

Caesar's Ascension to Divinity: A Literary Investigation of Caesar's Crossing
of the Rubicon in Lucan's *Pharsalia*.

In his *Pharsalia*, Lucan portrays Caesar as the anti-hero who transcends all natural human boundaries against a backdrop of war. Throughout Book 1 Caesar progressively grows in presence and in power. Lucan begins by foreshadowing his godly strength through his comparison of Caesar to a thunderbolt in the simile found in lines 143-53. Hardie 1993, understands Lucan's Caesar as embodying the forceful powers of both a god and of hell (61). Although I agree with Hardie that Caesar's ascent into power is hellish and warlike, I argue that Book 1 casts Caesar's rise to divinity as a necessity that he must first achieve in order to succeed in war. Hardie says, "Lucan's Caesar, as we have seen, has features of both god and beast, possessed by the energy of both thunderbolt and lion, carving his way to 'Heaven' of imperial apotheosis with the instruments of Hell" (68). I argue that the pivotal point of transformation occurs at the crossing of the Rubicon where Caesar disobeys the orders of a goddess, and crosses the final metaphysical defense of Rome. In the end Caesar conquers the river that has the power to divide and create thresholds (213-16), thereby transferring that power upon himself.

When Caesar crosses the Rubicon he is confronted by the *imago* of Patria herself, rising up out of the waters as if she were an extension of the Rubicon. Rivers are often used in poetry as a literary device to mark the major turning point in a poem, a place for character reflection and reader reflection due to a break in the narrative (Jones 2005). Lucan uses the Rubicon passage in the *Pharsalia* similarly; he slows the narrative, allowing the reader to reflect upon Caesar and Caesar's own self-reflection. While the civil war is fresh in the reader's mind due to the poem, Caesar is finally introduced in person as he approaches the boundary of the Rubicon. As Roche 2009 points out, Caesar crosses the boundary of the Alps as he "crosses the boundary into

narrative from proem” (204). The Rubicon separates the proem from narrative and it separates Caesar the general from Caesar the betrayer. Lucan delays the action of the narrative with speeches from the *imago* and then from Caesar, followed by a simile describing Caesar as a lion.

Bellum in line 184 is both a reference to the first line of the *Pharsalia*, as well as a reference to the civil war that Caesar is about to initiate by crossing the Rubicon. Lucan highlights Caesar’s agency in the cause of this war in lines 184-5 (*ingentisque animo motus bellumque futurum/ ceperat*). Lucan bookends Caesar’s agency between the two physical boundaries that Caesar must overcome in order to accomplish “victory:” between the *gelidas Alpes* (which he has just surmounted) and the new obstacle, the *parvi Rubiconis ad undas*. This description trivializes the obstacle for Caesar; the physical boundary is only *parvus*. It seems especially small with comparison to the gargantuan Alps that Caesar has already conquered. After Caesar reaches the Rubicon, he prays first to Jupiter, the protector of *moenia*, the ‘manmade’ physical boundaries (the second defense in his path) and then to Roma. In his prayer Caesar calls himself *victor terraque marique* (line 201). This line forcefully emphasizes Caesar’s claim as the “Conqueror” of boundaries and his claim to godhood. In his prayer Caesar assumes the role of Jupiter by becoming ‘All-Conqueror’ and the ultimate ruler over land and sea. From the beginning of the prayer Lucan places Caesar in a position equal to Roma in terms of power, through the mention of *instar*, as well as placing Caesar in the same line, thereby elucidating Caesar’s apotheosis through grammatical structure, in addition to Caesar’s declaration.

Bibliography

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