

Revisiting Lucan's Druidic Grove (*BC* 3.399-452)

Early in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* Caesar and his men deforest a gloomy Druidic grove near Massilia (3.399-452). Recent discussions of Lucan's models for this episode (e.g. Hunink; Masters) follow the lead of Philips in seeing this passage as an attempt by Lucan to invert the quintessentially Ovidian topos of the *locus amoenus*.

My paper will examine two points. For one, I argue that in his grove episode Lucan does much more than simply subvert Ovidian motifs. Rather, I detect a more complex nexus of influences at work here in the form of allusions to Senecan tragedy, as well as the awareness of a contemporary act of grove-deforestation described by Tacitus (*Annales* 14.30-1). Second, I illustrate that in this passage we have an example of Tacitean allusion to Lucan, a topic ripe for further study.

A close reading of Seneca's *Thyestes*, *Oedipus*, and *Hercules Oetaeus* reveals that Lucan echoes, both thematically and verbally, descriptions of groves contained in these plays. I argue that Lucan's depiction of towering trees (*rami*), a lone oak (*quercus*), dismal springs (*undae*), burning wooden images (*simulacra*), and destruction of an entire grove and the subsequent re-admittance of light and animals owes a great debt to three very similar grove episodes found in the dramas of Seneca. Thus, the influence on Lucan of various Ovidian *loci amoeni* needs to be reconsidered in light of the close thematic and verbal parallels found in Lucan's contemporary. Lucan's allusive gestures here are far more complex than is usually noted.

Furthermore, Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.30-1) recounts the destruction of a grove in 60 C.E. by Suetonius Paullinus, an event that was topical during the composition of Lucan's epic. The thematic parallels between the Tacitean passage and Lucan's grove scene have been briefly examined by Dyson, yet my paper offers a more in-depth examination of the relationship between the two passages, citing Tacitus' allusions to Lucan through his use of the terms *stabat*, *densa*, *membris*, *cohortationibus*, *ducis*, *pavescerent*, *sacri*, *cruore*, and *aras*. Thus, Tacitus has steeped his history in the epic tradition by using Lucan's contemporary poetic account of grove-destruction as a model for his later history. By alluding to Lucan, Tacitus invites the reader to recall the sacrilegious episode depicted in Suetonius Paullinus' contemporary, and in so doing he offers a subtle commentary on the imperial regime's penchant for blind destruction, its arrogance, and its desecration of his native Gaul.

In this way, my reading accounts for the two most fundamental aspects of Lucan's historical epic: it is at once highly poetical, as the allusions to Seneca demonstrate, and profoundly 'historical', so much so that Tacitus used it to enrich his own work. Lucan's work reveals that Latin literature often defies modern attempts to categorize its various forms, for Roman authors drew on a variety of material in creating their works. No ancient historian was simply an historian, nor was any poet simply a poet.