravity. In Roman literature after Catullus 64, then, Pharsalus bears the weight of its mythic past.

Lucan, I argue, transforms the mythological events which took place at Pharsalus into Roman historical epic, coloring his poem about civil war with Catullan overtones. The doomed marriage of Peleus and Thetis is echoed in the marriage of Pompey and Julia; Achilles choking the Scamander with corpses is echoed in the Sullan proscriptions of Book 2; and the abandonment of humanity by the gods is one of Lucan's consistent themes. By alluding to the language and themes of Catullus 64, I argue, Lucan is able to exploit the metaphysical topography of Pharsalus and its place in literary history. The civil war between Pompey and Caesar thus repeats the cataclysm of the Trojan War, and makes Lucan's alternate title *Pharsalia* (*BC* 9.985) a poetic fusion of all of the events, mythological and historical, that took place on the plains of Thessaly.