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## REPLACING ROME: GEOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL CENTRALITY IN LUCAN'S *PHARSALIA*

ERICA M. BEXLEY

**T**HAT LUCAN'S *PHARSALIA* is a narrative of disillusionment is widely recognized in recent criticism.<sup>1</sup> That it bemoans Rome's loss of power to a would-be tyrant is, currently, almost an axiomatic observation. Although this article relies on these assertions it does not intend to reiterate them in any detail, but instead aims to investigate a particular series of connections that appear to have passed unnoticed: the distinctive parallels Lucan constructs between Rome and three other geographic locations—Delphi, Pharsalus, and Ammon—and the ways in which he uses these sites to represent the physical and conceptual dislocation of the *urbs*.

Although at the epic's outset Lucan places Rome at the world's midpoint and depicts the relationship between the city and its contemporary ruler, Nero, as one of codependent significance, he soon destabilizes the equilibrium. The contradictory geography Lucan creates symbolizes contested power: Caesar's desperate grab for command literally carves up the world and undermines Rome's assumed role as the political pivot of the globe. The *Pharsalia*'s multiple centers illustrate Caesar's irresistible force. Of the three locales, Delphi and Ammon are associated with Rome's past; Lucan equates them with the *mores maiorum*, especially in the figure of Cato, and with the senatorial government, led by Pompey, that Caesar threatens to overthrow. As Caesar's political and ethical rivals, they occupy a peripheral position, while Pharsalus' bloodied fields, which mirror Caesar's appetite for destruction, are granted center stage. Via this triadic interplay of location, individual personality, and the idea of Rome, Lucan asserts that the *urbs*' assumed centrality is neither guaranteed nor necessary in the impending Caesarian universe.

### I

In order to examine the political geography of Lucan's epic we must make some prefatory remarks about the proem. The poet's enigmatic encomium

I am most indebted to my two Australian supervisors, Parshia Lee-Stecum (University of Melbourne) and the late Charles Tesoriero (University of New England), for all of their unfailing support and helpful suggestions. I would also like to thank *CP*'s two anonymous reviewers for reading my submission so carefully. All Lucan translations are from Braund 1992; other translations are mine.

1. The epic is certainly negative, but the tendency to emphasize this negativity above any of its other characteristics is largely due to the influence of poststructuralism in Lucanian literary studies.

of Nero has generated a disproportionate amount of commentary. While resolution of its internal contradictions seems impossible, one more proposition may, however, be added to the pile: the Nero proem introduces Lucan's preoccupation with the politics of space and one-man rule (1.53–58):

sed neque in Arctoo sedem tibi legeris orbe  
nec polus aversi calidus qua vergitur Austri,  
unde tuam videas obliquo sidere Romam.  
aetheris inmensi partem si presseris unam,  
sentiet axis onus. librati pondera caeli  
orbe tene medio<sup>2</sup>

The poet's insistence that Nero's prospective divinity claim a seat at heaven's midpoint assigns corresponding positions and, by implication, corresponding roles to Rome and the emperor. Just as the deified Nero will be the focal point of all heavenly beings, so Rome is, by association, the pivot of the terrestrial globe. A metaphorical balance of power has become literal: if Rome and the emperor are not situated in the middle of the universe, then this universe will be thrown out of kilter.<sup>3</sup> This reciprocal relationship between Rome and its ruler has led Jamie Masters to affirm "the Romano-centrism of the Caesarian universe" in the *Pharsalia*.<sup>4</sup>

Yet this assertion entails further speculation. Although the proem establishes Rome's geographic centrality via the *urbs*' political associations, it nonetheless betrays anxiety over the emperor's relationship to the capital.<sup>5</sup> If, as Lucan's expression implies, Nero's dominance is such that he may shift his power away from Rome, then the "Romanocentrism of the Caesarian universe" is hardly assured. Admittedly, in chronological terms, power has already shifted: it belongs to Nero rather than to the city; Rome is only central by grace of Nero's position. Yet these ideas do not become fully apparent until later in Lucan's narrative, and will be analyzed presently. For now it is sufficient to acknowledge how the *Pharsalia*'s opening structures the roles of *urbs* and emperor. Uneasy negotiation between geographic location and individual power is crucial to Lucan's epic. The presence of multiple geographic centers implies, Caesarian universe notwithstanding, that the Lucanian universe is far from "Romanocentric."

The geographic error apparent in naming several pivotal points on the globe can be read as a deliberate distortion on Lucan's part. Far from indicating careless composition,<sup>6</sup> these centers demonstrate the potential weakness of

2. "But choose your seat neither in the northern sphere / nor where the torrid sky of opposing south sinks down: / from these positions you would view your Rome with star aslant. / If you press on either side of the boundless ether / the sky will feel the weight: maintain the mass of heaven poised / in the sphere's mid-point."

3. Masters (1992, 98) and Thompson and Bruère (1968, 5) analyze this passage's emphasis on balance. Whether to take the proem ironically or seriously is furiously debated in Lucanian scholarship: see in particular Ahl 1976, 30; Dewar 1994, 199–211; Grimal 1960, 299.

4. Masters 1992, 98.

5. Croisille 2002, 157.

6. Bourgerie (1928, 26) and Pichon (1912, 7) feel that Lucan's muddled geography derives from a combination of ignorance and previous errors copied verbatim from his sources.

Rome's position as *caput mundi*.<sup>7</sup> Although, with the exception of Pharsalus, Rome's rivals for centrality are marginal to the *Pharsalia*'s narrative action, Lucan prefaces them with detailed excursuses that highlight their bearing upon the epic's political concerns.<sup>8</sup> The narrative deliberately calls attention to Delphi, Pharsalus, and Ammon as though to deconstruct what it has originally proposed. The proem therefore functions as a paradigm, presented for readers to peruse, in order that they might understand the poem's deviation from it. It also follows that Lucan's multiple, pivotal locations are not so much significant in their own right as in their relationship to Rome.

## II

In Book 5, Lucan describes Delphi as central. While the oracle's status as the earth's midpoint derives from Greek mythology, in the *Pharsalia* it pertains to Rome's political power. By its mere existence as an alternate center, Delphi destabilizes Rome. The excursus also illustrates faltering senatorial control. Since Lucan positions it directly after the meeting of exiled senators, Appius' consultation of the oracle symbolizes the Pompeians' increasing decentralization.

The poet devotes significant attention to Delphi, which he explicitly describes as *Hesperio tantum quantum summotus Eoo* ("[a]s far removed from western as from eastern point," 5.71). Such phraseology invites comparison with the proem (1.53–58) and so establishes the shrine's relation to Nero's Rome: whereas Nero must balance the sky between north and south, Delphi is securely situated between east and west. Here Lucan's expression is more tightly arranged, with east and west situated at opposite ends of the line, implying a simultaneously greater degree of geographic and poetic equilibrium.<sup>9</sup> The parallel images suggest that Delphi's presence in the narrative specifically contradicts Rome's assumed centrality and does not simply function as a self-contained description of the *omphalos*.

Lucan's preoccupation with balance in both of these passages reveals how Delphi destabilizes Rome. Not only does he refer to the compass points, but he also portrays the earthly sphere as carefully suspended (5.93–96):

forsan, terris inserta regendis  
aere libratum vacuo quae sustinet orbem,  
totius pars magna Iovis Cirrhaea per antra  
exit et aethereo trahitur conexa Tonanti.<sup>10</sup>

7. See *Pharsalia* 2.136 and 2.655. The corporeal metaphor implies political control and geographic significance. However, the descriptions of decapitation strewn throughout the epic belie the assumption that Rome has any authority left.

8. While Heitland (1887, xxxiii, lxxiv) dismisses the Delphic episode in particular as "padding," Lucan's digressions are really far more integral to his overall themes.

9. Barratt 1979, 27.

10. "Perhaps a large part of all Divinity, / inserted in the earth to rule it and holding up / the sphere poised in the empty air, through the caves of Cirrha / issues forth and is inhaled, linked to the Thunderer in the ether."

Although this description is sometimes cited as evidence of Lucan's Stoic leanings,<sup>11</sup> few scholars note that the language used here recalls the poet's anticipatory apotheosis of Nero in the proem: *libratum orbem* (5.94) is reminiscent of the phrase *librati caeli* (1.57).<sup>12</sup> Yet the balance of the globe is clearly undermined when two distinct locations claim to be its fulcrum. Moreover, the corollary here suggested between Jove and Nero as governing principles of universal equilibrium is less than flattering to the latter: Jove's rule, although Lucan sometimes doubts its power (7.447–59), is at least validated by its antiquity, while Nero's divine heritage is extremely recent and questionable (7.457–59). Nero may have usurped Jupiter's position in heaven,<sup>13</sup> but his claim to preeminence is simply not as valid. Likewise, Rome may possess pivotal import as a political power, but Delphi has eternal centrality in the great cosmic order of things.

The association these passages construct between Nero and Jove is, however, more tangential than that between Nero and Apollo. Notably, Apollo's inspirational power earns him the title of *vates* (5.82–85):<sup>14</sup>

ut vidit Paeon vastos telluris hiatus  
divinam spirare fidem ventosque loquaces  
exhalare solum, sacris se condidit antris  
incubuitque adyto vates ibi factus Apollo.<sup>15</sup>

In a comparable passage in Book 1, Lucan, having anticipated Nero's apotheosis, assures him (1.63–66):

sed mihi iam numen; nec, si te pectore vates  
accipio, Cirrhaea velim secreta moventem  
solicitare deum Bacchumque avertere Nysa:  
tu satis ad vires Romana in carmina dandas.<sup>16</sup>

The use of the rather obscure adjective *Cirrhaeus* (1.64; 5.95) underscores what is already a definite link. Nero's inspirational power is analogous to that of Apollo. Nor was Lucan alone in his choice of such an adulatory image: comparing Nero to Apollo seems to have been a popular motif in the literature of the period, since it provided a fitting opportunity for sycophantic praise of the emperor's vatic forays.<sup>17</sup>

11. See Dick 1965, 463; Liebeschuetz 1979, 151.

12. Barratt 1979, 34.

13. Clearly this passage also refers to Caesar, but as Green (1994, 227) and Grimal (1960, 202) reveal, it is just as profitable to read it in relation to the proem.

14. See O'Higgins 1988, 208–26, for a study of the *vates* in Lucan's epic, and 208–17, specifically for the interrelationship of Apollo, the Pythia, Nero, and Lucan.

15. "When the victor saw the earth's vast chasms / breathe out divine certainty and the soil exhale / talking winds, he hid himself in the sacred caves / and there, become a prophet, Apollo settled on the shrine."

16. "But already to me you are a deity, and if I as bard receive you / in my breast, no wish have I to trouble the god who has control / of Cirrha's secrets or to distract Bacchus from Nysa: / you are enough to give me strength for Roman song."

17. *Einsiedeln Eclogues*, 1.37 and 2.38; Sen. *Apocol.* 4. Calpurnius Siculus (*Ecl.* 4.87) aligns the two closely, although he does not merge Apollo's *numen* with Nero's. Sen. *Clem.* 1.8.4–5 likens Nero to the sun, but makes no specific mention of Apollo.

On the other hand, Lucan's version of the analogy is not wholly positive; the *Pharsalia* presents these two images with a notable degree of dissonance and effectively creates a false parallel. Lucan declares that the Delphic earth breathes out *divinam fidem* (5.83)—a striking statement for a poem that usually revels in uncertainty. He then proceeds to mourn the oracle's desuetude, pronouncing kingship incompatible with faithful divinations (5.111–14). The proposition makes Nero into a spurious *vates*, an impostor. While Delphi's prophetic power is intrinsically linked to its geographic location (5.82–84) and guarantees its centrality, Nero's poetic pretensions merely undermine his city's preeminence. Nero's muse is perversely appropriate to an epic that sings of the transience of Rome.<sup>18</sup> In this instance, displacement occurs on a conceptual rather than strictly geographic level: Nero and Rome do not exhibit the same inherent unity as Apollo and Delphi. The emperor contradicts rather than augments the city's power.

Lucan's Delphic excursus further decentralizes Rome in that Delphi shares its dereliction with the doomed republican partisans. Although he creates no explicit link between Pompey and Delphi, the poet associates the oracle with republican decay in light of the passage immediately prior, the Senate's meeting in Epirus. For when Lentulus addresses the exiled senators, he reassures them that their power as Rome's governing body is central and dominant, but Appius' Delphic pilgrimage, which occurs in *medias res*, indicates that the Pompeian party has in fact been relegated to the periphery.

Lentulus' speech does not simply align the Senate's power with that of Rome, it imagines the two as homologous (5.23–30). Naturally, the Senate cannot transport the physical Rome—but, Lentulus argues, bricks and mortar and even the *curia* are not as important as what the Senate represents. Republican power, its traditions, and its principles can be conveyed and maintained elsewhere. It is these, rather than the actual city and its particular geographic location, that confer centrality. Lentulus describes Roman senatorial power in apposition to the uninhabitable regions of the world (5.23–27). He further regards it as a force dispersing Caesarian partisans to their deaths at the edges of the earth (5.37–40):

en totis viribus orbis  
Hesperiam pensant superi: iacet hostis in undis  
obrutus Illyricis, Libyae squalentibus arvis  
Curio Caesarei cecidit pars magna senatus.<sup>19</sup>

Here, as when he declares *ordine de tanto quisquis non exulat hic est* ("from such a mighty Order whoever is not an exile is here," 5.34), Lentulus illustrates the Senate's centrality via its supposed ability to define the periphery. Even if ultimate responsibility for scattering Caesarian forces must be attributed to the gods rather than to the Pompeians, branding Caesar's senators as exiles certainly reinforces Lentulus' idea of pivotal power.

18. Hershkowitz 1998, 209.

19. "See! With all the forces of the world / the gods make up for Hesperia: the enemy lies overwhelmed / in Illyrian waves, on Libya's barren fields / Curio has fallen—a large part of Caesar's Senate."

But Appius' visit to the Delphic oracle contradicts the ideals extolled in Lentulus' address and reveals them as outdated. One expects his presence at the site of the famously central oracle to be a positive *exemplum* of the Senate's claims, when it is an exercise in futility instead. In the first place, Appius is a minor, ineffectual character who does not in any way influence the course of the fight for Rome: *solus in ancipites metuit descendere Martis* ("Appius alone fears to descend into the hazardous events / of Mars," 5.67).<sup>20</sup> Secondly, he comes seeking answers from a moribund oracle. As Phomenoe's speech implies (5.131–34), Delphi's centrality is now merely nominal. Similarly, as a republican representative, Appius symbolizes the Senate's inability to alter Rome's fate or to change the world's layout.

That Delphi in some ways evinces Rome's decline is made clearer still by the characteristics it shares with Lucan's Pompey. He too possesses a glorious past and a desolate present. His leadership rests upon his former triumphs (1.134–35) and although his fame is assumed, it is no longer justified: *stat magni nominis umbra* ("[h]e stands, the shadow of a great name," 1.135). The pun indicates that Pompey is not merely the shadow of a great name, but also the shadow of his own name.<sup>21</sup> His reputation is now reduced to mere puppetry. Pompey's *nomen* is no longer aligned with its *omen* or destiny—it has become a veritable anachronism.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the most direct illustration Lucan provides of the Pompeians' truly peripheral status is the actual prophecy Phomenoe delivers. Although she is *deque orbis trepidi tanto consulta tumultu* ("consulted about the turmoil / so immense of the anxious world," 5.160), she articulates only Appius' insignificant destiny.<sup>23</sup> He, like Pompey and Cato, will not die and be buried in Rome (5.196). Both he and his virtually derelict republican cause have already been decentralized, despite Lentulus' claims to the contrary. Lucan's Delphic excursus shows how senatorial government, so integral to the idea of Rome, is displaced. Appius' pilgrimage anticipates the concept of Rome being redefined along Caesarian rather than Pompeian lines.

### III

In one of his final poems, W. H. Auden remarked that history is made by the criminal in us.<sup>24</sup> No statement more accurately sums up Lucan's Caesar, his manipulation of the world around him and his relationship to the central site of the epic. For, following Delphi, Lucan's depiction of Pharsalus also articulates the tension between Roman power and Caesarian dominance. Pharsalus is the bleakly ironic center point of Rome's destiny—the place in which the city's fate will be decided in favor of Caesar's preeminence. Here the rebel general's tendency to transgress natural limits not only reflects

20. Makowski (1977, 194) asserts that Lucan portrays Appius as a cowardly fool. Ahl (1969, 333) thinks Lucan is satirizing Appius' historical interest in the occult. Either way, Lucan trivializes this character.

21. Feeney 1986, 239; Putnam 1995, 227.

22. Feeney 1986, 239–40.

23. In contrast to Erichtho's, the Pythia's prophecy is a distinct anticlimax. See Ahl 1969, 337; Feeney 1991, 288; Makowski 1977, 195; Masters 1992, 147.

24. Auden 1976, 662–63.

Pharsalus' tortured landscape but also foreshadows the global rearrangement destined to result from his victory.

Denoting the battle fought between Caesar and Pompey as well as its physical location,<sup>25</sup> Pharsalia represents the geographic and textual halfway mark in Lucan's epic. It is the predicted (1.678–82) center of narrative action, upon which the two principal adversaries converge with ever-increasing momentum.<sup>26</sup> Prior to this pivotal conflict, Lucan describes Caesar as fighting *procul extremis terrarum . . . in oris* ("far off on the furthest borders of the earth," 4.1). Civil war draws him to the world's edge: *versus ad Hispanias acies extremae mundi / iussit bella geri* ("turned to Spanish battle-lines and the limits of the world, / ordering continuation of the siege," 3.454–55). Such expressions assume a center at which Caesar will eventually arrive (and it materializes that Pharsalus, not Rome, will fulfill this function). Fighting on the periphery also detains the Pompeian forces from the final showdown of Pharsalia: *celsam Petreius Ilerdam / deserit . . . et tendit in ultima mundi* ("Petreius . . . abandons/ high Ilerda and . . . heads for the world's furthest parts," 4.144–45; 147). This phrase illustrates how Lucan links narrative pace with geographic location, since *ultima* can translate as "final" as well as "furthest."<sup>27</sup> Hence the poet delays the vital action of his poem until it reaches Pharsalus, the center of the world.<sup>28</sup>

Reinforcing this argument is the high probability that Pharsalus' fateful site occupies the textual core of Lucan's eponymous epic. While endings as far afield as Philippi and Actium have been suggested, the most plausible view is that it would have run to twelve books and concluded with Cato's suicide, had not the poet's own suicide left future readers stranded along with Caesar halfway through Book 10.<sup>29</sup> In other words, it is likely that Lucan's lengthy Thessalian excursus in Book 6 constitutes the middle of his work. The poet underlines the crucial importance of Pharsalus by its location within the poem.

Pharsalus also represents a geographic midpoint because it is the place where east and west converge. Although Pompey and Caesar do not strictly arrive from opposite directions, Lucan presents the composition of their armies in terms of a dichotomy of orient and occident. In Book 1 (392–465), Lucan dilates upon a catalogue of Caesar's troops, all drawn from regions of Gaul

25. Bruère (1951, 112) observes that Lucan gives the same name to the battle and the site. I have called the physical location "Pharsalus" throughout, for the purposes of differentiation.

26. Masters (1992, 93–94) argues that Lucan's narrative delays its progress towards this unspeakable (*nefas*) battle.

27. *OLD*, s.v. *ultimus* 1, 4. Lucan uses *ultimus* in a specifically temporal sense at 5.181. See also Masters 1992, 94. Sullivan (1985, 150) observes that the battle "is the spatial and temporal pivot of the work."

28. Masters 1992, 93–95.

29. The theories on the proposed size and scope of Lucan's *Pharsalia* are many and varied. Bruère (1950, 217–31), Thompson (1964, 147–53), and Jal (1963, 54) suggest an ending at Actium, which makes the epic ludicrously long. Due (1962, 131–32) proposes Philippi. Marti (1970, 5) argues that the epic would have terminated with Caesar's assassination. Ahl (1968, 139–61, and 1976, 307–25) refutes all of these arguments to conclude that Lucan would have finished writing at the death of Cato. Bramble (1982, 39), Gorman (2001, 285), Sullivan (1985, 150), and von Albrecht (1997, 915, 920) concur. Brisset (1964, 163), Masters (1992, 216–59), and Spencer (2005, 66) assert that the epic is complete as it is. Although appealing, this final hypothesis is improbable because it regards the lack of resolution as overly calculated.



or Germany. To balance this, Book 3 (171–297) contains a rival catalogue of Pompey's predominantly Asian army. Both halves of the world advance upon Pharsalus.

The geographic centrality that Lucan bestows mirrors Pharsalus' political significance. On the morning of battle, Pompey announces to his assembled troops: *medio posuit deus omnia campo* ("the god has set all prizes in the field between us," 7.348).<sup>30</sup> Lucan creates this secondary center for emphasis: Roman power and all the reaches of the world that Rome controls, *omnia*, are literally positioned *medio campo*, condensed into a midpoint within the midpoint that is Pharsalus. Whoever leaves the field as victor will decide in what way the global map is to be redrawn. Pharsalus takes center stage because it is the site where the future of Rome, the ostensible center of the world, will be decided.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, Pharsalus closely resembles Rome in the way it temporarily embraces the entire world. After listing Pompey's troops, Lucan observes *acciperet felix ne non semel omnia Caesar / vincendum pariter Pharsalia praestitit orbem* ("[t]o ensure that lucky Caesar received everything at one stroke, / Pharsalia offered him the world to be conquered all at once," 3.296–97). Other Latin literature likewise depicts the *urbs* as expanding to accommodate its own empire,<sup>32</sup> such as in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* (1.173–74): *nempe ab utroque mari iuvenes, ab utroque puellae / venere, atque ingens orbis in Urbe fuit* ("of course, youths and girls came from either side of the sea, / and the whole huge world was inside the city"). Here a *naumachia* symbolically conveys the *orbis* into the center of the *urbs* since it attracts and represents people and places that exist far beyond the city, and because it reenacts military conquest, and the territory hence added to the empire. Like Ovid's Rome, Lucan's Pharsalus is an arena, in this case defined by surrounding mountains, but it does not showcase a display of imperial conquest.<sup>33</sup> Instead, it is the ironic center of Roman self-defeat.

The very fact that Caesar and Pompey confront each other at Pharsalus perverts Rome's pivotal position as much as it ensures Thessaly's crucial location. John Henderson remarks upon "the paradox of a *Roman* war fought out in *alien* Thessaly."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the paradox extends to the title of Lucan's epic: *Romana carmina* that sing of Roman destiny and yet are called the *Pharsalia*.<sup>35</sup> Pharsalus challenges Rome's centrality because as the site of

30. Another pivotal battle in Roman literature is Actium: Verg. *Aen.* 8.675.

31. Ahl (1968, 131) and Quint (1993, 149) remark upon the rather ironic centrality of Pharsalus to Rome's experience of imperial history.

32. Luc. 1.511; Ov. *Ars am.* 1.174, and *Fast.* 2.684. For discussion, see Bréguet 1969, 149; Edwards 1996, 99–100; Hardie 1986, 365; Hope 2000, 87.

33. Masters (1992, 155) views Lucan's Pharsalus as an arena.

34. Henderson 1998, 187. Emphasis original.

35. Ahl 1968, 125, 137. Of course, other Latin epics bear equally un-Roman titles: Naevius' *Bellum Punicum*, Cornelius Severus' *Bellum Siculum*, and later, Silius Italicus' *Punica*. However, with one exception, these epics celebrate Rome's foreign victories. Also, *Pharsalia* is not the only title available for Lucan's epic. The most reliable manuscripts head the work *De belli civilis libri X*, and the title *Pharsalia* derives from Stat. *Silv.* 2.7.66 and internal evidence at 9.985–86. Brûère (1950, 218) argues that the latter heading is erroneous because it ascribes too much to one line of the poem. Contrast Ahl 1968, 133; Heitland 1887, xxxvi; von Albrecht 1997, 914. *Pharsalia* really is the most ironically appropriate title for this epic, and the central placement and importance of the eponymous battle contribute some justification for this nomenclature.

a crucial battle it heralds a new ruler who will, as indicated in Lucan's authorial asides and even in the proem, usurp Rome's preeminence. These two threads of interpretation unite in Lucan's pertinent use of the adjective *Emathius*, which designates both Thessaly and Macedonia and so recalls Alexander the Great's global domination.<sup>36</sup> Pharsalus temporarily robs Rome of significance in order to give victory to Caesar who will, on the model of his Macedonian *exemplum*, attempt to make himself the pivot of the globe.

Given this, it is not surprising that Lucan creates a strong correlation between Pharsalus and Caesar. Indeed, if Lucan's overall coloring of the Delphic episode can be termed "Pompeian," then his depiction of Pharsalus is unmistakably "Caesarian."<sup>37</sup> As the primary site of civil war battles, Pharsalus complements Caesar's *nefas*. Characterized as a lightning bolt (1.151–57), Lucan's Caesar is a man of violent, ruinous power. His indomitable energy is, moreover, deliberately immoral: *Caesar in arma furens nullas nisi sanguine fuso / gaudet habere vias* ("Caesar, mad for war, rejoices to proceed only by shedding / blood," 2.439–40). By specifically choosing the participle *furens*, Lucan makes Caesar the antithesis of Aeneas, who must attempt to overcome this impetus to violence.<sup>38</sup> Unlike Vergil's dutiful hero, Caesar rejoices in his own destructive potential: *iuvat Emathiam non cernere terram / et lustrare oculis campos sub clade latentes* ("[h]e is delighted that he cannot see the Emathian land / and that his eyes scan fields hidden underneath the carnage," 7.794–95). *Gaudet* and *iuvat* imply a sadistic inclination that befits the main proponent of civil war.

Caesar's characteristic violence is also written across the landscape of Pharsalus. Lucan portrays Thessaly's location and mythic history as a fitting backdrop for the coming battle, and suitably associated with Caesar:<sup>39</sup> *hac tellure feri micuerunt semina Martis* ("[i]n this land did seeds of savage warfare spring to life," 6.395). Lucan's extended account of Emathian topography substantiates this claim via an accumulation of violent language: *coercet* (6.334); *opponit* (6.336); *adversos* (6.339); and *excipit* (6.339) are just a few examples of the poet's martial vocabulary.<sup>40</sup> In reference to mythology, Lucan presents Thessaly as the birthplace of the first warhorse (6.396–97) and of Achilles, Caesar's mythological role model (6.349–50).<sup>41</sup> Even Agave receives a mention in Lucan's catalogue of gory mythological favorites: she comes to Thessaly as an exile from Thebes, still carrying her son's severed head (6.358–59). The gruesome image anticipates Pompey's imminent defeat, which results in his and the Republic's decapitation.<sup>42</sup> The

36. Mayer (1986, 49) observes that Emathia was identified with Macedonia. Henderson (1998, 171) associates Lucan's use of the adjective with Macedonia's most famous progeny, Alexander.

37. Masters 1992, 183.

38. The poet's antithetical pairing of Caesar and Aeneas is remarked upon, to varying degrees, by Ahl 1976, 274–79; Hershkovitz 1998, 222; Newmyer 1983, 249; Thompson and Bruère 1968, 5–9. Whether Aeneas ever does overcome his *furor* is, of course, infinitely debatable.

39. See Masters 1992, 150–78, for a detailed analysis of Lucan's Thessaly.

40. Both Masters (1992, 155) and Tesoriero (2000, 14–18) remark upon Lucan's repeated verbal suggestions of conflict in this section.

41. Tesoriero 2000, 22. See also Ahl 1968, 134; von Albrecht 1999, 232.

42. Masters 1992, 162.

brutality through which Caesar will seize the Roman state is written into the history of Pharsalus.

A further trait Lucan's Caesar shares with the Thessalian region is a propensity for transgression, especially of natural limits. After all, the action with which Caesar commences the *Pharsalia*'s narrative and initiates civil conflict is the crossing of the Rubicon (1.215–16). The unnatural violence he thereby unleashes threatens universal destruction: *extimuit natura chaos* (5.634).<sup>43</sup> In the storm scene in Book 5, Lucan employs martial vocabulary—*occurrit* (5.601); *concurrere* (5.607); *defendisse* (5.611)—to depict Caesar's aggression against his fellow Romans as being replicated in nature, which wars against itself.<sup>44</sup> The rebel general warps the world to the extent that even the Libyan serpents fight for him: *pro Caesare pugnant / dipsades et peragunt civilia bella cerastae* (“[i]n place of Caesar, Dipsads / fight; Cerastae finish off the civil war,” 9.850–51).<sup>45</sup> As lightning (1.151–57), Caesar also embodies a violent disregard for environmental limits. He is, W. R. Johnson observes, “not so much a political phenomenon, a man who wants power, as a process in nature: he wants to *be* power, he *is* power.”<sup>46</sup> This power disrupts the *Pharsalia*'s world.

Lucan mirrors his characterization of Caesar when he portrays Pharsalus as a place of shifting, ill-defined boundaries. For instance, his incorrect positioning of Ossa and Pelion in Book 6 (333–36) has led Abel Bourgery to conclude that the poet was simply ignorant of geography,<sup>47</sup> yet this cannot be so, as Lucan later describes their correct location (6.347–48; 411–12). Instead, this confusion of Thessalian topography is a deliberate attempt to illustrate the gigantomachic chaos of civil war—Lucan literally piles Pelion on Ossa.<sup>48</sup> The excursus also deliberately muddles the names of towns and rivers, in order to conjure mythological allusions reminiscent of primal violence.<sup>49</sup> Such geographic uncertainty symbolizes the tendency of civil warfare, and of its major proponent Caesar, to jeopardize and invalidate limits.<sup>50</sup>

Pharsalus further reflects Caesar's transgressive tendencies through being the birthplace of witches. Lucan's Erichtho also possesses the arrogance and ability to directly pervert the laws of the universe (6.461–65). This sorceress is a terrifying chthonic force that embodies the macabre, disruptive atmosphere of civil conflict. Her incantations make rivers run uphill (6.472–74) and, significantly, disrupt the balance of the world: *terra quoque inmoti concussit ponderis axes / et medium vergens titubavit nisus in orbem* (“Earth

43. As an elemental force, Caesar's behavior causes equivalent upheaval in the natural and political spheres. See Bramble 1982, 41; Lapidge 1979, 368; Newmyer 1983, 249–50.

44. See Bramble 1982, 58–59.

45. Hershkowitz (1998, 245) makes this connection.

46. Johnson 1987, 74. Emphasis original.

47. Bourgery 1928, 26–27.

48. Masters (1992, 154–55) explains the contradiction as purposeful and designed to illustrate the confusion and transgression of civil war.

49. See Masters 1992, 150–78.

50. See Sklenář 2003, 129, for evidence of Caesar's tendency to violate geographical limits and boundaries.

too shakes the axis of her unmoved weight, / the thrust which tends towards the centre of the earth falters," 6.481–82). In these lines, Lucan's language is instantly recognizable as part of his motif of global balance and centrality that extends back to the proem. Here the poet links Erichtho's black arts with the cosmic confusion that emanates from Caesar, and with the resulting decentralization of Rome. Erichtho corrupts natural laws in the same way that Caesar's, and Lucan's, civil war confounds established political geography.

Of course, the very title of Lucan's work commemorates this inter-identification of Caesar and Pharsalus. Later in his epic, the poet proclaims: *venturi me teque legent; Pharsalia nostra / vivet* ("the future ages will read me and you; our Pharsalia / shall live," 9.985–86). Besides being a characteristic declaration of vatic immortality, the statement reveals Caesar's enduring domination over both geography and verse.

Since Lucan establishes a close thematic correlation between Caesar and Pharsalus, it may appear odd that Pompey's son Sextus is the character who consults Erichtho. Blatant lack of historicity makes this scene all the more striking: Sextus was not at Pharsalus but with Cornelia on Lesbos.<sup>51</sup> His presence is problematic. While several scholars have attempted to solve the conundrum,<sup>52</sup> Charles Tesoriero's argument that Lucan's Sextus resembles Caesar, and the world's Caesarian future, stands out as the most viable.<sup>53</sup> When the poet describes Sextus as *impatiensque morae venturisque omnibus aeger* (6.424), he imbues him with an un-Pompeian desire for action.<sup>54</sup> It is Caesar, not Pompey, who is typically impatient of delay.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Sextus' *impietas* (6.421–22), and unorthodox behavior (6.425–30), match him with Caesar rather than his father.<sup>56</sup> Lucan's use of Sextus does not in any way contradict the connection he creates between Pharsalus and Caesar.

Pharsalus' centrality simultaneously acknowledges and undercuts Rome's pivotal significance, as Lucan's descriptions of Thessaly show how the violent expression of one man's power decentralizes the *urbs*. Pharsalia, as the place, the battle, and the title of Lucan's work, reconstrues established concepts of imperialism: Caesar wins, but Rome suffers debilitating slaughter.

#### IV

Cato's visit to Ammon forms the third scene in Lucan's triad. Here, as in the poet's portrayal of Delphi, Lucan draws links between Rome and Ammon largely on the conceptual plane. While Ammon cannot be said to possess global centrality per se, it is pivotal to the extent that it exhibits core Roman values, Cato's mutual display of which shows, like Delphi's "Pompeian" coloring, that a particular traditional ideal of Rome is rapidly becoming marginal.

51. For historical evidence, see Dio Cass. 42.2.3; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 74.1.

52. See, in particular, Dick 1963, 43; and Martindale 1980, 368.

53. Tesoriero 2002, 229–47.

54. Tesoriero 2002, 234.

55. Other instances of Caesar's impetuosity occur at 1.124, 2.656–57, 3.453, 5.300–304, 6.13–14, 9.47–48.

56. Tesoriero 2002, 234.

First, some preliminary observations are necessary. Whatever links Lucan establishes between Cato and Ammon, the ones he creates between Cato and Rome arguably play a more significant role in the epic's narrative. Cato's relationship to the *urbs* is familial: *urbi pater est urbiq[ue] maritus* (2.388); the sage grieves for its loss of liberty as he would for a dead son (2.297–302). Moreover, it is this intrinsic connection to Rome that really defines Lucan's Cato and distinguishes him from Pompey and Caesar: while they fight for control of Rome, Cato fights for Rome itself and admonishes his troops to do likewise (9.257–58). But this association neither overrides nor contradicts Lucan's Libyan episode. In the latter, Cato's allegiance to the *urbs* is consigned to the fringes of the impending Caesarian universe along with the antiquated values that inspire it.

Lucan's description of Ammon is neither as meticulous as his previous geographic excursions nor as conclusive. The shrine definitely possesses some degree of centrality, but this is partially negated by the topographic uncertainty of its extreme and marginal location—a paradox made manifest when Lucan prefaces Cato's arrival. The poet relates: *deprensus est hunc esse locum qua circulus alti / solstitii medium signorum percutit orbem* (“[i]t has been discovered that this is where the circle / of the higher solstice strikes the middle of the zodiac,” 9.531–32). Given that Rome, Delphi, and Pharsalus have all previously been introduced as central locations, it is tempting to view Ammon as the next in the sequence. But in this instance, any suggestion of centrality is highly contingent, since *medium signorum percutit orbem* means Ammon is situated on the Tropic of Cancer.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the shrine's position in the middle of the Syrtes makes its location rather indeterminate. In Book 9, Lucan adheres to the tradition that imagines the Syrtes as a region of geographic instability.<sup>58</sup> Directly prior to their arrival at Ammon, Cato and his soldiers endure a sandstorm: *iamque iter omne latet, nec sunt discrimina terrae / sideribus novere viam* (“and now their entire path is hidden and gone are all the land-marks: / they found their way by constellations,” 9.494–95). The idea that this landscape lacks definition indicates that whatever centrality Ammon can be said to possess, it certainly is not secure.

Furthermore, Lucan's Libya is extreme. Situated in the harsh, barren sweep of the desert, Ammon can hardly be said to enjoy the temperate climate that usually characterizes the earth's midpoint (9.435–37).<sup>59</sup> Libya resembles the primitive landscapes that feature in ancient ethnographies of Strabo, Mela, and Pliny.<sup>60</sup> Its fields cannot support agriculture—*illa tamen sterilis tellus fecundaque nulli / arva* (9.696–97)—and its people are hardy and simple, *gens dura* (9.439). These inhabitants are depicted as noble savages: they do not trade (9.443–44); they have no knowledge of precious metals (9.422);

57. Aumont 1968, 317; Bourguery 1928, 29.

58. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1233–39; Sall. *Iug.* 78; Strabo 17.3.20. Plin. *HN* 5.4.26 also refers to the Syrtes as treacherous.

59. Rome, by contrast, was supposed to be located in a more temperate and fertile region of the world. Geographic and climatic balance was viewed as natural justification for empire: Vitruvius *De arch.* 6.1.10–11; Varro *Rust.* 1.2.3–5.

60. Mela 1.21; Plin. *HN* 5.4.26, 7.2.14; Strabo 2.5.33, 17.3.1.

their hard life mirrors their environment.<sup>61</sup> Typically, Libya's deviation from the point of central tendency emphasizes its distance from Rome.

Nevertheless Lucan makes the shrine pivotal in another manner, highlighting its significance via narrative structure. Like Pharsalus, the Libyan oracle claims a central spot within the text itself, since Cato's visit to it is the core episode of Book 9, and occurs almost exactly in the middle.<sup>62</sup> Lucan thus singles it out for special attention. He particularly emphasizes the parallel qualities that Ammon and Cato possess, thereby creating a connection that represents Rome's displacement and destabilization. As with the relationship of Pharsalus to Caesar, Ammon is imbued with typically Catonian traits; like Delphi's Pompeian associations, it symbolizes an idea of Rome that is no longer really pivotal, however much it is claimed to be so.

Lucan portrays Ammon's as a deity of distinctly primitive virtue (9.519–21):

pauper adhuc deus est, nullis violata per aevum  
divitiis delubra tenens, morumque priorum  
numen Romano templum defendit ab auro.<sup>63</sup>

Although he contrasts Ammon with the recognizably civilized form of Roman Jupiter—*stat sortiger illic / Iuppiter, ut memorant, sed non aut fulmina vibrans / aut similis nostro, sed tortis cornibus Hammon* (“there stands the oracle-giver, / Jupiter, as tradition says, but not shooting thunderbolts / or like our own, but Ammon with his twisted horns,” 9.512–14)—the poet ascribes a traditional form of Roman *virtus* to this Libyan deity.<sup>64</sup> While Lucan employs his habitual technique of negative description to enhance Ammon's foreignness,<sup>65</sup> this only makes the shrine's simplicity and poverty all the more pronounced. Rome's golden Capitoline has long renounced the *mores* that distinguish Ammon. Paradoxically, the flow of gold, luxury, and dependent corruption that Roman authors usually trace to the vice-ridden East is here reversed.<sup>66</sup>

Ammon's moral rectitude mirrors Cato's *virtus* (2.380–81; 384–87):

hi mores, haec duri inmoti Catonis  
secta fuit . . .  
  
huic epulae vicisse famem, magnique penates  
summovisse hiemem tecto, pretiosaque vestis,  
hirtam membra super Romani more Quiritis  
induxisse togam.<sup>67</sup>

61. Thomas (1982, 109–11) analyzes these parallels and remarks that Lucan depicts the savages' behavior in approving moral terms. For descriptions similar to Lucan's, see Polyb. 4.19–20; Just. *Epit.* 2.2; Strabo 7.3.9.

62. Morford 1967, 124, 127.

63. “Still he is poor and occupies a shrine profaned / through ages by no wealth and, a deity of the ancient ways, / he defends his temple against Roman gold.”

64. Sklenář (2003, 91) remarks on this paradox.

65. Bramble (1982, 47) and Martindale (1976, 49) further analyze this Lucanian technique.

66. Sklenář 2003, 91. See also Sall. *Cat.* 11.5 and Tac. *Ann.* 14.20.

67. “This was the character and this the unswerving creed / of austere Cato . . . / In his eyes to conquer hunger was a feast, to ward off winter / with a roof was a mighty palace, and to draw across / his limbs the rough toga in the manner of the Roman citizen of old / was a precious robe.”

The shrine's poverty and simplicity link it closely with the man who believes that it is a feast merely to banish hunger. Lucan's mention of *morumque priorum* (9.520) is especially significant. Taken in conjunction with the portrait of Cato in Book 2, the expression inevitably evokes the *mores maiorum*. Cato and Ammon uphold the morality of a past age. Like Delphi, Ammon thus challenges Rome at a conceptual level, by embodying critical values that the *urbs* has betrayed.

Additionally, Cato's personality and creed mirror the shrine's desert environment. The adjective *durus*, which Lucan regularly employs to denote both Cato's rectitude and his endurance,<sup>68</sup> equally evokes Libya's harsh landscape and the *gens dura* (9.439) who inhabit it.<sup>69</sup> The ascetic countryside that surrounds Ammon corresponds implicitly to Cato's behavior.<sup>70</sup> It also presents an arena for the exercise of his *dura virtus* (9.382–85):<sup>71</sup>

vadimus in campos steriles exustaque mundi,  
qua nimius Titan et rarae in fontibus undae,  
siccaque letiferis squalent serpentibus arva.  
durum iter ad leges patriaeque ruentis amorem.<sup>72</sup>

Thirst, burning sun, and snakes make Cato's march through Libya a Stoic expression of indifference to suffering.<sup>73</sup> Together, the leader and the location illustrate extreme austerity.

Lucan draws the link tighter still. Unlike the associations between Pompey and Delphi, and Caesar and Pharsalus, no intermediary visits the oracle in Cato's stead. When Cato stands outside the shrine's doors, he delivers his own pronouncement about fate, *deo plenus tacita quem mente gerebat* ("filled with the god he carried in his silent mind," 9.564), and so appropriates Ammon's role for himself.<sup>74</sup> Cato becomes the oracle; he becomes the center as he expounds the pivotal tenets of his Stoic belief (9.580–84). It appears that Lucan seriously alters the source of Cato's historical desert march in order to have him visit Ammon,<sup>75</sup> and this makes the scene doubly significant. Its central positioning within Book 9 also implies, at least initially, that Cato's Stoicism is the key to survival in Lucan's chaotic, perverted, nihilistic universe.<sup>76</sup> Cato's prophetic role, his position as a guarantor of

68. Newmyer (1983, 232), Sklenář (2003, 81), and Thomas (1982, 115–17) observe that Lucan takes pains to stress Cato's *duritia*.

69. Thomas 1982, 115.

70. Thomas 1982, 115.

71. Leigh 2000, 103, 108.

72. "We march towards the barren plains and the burnt-up places of the world / where Titan is excessive and waters scarce in springs / where dry fields are caked with deadly snakes. / Hard is the path towards legality and love of crashing fatherland."

73. Leigh 2000, 108–9.

74. Cato's assumption of the role of oracle is asserted by Dick 1965, 466; Feeney 1991, 290–91; Makowski 1977, 202; Morford 1967, 126; Rudich 1997, 118. Lucan earlier confirms Cato's senioriacular status at 2.285.

75. Pichon 1912, 37. Aumont (1968, 316–17) defends Lucan's geography by suggesting that Cato did not visit Ammon, but one of the lesser shrines that lay along his route.

76. This is certainly the dominant view of Cato. See Ahl 1976, 231–79; George 1991, 237–58; Gorman 2001, 286, 288; Liebeschuetz 1979, 140; Lintott 1971, 503; Marti 1945, 355, 359–62; Makowski 1977, 195, 201; Morford 1967, 127–29; Newmyer 1983, 231; Rudich 1997, 183; Sullivan 1985, 144.

divine truth—*arcano sacras reddit Cato pectore voces* (2.285)—has led the majority of scholars to affirm Cato's righteousness.<sup>77</sup> Others argue that, while collective *libertas* will perish with the Republic, Catonian Stoicism guarantees personal freedom, in life or death.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, Cato prophesies that moral conduct is more important than historical events,<sup>79</sup> and that true *virtus* accepts fate rather than fighting over it, and hence achieves true *libertas*.<sup>80</sup>

However, this viewpoint entails several difficulties. Principally, it assumes that in the Libyan episode Cato is the mouthpiece for the poet,<sup>81</sup> when Lucan in fact subtly undermines the Stoic sage. For, as Cato himself has previously observed, the central location from which he chooses to speak really is very remote: *sterilesne elegit harenas / ut caneret paucis, mersitque hoc pulvere verum?* ("did he select the barren sands / to prophesy to a few and in this dust submerge the truth?" 9.576–77). The irony is not lost on the reader, even if it is lost on Cato. For standing in the middle of nowhere and prophesying to a handful of nobodies is exactly what Cato is doing—and this is his great, stirring, Stoic speech upon which the proposed optimism of Lucan's poem hinges. When Cato discredits the oracle he risks discrediting his own semi-oracular utterance. Still more importantly, Lucan aligns Cato's laudable Roman *mores* with an unpredictable, extreme, peripheral region of the world. By marginalizing the sage and his creed, Lucan demonstrates not only Rome's loss of *virtus*, but also Cato's loss of Rome. These *mores* are no longer pivotal and hence no longer powerful. Caesar's assault has altered the idea of Rome so that he, the most un-Stoic character in the epic,<sup>82</sup> is the epicenter.

#### CONCLUSION

So, what could all of these parallels possibly mean? As I asserted earlier, it is crucial that they be read with reference to the proem. The impossible simultaneous centrality of Rome, Delphi, and Pharsalus challenges Rome's political significance as established at the outset of the epic. Revealed in the proem and reinforced in these evocations of particular sites is the idea that henceforth Rome must depend upon an individual, a ruler, for its significance and centrality.

Lucan's treatment of these locales anticipates the global rearrangement that will result from Caesarian victory: Caesar and Pharsalus take center stage, while Pompey and Cato are relegated to the wings. Moreover, when Lucan creates thematic parallels between Delphi and the republican partisans on the one hand, and Ammon and Cato's moral creed on the other, he demonstrates Caesar's iconoclastic ascendancy. The marginalization of Ammon and Delphi foreshadows the outcome of the war, while Caesar's disruptive power

77. George 1991, 237–58; Hershkowitz 1998, 232; Liebeschuetz 1979, 140; Marti 1945, 355, 359–62; Morford 1967, 127–29.

78. This stance is maintained by Gorman 2001, 288; Lintott 1971, 503; Makowski 1977, 195.

79. Ahl 1976, 266.

80. See Gorman 2001, 263–90.

81. Rudich (1997, 127) argues that Cato's views should not be read verbatim as Lucan's.

82. Hershkowitz (1998, 232) sees Caesar as the antithesis of Cato.



demonstrates the potential for one man to usurp Rome's geographic and political preeminence and to reorder the world along his own lines. Caesar's power is inimical to established concepts of Rome. After Pharsalia, the *urbs* cannot envision its pivotal power in terms of senatorial government or the *mores maiorum*. Instead, its centrality will be wholly determined by Caesar, who will stand at the center of politics, of geography, and even of meaning.

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