

Jupiter Divided: Civil War in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

The metaphor of a self-mutilating body pervades the imagery and language of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. Lucan employs the repeated language of an individual body divided against itself to highlight the unnatural divisions that occur within a civil war and to question the quality of peace that can follow. For instance, Lucan introduces his subject of civil war as “a powerful people turned against their own vitals with victorious right hands” (*populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, 1.2-3). Rome has a history of division amongst itself (Roux 41), which brings to the forefront the question of whether lasting peace is possible for Rome (Thompson 148). This is especially evident in the role of Jupiter within the epic.

Several scholars have pointed to the absence of the gods in the poem, claiming that any mention of the divine is only in vague terms without any role or influence in the dramatic action (Ahl 282). I argue that the figure of Jupiter, although he does not intervene in the narrative, is present through the Jovian metaphors that characterize Pompey and Caesar. The significance in his metaphorical presence lies in the imagery of self-mutilation – if Jupiter represents both Pompey and Caesar, then he must turn against himself as they war against each other.

The reader is first introduced to Pompey and Caesar through the Jovian similes of an oak and lightning, respectively (1.136-43, 1.152-7). Applying Jovian metaphors to both Caesar and Pompey and extending these likenesses throughout the whole of the epic makes little sense if read only as a device for character description. Certainly, both men strive to secure the position of the head of the state, just as Jupiter is the head of the gods, but each simile taken on its own depicts poor, even self-dooming qualities of leadership. The oak is decaying and relies on past glories to receive worship. The lightning forges a broad path of destruction that does not spare even its own holy spaces. Jupiter is not the firm guiding ruler Rome needs for harmony and

peace. He is divided among himself, and worse, self-destructive. As Caesar marches against Pompey, he marches against fellow Romans and Jupiter rages against himself (Nix 283). As Pompey and Caesar fight each other, and as the body of Rome tears itself apart, Lucan turns to the individual figure of Jupiter splintered into discordant symbols to emphasize the self-mutilation of severing the ties of natural unity.

When a body wars against itself, whether it be an individual or a state, it inevitably destroys part of itself. With the figure of Jupiter split between Caesar and Pompey, part must be conquered in order for the war to end. Caesar is ultimately victorious over Pompey—figuratively as he fells the oak (3.434) and literally with the brutal decapitation of Pompey (8.670). Although Pompey was once a great war leader and is likened to the ruler of the heavens, his name *Magnus* is an ironic marker of his failure to lead Rome as a unified state (Feeny 247). Pompey, like Rome, was destroyed by its own greatness (Johnson 76). Ultimately, the destruction was self-inflicted as Romans fought Romans and Pompey failed to unite a sufficient Jovian figure.

The division of Jupiter points to the loss of a natural unity within Rome caused by civil war. Split between opposing sides, the identity of Jupiter signifies civil war that only ends when his figure regains singularity—Pompey dies and Caesar is able to rule as the remaining likeness of Jupiter. The unity of Rome, however, is still dubious. Jupiter is no longer split, but neither is he harmonized. He is a mutilated figure, simultaneously victorious and defeated.

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