

Looking Back in Anger: Nostalgia in Lucan's *Pharsalia*

Lucan's *Pharsalia* is commonly characterized as a poem of anger and bitterness. Quintilian describes Lucan as *ardens et concitatus* (*Inst.* 10.1.90); modern critics have called Lucan "too outraged," the *Pharsalia* a "bitter poem," and claimed the narrator "pretends to feel, for example, anger, fear, or sympathy" (Bartsch 2011, Mulhern 2020). This anger is seen especially in the narrator's antagonistic stance against Caesar, in which he apostrophizes Caesar to confront him of his crimes (*At tu, quos scelerum superos, quas rite vocasti / Eumenidas, Caesar, 7.168–9*). Anger has largely dictated the perception of Lucan, and distinguishes him as an author not only from his epic forebearers Homer and Vergil, who write with an "impartial manner," (Bartsch 2011) but also from writers of histories, such as Tacitus, who claim that true history is free from impassioned bias (*sine ira et studio, Tac. Ann. 1.1.3*).

The narrator's anger toward Caesar can be attributed to Caesar's role in the fall of the Republic, a demise which the narrator laments and considers the beginning of the tyranny of the principate (*Felix Roma quidem civesque habitura beatos / Si libertatis superis tam cura placeret / Quam vindicta placet, 4.807–9*). This expression of grief and resulting anger, however, has been little discussed in relation to nostalgia. This paper will address that scholarly gap by demonstrating that a connection can be drawn between the visible anger in the *Pharsalia* and a latent nostalgia for pre-civil war Republican Rome. A longing for the past, and to return to it, goes hand-in-hand with dissatisfaction toward one's present circumstances, and manifests as anger toward those perceived as causing the loss of that desired past. A 2017 psychology study affirms this relationship, demonstrating that collective nostalgia (a longing for a group's

collective past and cultural identity) is a predictor of outgroup-directed anger (Cheung et al. 2017).

In this paper I will examine the nostalgia of Lucan's portrayal of the fall of the Republic. First coined in 1688 as a medical diagnosis, nostalgia was not a formally recognized concept in the ancient world, despite its etymology (Boym 2001). Nonetheless, the sentiment of nostalgia, the melancholic longing for, and idealization of, former times and places, was clearly present in antiquity and its literary history. Nostalgia for earlier periods of time can be found as early as the myth of the ages of man in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, while nostalgia for previous spaces appears through Odysseus' journey home in Homer's *Odyssey*. The nostalgia exhibited in these foundational literary works is emulated throughout Greek and Roman literature during periods of change. The dramatic shift in the Roman political structure and the lasting trauma of civil violence made the civil war a critical period for the formation of a new cultural identity under the principate, and this period was especially fertile for nostalgia (Walde 2011).

As part of my discussion of nostalgia in the *Pharsalia*, I will examine the narrator's acerbic apostrophes and other expressions of anger toward Caesar, arguing that the diatribes against him depict Caesar as a member of the outgroup to the Roman people, the outgroup whose acts of civil war cause the loss of Lucan's yearned-for Roman prosperity and identity. I will also consider the theories of nostalgia as developed by English literary theory, based on the genre of nostalgia poetry of the eighteenth century, and by film theory (Santesso 2006, Le Sueur 1979). Through these theories, I will consider in what ways Lucan's poem reveals his knowledge and memory of the civil war, not as a historical event, but as a cultural myth integral to the Roman identity of his time. I will argue that a nostalgic longing for pre-civil war Rome is at

the *Pharsalia*'s core and constitutes Lucan's collective and cultural memory of what it means to be Roman under the principate.

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