

The Poetics and Power of Lament in Lucan's *Pharsalia*

Recent scholarship (Murnaghan 1999; Tsagalis 2004) has examined the centrality of lament in Homer's *Iliad*: in this poem about death, lamentation is a chief mode of communication, of both the horrors and, correspondingly, the glories of war. In this paper I argue that Lucan similarly makes the voice of lamentation central to the narrative and argument of the *Pharsalia*. In a design that builds upon and at the same time rivals its Homeric model text, Lucan's poem integrates the lamentations of grieving characters but also the sustained dirge of the narrator.

Lucan's poem gives the opportunity to lament to several characters who are witnessing the fall of the Republic (Keith 2008). A group of Roman women (2.16-64), Pompey's wife Cornelia (8.639-61; see too 8.86-107), and an imaginary group of Pompey's admirers at 7.29-44 all offer poignant expressions of grief. But, in a significant detail, one of the grieving women in Book 2 exclaims that, after the war is over and one individual has prevailed, they will lose the "power to weep" (*flere potestas*, 2.40). In this passage that foreshadows the oppressive tyranny of the principate (Fantham 1999, 222), Lucan makes the inability to safely voice lament a striking condition of Rome after the victory of Caesar and the Caesars.

But at the same time Lucan gives the space for strident and sustained lament to a wholly different character: the narrator. The trope of narratorial apostrophe is pervasive in the *Pharsalia*. D'Alessandro Behr (2007) has tallied 197 apostrophes in the poem, and she argues that they "resemble miniature lamentations or perhaps failed lamentation"(23). Across the poem the narrator cries out about the death of Rome. He addresses these cries to a host of human characters and gods, to Roma herself (first at 1.21-3), to the baleful lands of Thessaly (7.847-71) and Egypt (8.823-72), and, in his first address, to Rome's citizens: "What is this madness,

citizens, what is this great license to kill?" (1.8: *quis furor, o ciues, quae tanta licentia ferri?*). As in this early call to Rome's warring citizens, the narrator's apostrophes are most often anxious and plaintive, articulating the suffering that Caesar's victory has produced.

The existence in the *Pharsalia* of both the lamentations of characters and the narrator's repeated cries about the death of Rome may be best understood as manifestations of the two types of lament that Homer describes: the more informal *gooi*, the wailing of family members; and the more formal *threnos*, the dirge that would be delivered by a professional singer -- but that is absent from the Homeric poems themselves (on these two types of lament, see Alexiou 1974). With this paper I propose that Lucan, in a wholly novel poetic gesture, fashions the narrator as the singer of a sustained *threnos*. The narrator's on-again, off-again dirge, presented alongside the *gooi* of the poem's characters, gives voice to those living and grieving under the tyranny of the Caesars, those who do not have the "power to weep."

In her work on lament in Homer, Murnaghan (1999) has emphasized that "a hero's achievement is measured in the suffering that it causes, in the grief that it inspires" (217). The lamentation that Lucan carries through his poem, while grim and full of despair for Rome's present and future, at that same time elevates and glorifies the primary recipient of the sustained lament: Rome herself. Moreover, by interlaying the multipart *threnos* of the narrator alongside the *gooi* of his characters, Lucan at the same time endows his own poetic voice with lasting power and glory.

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