

Caesar's Storm: The Crafting of Heroic Identity in *Bellum Civile* V

In Book Five of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* Caesar embarks on a quest that sends him on a collision course with a dangerous storm. The storm in Greek and Latin epic always poses a great threat and stands as an obstacle that derails a hero's progress, but Lucan's Caesar is eager to face the storm and reach his destination, and this detour thus inverts the ordinary function of inclement weather in epic. Odysseus, Aeneas, and the like cannot complete their journeys due to spontaneous storms, but Lucan makes Caesar an actor aware of the coming danger and insistent upon meeting it face to face.

Caesar's journey is not only dangerous, but also pointless for plot progression. This side quest does nothing for the narrative action and therefore presents the opportunity for Lucan to further Caesar's characterization. The cosmic arrangement of *Bellum Civile* lacks divine activity and thereby does not allow for heroes that are linked to divinity. Lucan nevertheless has Caesar oppose the forces of nature itself, rise above the other characters of the epic, and prove his heroic status by overcoming the very hurdle that not even the greatest epic heroes could manage.

Previous scholars have noted how Lucan portrays Caesar's role as a quasi-divine being (Nix 2008; Strelan 2000) and have examined the interaction between Caesar and his men before, during, and after the storm in scenes on the verge of mutiny (Fantham 1985; Pitcher 2008), as well as his stark contrast with Pompey throughout the poem (McCune 2014). This paper addresses the overt methods that Lucan employs to create a hero in line with the traditional expectations of epic. Lucan casts Caesar in Book Five as an unstoppable character through his conquering of the storm and thereby establishes him as a heroic protagonist in order to lend stability to the narrative framework of a poem with a tumultuous plot that covers a period of historical uncertainty.

Comparisons with Pompey at the time of his final departure and the storm of Book Four show that Lucan has characterized Caesar as the hero *par excellence* and therefore offered an ironically stable framework in his account of a turbulent but significant point in Roman history. Though there are an array of opinions concerning Caesar, the end of the republic, and the hero–antihero–villain dynamic in *Bellum Civile*, Lucan ironically problematizes the interpretation of his epic and the memory of the political events leading to the Roman empire by firmly establishing Caesar as the major hero of the epic in which confusion, civic turmoil, and bloodshed prevail.

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