Introduction: Lucan’s “excessive” passion/historiography

- Lucan’s too fiery and passionate treatment of his topic (Quint. Inst. 10.1.10; cf. Bartsch 2011).

- Truth the ideal, and opposite of bias (Bartsch, 304). Both ancient writers and Victorians disqualified Lucan from being either a proper epic poet or historian.

- Bartsch’s thesis: Lucan’s bias calculated to demonstrate the ongoing effects of civil war.

Thesis

- My thesis: the hard distinction between the goals of poetry and history are more ideal than real. In practice historians like Tacitus and epic poets often treated the same concrete events and engaged with one another’s interpretations and arguments. Lucan takes part in this conversation through engagement with poets and historians who came before him and through Tacitus’ engagement with Lucan’s arguments.

- Goal of Presentation: Lucan’s historiography (i.e.: in conversation with the historical and epic traditions), not Lucan’s history (a different and equally important topic).

Proof of Concept: Lucan in two very Roman conversations

The First:

- Lucan and the explanatory narrative of the foundational crime of Rome, the murder of Remus by Romulus in 1.92-7:

  nulla fides regni sociis, omnisque potestas
  inpatiens consortis erit. nec gentibus ulla
  crede nec longe fatorum exempla petantur:
  fraterno primi maduerunt sanguine muri.
  nec pretium tanti tellus pontusque furoris
  tunc erat: exiguum dominos commisit asylum.

- Which corresponds to the historian Livy’s conclusion in 1.6.4:

  Intervernit deinde his cogitationibus avitum malum, regni cupido, atque inde foedum certamen,
  coortum a satis miti principio.

  Desire for tyranny, the ancestral evil, then interrupted these designs [the founding of Rome], but thenceforth shameful rivalry arose from quite placid beginnings.

- And to Horace’s judgment concerning the causes of civil war in his own day, Epode 7.17-20:

  Sic est: acerba fata Romanos agunt
  Sceclusque fraternae necis,
  Ut imмерentis fluxit in terram Remi
  Sacer nepotibus cruor.

  Thus it is: Harsh fates drive Romans, and the crime of fraternal murder; when the blood of undeserving Remus flowed into the earth, (it was) ominous for his descendants.

- So: L. participates in broad, long-lived discussion about the cause of the sufferings of Rome—not as an epic poet in contraversion to other Roman intellectuals, but in conversation with them.
The Second:

- Tacitus’ deployment of a trope used in (esp. epic) poetry as far back as Virgil (cf. *Georgics* 1.465-514) to illustrate the repetitive nature of civil strife in *Histories* 1.50.2:

  Nec iam recentia saevae pacis exempla sed repetita bellorum civilium memoria captam totiens suis exercitibus urbem, vastitatem Italiae, direptiones provinciarum, Pharsaliam Philippum et Perusiam ac Mutinam, nota publicarum cladium nomina, loquebantur.

  No longer were they discussing the recent examples of savage peace but, with the memory of civil wars dragged back, they spoke of their city captured so often by their own armies, of the devastation of Italy, of the plunderings of the provinces, of Pharsalus and Philippi, Perusia and Mutina, the notorious names of public disasters.

- Joseph Timothy: Tacitus’ construction, *Pharsaliam Philippum*, takes part in a poetic conflation between the two battles and sites used multiple times by Lucan to drive home the soul-rending repetitiveness of Roman civil war (Timothy, 59).

- One of the most poignant instances of this conflation comes during the prophecy at *Civil War* 1.678-94. After listing five different events that will take place in the future, the prophetess complains to her muse, Apollo,

  Nova da mihi cernere litora ponti
  Telluremque novam; vidi iam, Phoebus, Philippi.

  Allow me to see new shores of the sea and new earth; O Phoebus, Philippi I have seen already (1.693-694).

- In Lucanian paradox, Philippi refers to Pharsalus as its double (Timothy, 59 points out that the prophetess actually calls Pharsalus *Philippus* in 1.680).

Conclusion:

- Lucan engages with both historians and poets (epic and otherwise) and is himself engaged by historians such as Tacitus. He is integrated deeply into Roman historiography (which includes both poets and historians).
Bibliography


