

Haunting Caesar and Pompey: Death as a Characterization Method in the *Pharsalia*

In Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Caesar and Pompey are placed directly at odds with each other, both literally in the Civil War itself and figuratively in the way Lucan describes them. This contrast is particularly clear in the way that they are surrounded by death and ghosts at different points in the work. While some study has been done on the characterization of these leaders, most notably by Ahl (1976) and Masters (1992), further study is necessary concerning the different terminology and imagery Lucan uses to differentiate them. By looking at how Pompey and Caesar are surrounded by evil omens, vengeful ghosts, and mentions of Hades, this paper will look at how Lucan discusses fate and the afterlife, and the way that he interprets these aspects to show the favor of the gods as well as each character's morality.

In this paper, I demonstrate that Lucan uses the Underworld, fate, and death to show that Pompey is more loved by the gods and is a more sympathetic figure and that Caesar's actions in battle cause him to be hated by gods and men. Given Lucan's constant contrast of these two figures in "complementary and contrasting doublets" (Penwill, 2009) and Lucan's "obsession" with duality (Bartsch, 1997), further comparisons are inevitable. For example, Caesar at 7.772-786 is haunted by innumerable ghosts and compared to Orestes, Pentheus, and Agave in his madness, showing that the Underworld is hostile to him and, when he dies, he will not be welcomed into Hades. Pompey, on the other hand, receives the opposite prophecy when his son Sextus talks with the witch Erichtho at 6.802-809, and discovers that, although he will lose the war, he will be honored in death, analyzed well in Makowski (1977). The same parallels are shown in the omens that they observe. Caesar at 1.608-637 sacrifices a bull to only find rotting flesh, a universally terrible sign. At 3.8-40, Pompey is visited by the ghost of Caesar's daughter,

Julia. Although she is intending to scare Pompey, she reveals that he will die at the end of the war. Certainly, this is not positive, but even this scene demonstrates that the gods give Pompey guidance, while Caesar's lack certainty.

These passages demonstrate that Pompey's encounters with ghosts give him useful insight into the future, where Caesar's have evil messages that are unspecific and unsettling. I will use these examples and more to demonstrate that, although both Pompey and Caesar both encounter death imagery, the method used creates differing effects, providing Pompey with the moral high ground and allowing him greater access to the truth through prophecies. This paper will add to the current scholarship around the characterization of Caesar and Pompey through this case study and add to the understanding of ghost imagery in the *Pharsalia*.

Selected Bibliography

Ahl, Frederick. *Lucan: An Introduction*. Cornell Studies in Classical Philology; v. 39. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976.

Bartsch, Shadi. *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's Civil War*. [Revealing Antiquity; 6]. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Makowski, John F. "Oracula Mortis in the Pharsalia." *Classical Philology* 72, no. 3 (1977): 193-202.

Masters, Jamie. *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's Bellum Civile*. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Penwill, John L. "The Double Visions of Pompey and Caesar." *Antichthon* 43 (2009): 79-96.