

ABSTRACT

Parodies of Hope:
Resurrection, Redemption, and Jewish Religious Thought in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

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This thesis presents the case for the influence of Jewish religious thought, especially as transmitted through the Septuagint, on Lucan's epic *Bellum Civile*. Certain textual and conceptual parallels demonstrate both that Lucan artfully alludes to specific passages from the Septuagint and that his thought is influenced by Jewish religious concepts such as messianism and apocalypse. Given this literary and cultural context, new insights into Lucan's characterization of two of his most memorable figures—Erictho and Cato—become evident. The witch Erictho, who brings a dead man back to temporary, miserable life as part of her nefarious rites, represents a grim parody of the concept of resurrection. The noble Cato, leader of the republican troops, is a Mosaic and messianic figure whose passionate desire to sacrifice himself for the welfare of his people ultimately does them no good. Lucan alludes to these potential sources of redemptive hope as he does to others, only to snatch them away, whether through Erictho's twistedness or Cato's gallant failure. Lucan's interaction with Jewish religion only goes to confirm his own outlook: that ultimately, there is no philosophy or system of values that can provide hope for the universe, plunging to its own doom.

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RESURRECTION, REDEMPTION, AND JEWISH RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
IN LUCAN'S *BELLUM CIVILE*

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S.D.G.

To all those who have turned their despair in the face of tyranny
into action against it

INTRODUCTION

Lucan and His Universe

Who is Lucan and why?

It is less necessary today than it would have been fifty years ago to give, in an introduction, a detailed account of who Marcus Annaeus Lucanus was, what he did, and why his single surviving work, the unfinished *Bellum Civile*, is important. Lucan was considered a great epic poet from antiquity through to the early modern period, and Dante even accorded him a place with Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Horace in Limbo. Yet eighteenth-century Augustanism relegated him to the so-called “Silver Age” of second-rate, derivative poetasters, and nineteenth-century European political thought had no place for the republican dream they saw in his text. Only recently has there been a resurgence in interest in Lucan; William Fitzgerald, in his overview of Lucan and Seneca, notes that “the very traits that earlier consigned [the Silver Age writers] to secondary status have recommended them to contemporary tastes” (Fitzgerald 2013: 183). There has been a recognition that Lucan does have something important to say, that his politics and philosophy are not distractions or rabbit holes but an essential part of the poem, and that some of the bizarre things about the *Bellum Civile* are not only intentional but perhaps even effective.

The question about Lucan that has attracted the most scholarly attention is perhaps somewhat vague. One might almost phrase it, simply, as “Why is Lucan the way that he is?” Many of the more or less recent books about Lucan, such as W.R. Johnson’s *Momentary Monsters*, R. Sklenář’s *The Taste for Nothingness*, and Shadi Bartsch’s

Ideology in Cold Blood, aim to provide an overarching reading of the *Bellum Civile*, to bring together all its plots and subplots, its themes and motifs, its stylistic quirks and its patterns of allusion, and to understand what kind of unified (or deliberately disunified) whole they make. While this is a worthwhile and indeed supremely important goal, if readers of Lucan are to defend his epic against the charge of being an “outrageous, sour, impossible poem” (Johnson 1987: 1, paraphrasing an opinion he does not share), I hasten to clarify that it is not the goal of this thesis. Against the backdrop of competing or complementary interpretations of Lucan, I intend merely to seek the sources of certain of the motifs and images that the poet uses in doing whatever it is that he does. After a brief literature review, I shall demonstrate the textual and thematic parallels between parts of Lucan and the Septuagint. I shall then explore how an understanding of Lucan’s relationship with the Septuagint and, more broadly, with Judaism and early Christianity contributes to the interpretation of two major figures in the epic, Erictho and Cato. Erictho’s scenes, it becomes apparent, enact a bitterly hopeless parody of the idea of resurrection, while Cato’s characterization depicts him as a Stoic redeemer yet strips him of the power to redeem.

While it is not the aim of this thesis to come to a definite conclusion about the meaning of Lucan’s work, it will be important to understand the range of interpretations of Lucan’s philosophy, politics, and aesthetics. This thesis assumes that Lucan was in fact a good poet who did things on purpose; also, to show that he borrowed ideas from a particular source, it will be necessary at least to formulate a hypothesis as to what he wanted them for. We can determine which questions Lucan’s work raises, even if there

remain conflicting opinions over how (or whether) the poet chooses to answer those questions. Therefore, a brief review of the recent literature on Lucan is in order.

Lucan in Scholarly Context

Two camps

Shadi Bartsch describes “two major camps of scholarship” on Lucan and sees a movement from one to the other within scholarly history. The older camp Bartsch describes as “the ‘sincere author’ group.” Conscious of Lucan’s known participation in the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero and of his narrator’s obvious Pompeian partisanship, this type of analysis understands the *Bellum Civile* as an anti-Julio-Claudian poem, a revolutionary or reactionary tale of the end of the Republic and a scathing condemnation of the principate that replaced it. A variant of this school likewise holds that Lucan is a sincere author but sees his primary preoccupation as philosophical rather than political: the nephew of Seneca, naturally enough, has written a Stoic epic with Cato as its hero (Bartsch 1997: 5). This is the type of view typically held until about the 1980s. For these scholars, Lucan is a devoted and sincere partisan of a particular ideology, even though his epic, and perhaps his whole outlook on life, has its flaws, to which he is more or less blind. They generally see Lucan as an interesting but minor poet who would no doubt have improved had he lived longer (5-6).

The sincere author

Frederick Ahl is a fine representative of the “sincere author” school of interpretation. Writing his *Lucan: An Introduction* in the midst of the Cold War, he sees Lucan as a dissident author deeply shaped by his “totalitarian” environment (1976: 27-

35); given the known facts of his short life, it is impossible “to isolate Lucan the politician from Lucan the poet” (39). Ahl argues powerfully that, however cramped by his environment, Lucan was a heartfelt republican who rejected any possibility of *libertas* under the principate (46). He traces the poet’s changing views on politics through the poem, from a festering discontent in the first three books to an extravagant fury in the seventh and a “secretive confidence,” springing from his participation in the budding Pisonian conspiracy, in the eighth through the tenth (43-47). As for Lucan’s Cato, Ahl takes the traditional view, arguing that he is a Stoic hero presented as “the most perfect man in the Pharsalia” by his author (284). Though willing to entertain the notion that Lucan himself no longer holds to the Stoic faith in the order of the universe (44), Ahl holds that the poet still cherishes Stoic values more broadly defined. Another important topic that Ahl broaches is that of self-sacrifice, a theme familiar both from Roman usage (the act of *devotio* in which a general makes a vow condemning himself and the enemy at once and rushes on them) and from Jewish and Christian religious thought of the same period. Ahl sees this as an important theme for Lucan as well (241).

The master of irony

The other trend in the interpretation of Lucan might best be summed up as the nihilist school: those, that is, who believe Lucan is a nihilist, or something like it. They themselves may or may not agree with the poet, but they tend to find Lucan a much better poet than do their predecessors. According to them, several generations of scholars did not know what to do with this despairing, deliberately oppositional, deconstructionist poet, but people of today whose reading habits have been shaped by the experience of the twentieth century and the rise of postmodernism are much closer to an ideal audience for

Lucan and are better able to understand what he is trying to do. They see Lucan's "fractured voice" (Jamie Masters' term, which Bartsch also cites) as intentional, a stylistic expression of the irreconcilable division of civil war and of a chaotic universe. Lucan is not an idealistic republican; he sees and embraces the futility of human efforts to bring order to the cosmos, and he illustrates it in a poem riddled with irony and the failure of ideals (Bartsch 1997: 6-7). Analysis of Lucan since Ahl has tended to lean in this direction, becoming significantly more cynical about the futility of Lucan's world.

R. Sklenář, in *The Taste for Nothingness: A Study of Virtus and Related Themes in Lucan's Bellum Civile* (2003), inclines toward the nihilist camp with the claim that Lucan is very far from being a Stoic. Sklenář supports this claim by analyzing the way Lucan, with precision and artistry, unravels the meaning of the word *virtus* throughout the epic. Although Sklenář interprets Lucan as overall denying the potential for hope, this scholarly position admits a great deal of nuance. Many interpretations which deny Lucan's Stoicism hold that Lucan's Cato is a "nasty caricature of... the Stoic sage and the traditional Roman *vir bonus*," but Sklenář offers a more charitable reading of Cato (Sklenář 2003: 59). Cato is a genuine Stoic hero; the reason for his failure is that the universe he confronts is nihilistic. Stoicism assumes a cosmos that makes sense, but Lucan places his Stoic "hero" Cato in a cosmos that makes no sense (9). This type of interpretation of Cato and of Lucan's universe seems to be the soundest; it takes seriously the portrayal of Cato as a Stoic without dismissing Lucan's bitter authorial tirades that hardly accept the providential government of the universe. Lucan depicts Cato as upright, moral, sincere, and philanthropic, to the point of being willing to die, but the

value and effect of his sacrifice, in a universe that is chaotic rather than Stoic, is ultimately called into question.

Shadi Bartsch's *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's Civil War* (1997) acknowledges the relevance of seeing nihilism and the empty cosmos in Lucan, as Sklenář and others have, but takes the position that the nihilist view is only half right. Bartsch argues that the *Bellum Civile* actually tells two stories: the historical tragedy of the civil war, and the story of the narrator who moves from political nihilism to political engagement and even hope. She claims that Lucan includes both of these stories because he sees both of them as necessary: the real world is the one we see in Lucan's historical narrative, steadily spiraling into disaster, but as human beings we have to believe in the possibility of political salvation anyway.

Bartsch suggests that Lucan holds to something like a kind of existentialism, reminding us of "the idea that we are both condemned and blessed by our own enduring search for transcendent values in a world that cannot provide them" (9). She sees this in Lucan's style, which deliberately confounds opposites but forces the reader to distinguish between them (58, 128), and in his treatment of the central character, Pompey. For Bartsch, the curious vacillation in the way Pompey is presented, receiving the narrator's starry-eyed adulation yet clearly described as selfish, pompous, and cowardly, is entirely intentional: Lucan deliberately creates a narrator who holds to this unjustifiable Pompeian stance. The narratorial voice is not meant to persuade the audience (75), but to show them what it looks like to embrace "the paradox intrinsic to giving meaning to human existence" (103). Cato is the figure who most fully does this, in Bartsch's analysis. The republican leader knows just how disastrous the civil war will be, cannot

help but be, yet he chooses to act anyway, in what Bartsch describes (in distinctly modern terms) as “an act of will and agency.” She says that Cato “knows the outcome is damned either way; but despair of the goal is not reason enough for passivity” (74). While I find Bartsch’s reading of the *Bellum Civile*, even if it does fit suspiciously well into distinctively modern terminology, quite convincing, my argument in this thesis does not depend on it. Her analysis of Cato in particular, however, which portrays him neither as a perfect Stoic nor as a caricature of Stoicism but as one who strives to save his country even knowing that it is futile, does provide a context in which much of the following discussion will make more sense.

Unorthodox Stoicism

A scholar who does not quite fit nicely into either of Bartsch’s categories, the “sincere author” or the nihilist, is Francesca D’Alessandro Behr, in her 2007 book *Feeling History: Lucan, Stoicism, and the Poetics of Passion*. D’Alessandro Behr, like many others, addresses the question of whether Lucan is a Stoic, but she approaches it from the angle of his treatment of emotion. Surprisingly, she concludes that despite his depiction of, and his narrator’s indulgence in, extreme emotion, Lucan and his Cato are Stoics, albeit Stoics of a rather unorthodox school among whose members she also names Lucan’s uncle Seneca. D’Alessandro Behr discusses how Lucan’s apostrophes to negative characters, to Pompey, and to Cato react against Virgil’s (much more restrained) use of the same device and perform a Stoic poetic function by detaching the reader from the fiction. She argues that Lucan’s narrator is a sincere Stoic, if a somewhat unorthodox one, who presents Cato as a true Stoic hero, and that their intense emotions and espousal of a lost cause do not obviate their Stoicism. They engage, she says, not in the usual

Stoic *apatheia*, or lack of feeling, but in *eupatheia*, “rational joy and other good emotions” (2007: 160). Cato is “a new kind of Stoic sage,” one who uses his strength and self-control in an attempt to bear the burdens of the city he loves (159).

D’Alessandro Behr writes that Cato “appoints himself as the lamb for the salvation of the Romans; he hopes that his sacrificial throat . . . may be cut to bring peace to the world” (159-160). On this singularly appropriate note, let us move to examine what Lucan may have known about Jewish and Christian beliefs.

Judaism in the First-Century Roman World

Vergil and the Septuagint

Lucan is an attentive reader of Vergil; it is a commonplace, for instance, that he responds to his predecessor’s use of epic style and structure, whether by imitating his work or by defying the norms that it set. If, as contemporary scholarship reveals to be increasingly likely, Vergil used Jewish materials as a source, it is probable that Lucan became aware of this usage in the course of his study of the *Aeneid* and the other poems of Vergil. Nicholas Horsfall, in his 2012 article “Virgil and the Jews,” addresses the question of whether Vergil was familiar with Jewish materials, a question that has been remarkably, though perhaps unsurprisingly, controversial over the course of scholarly history. The belief that Vergil was a “pagan prophet” whose *Eclogue* 4, which deals with the birth of a miraculous child who will bring peace to the world, was a divinely inspired prediction of the birth of Christ would be difficult to sustain in the contemporary academy. Much more plausible is the idea, strongly argued for by Julia Dyson Hejduk, that Vergil read Jewish texts that really did portray a messianic figure, and that he

borrowed ideas and imagery from them (Hejduk 2018). This idea is initially plausible in view of the tone and content of the *Eclogue*, and becomes only more convincing when, as Hejduk does, one compares the *Eclogue* and other Vergilian poems to specific Jewish texts that were available in Greek in Vergil's Rome.

Horsfall's interest in the question comes specifically out of his work on *Aeneid* 6, and whether it is influenced by *1 Enoch* (he believes it is unlikely), but he goes on to look at the more familiar question of Jewish influence on *Eclogue* 4 (the so-called "Messianic Eclogue") and, more broadly, "whether V[ergil] used, or did not use Jewish texts" (Horsfall 2012: 70). He concludes that there is significant evidence for Jewish influence on *Eclogue* 4, not only from Isaiah but also from the *Third Sibylline Oracle*, a pseudepigraphical Hellenistic Jewish text framed as a prophecy of Rome's Sibyl. In what Horsfall describes as "an accumulation of parallel passages," he shows that the *Eclogue* features not only concepts such as the return of the golden age and peace between animals but also specific parallel concepts and phrasings in the two Jewish texts he examines.

Horsfall then gives a detailed historical and literary account of how Virgil could have gotten to know Jewish texts, demonstrating that there was a history of cultural exchange between Judaism and the Roman poetic tradition. He notes that Herod's sons spent five years in Rome for their education (74-75) and lists numerous authors and diplomats with Jewish influences whom Vergil could have known (76-77). He mentions an embassy to Rome sent by the Jewish high priest Hyrcanus in 45 BC, during Vergil's youth, and Herod's personal visit in 50 BC (77). The philosopher Philodemus of Gadara, with whom Vergil is known to have studied, came from Syria and must have been

familiar with Jewish practices and ideas, if not necessarily with any specific text (78-79). Horsfall concludes by downplaying the potential availability of Jewish texts in Rome (Vergil must have had to be pointed toward them by “some sort of specialist or expert”) and by questioning the recognizability of Jewish imagery to Vergil’s original reader. “How much of it,” he asks, “could [Vergil’s] Learned Contemporary Reader have understood and appreciated? Perhaps in this quite exceptional case, rather less than we do” (80).

Jan Bremmer, however, in a 2013 note titled “Virgil and Jewish Literature,” criticizes Horsfall 2012 for focusing primarily on Vergil’s potential contacts with Jewish individuals, suggesting that equally important could be his (and his contemporaries’, such as Ovid’s) knowledge of Jewish texts acquired second-hand, as it were. He argues that Vergil and his poetic contemporaries knew at least of Isaiah, Genesis, and the *Third Sibylline Oracle*. Perhaps, then, the allusions were not so recondite. This is significant because of the permanence of texts: if Vergil had access to these texts, then Lucan, a few generations later, likely did as well, and if he realized that Vergil had drawn on them, he would certainly, based on what we know of his allusive relationship with Vergil, want to follow up the reference and discover these works for himself. Although the Lucan-Vergil-Septuagint chain of connections might not be quite close enough to be described as a window reference,¹ the term springs to mind as an analogue of the kind of mediated cultural transmission that is going on here.

¹ This term, introduced by Richard Thomas in the article “Virgil’s *Georgics* and the Art of Reference,” is defined by him as “the very close adaptation of a model, noticeably interrupted in order to allow reference back to the source of that model”—that is, the immediate model acts as a “window” that allows glimpses of its own source

Public knowledge of Judaism and Christianity

Even if he were not interested in Jewish culture and texts, Lucan, as a member of Nero's court, would have been aware of contemporary controversies about Judaism and its new offshoot, Christianity, which was becoming established in Rome. Nero's reign saw a significant growth in awareness of Christianity among the Roman upper class, as well as a distrust of it that made its adherents easy scapegoats for the famous fire (Lane 1998: 214-15). Historian Gervase Phillips recounts how "dark and ugly rumours of atheism; sorcery; sexual promiscuity and ritual cannibalism swirled around Christian congregations" (2016: 252). Though this shady reputation originated in the association of early Christians with the Jewish resistance to Rome (261), it soon spread to include all the lurid charges Phillips lists. The very message they preached became distorted through rumor: for instance, Romans heard that Christians ate someone's body and blood and, misunderstanding the Eucharistic sacrament, accused them of literal cannibalism (Wilken 2003: 19). We shall see that this kind of misinformation, which produces a grim and distorted version of an existing religion, provides material for Lucan's grim and distorted vision of the universe itself.

Themes of Jewish religious thought

What would Lucan have found in his exploration of Jewish texts? It depends, of course, on which texts he had access to. If he was reading the whole of the Septuagint, or even a selection of books, he would have encountered a number of important themes,

(Thomas 1986: 188). Thomas's example is a passage in the *Georgics* where Vergil imitates Varro as a way of criticizing Varro's own adaptation of Aratus.

although not necessarily those that a student of the Old Testament would find salient today. I argue that Lucan certainly had read Isaiah and Ezekiel, most likely some of the historical books including 2 Samuel, and possibly also some of the apocryphal books associated with the Septuagint. If Lucan talked to any Jews about what he was reading—something that would be far from difficult in first-century Rome, where Josephus, to name just one example, visited in the last year of Lucan’s life—then he was likely made aware of the most popular interpretations and the most notable debates about the text.²

Although today we associate the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead primarily with Christianity, in Lucan’s day it was much discussed within Judaism. C.D. Elledge, in *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism, 200 BCE-CE 200* (2017), shows that the doctrine of resurrection, in its varied forms, was neither universally accepted nor universally denied among Jews in this period. In fact, it was decidedly a subject of controversy (although the traditions that understood it as a central doctrine would eventually be the ones to survive), and this only increases the probability that a Roman writer interested in Jewish thought would be struck by this concept. Resurrection must be distinguished from the immortality of the soul; immortality is an inherent property of the soul, whereas resurrection is produced (for some or all) by an outside force, namely God. The Jewish groups that believed in resurrection saw the foundations for this belief in texts such as Isaiah 26 and Ezekiel 37, and it is also apparent in texts such as *1 Enoch*.

² I am not arguing that Lucan knew Josephus specifically; by the time Josephus arrived in Rome, Lucan’s priorities no longer included meeting interesting foreign visitors. Josephus’ experience is merely a familiar example of the links and exchanges that existed between Judea and Rome, not to mention the significant Jewish community in Rome itself.

It was used as the foundation for a theodicy, something Lucan, I argue, deliberately subverts. While Jewish writings used many different images for resurrection, and especially for the eschatological life that was to follow resurrection, some of them, such as the Valley of Dry Bones, find visible parallels in Lucan's Erichtho scenes. A parallel line, after all, may well point in the opposite direction. Lucan's very different beliefs about the meaning and value of resurrection do not preclude his being influenced by Jewish depictions of the phenomenon.

Especially if Lucan came to the Septuagint through Virgil, he must surely have been struck by the idea of the Messiah evident in Isaiah. In Lucan's own day, of course, the idea of the Messiah was being reconsidered in a whole new way because of the rise of Christianity. It is a commonplace "how Christlike Lucan's Cato is" (Ahl 1976: 250), primarily because of his often-expressed wish that he could bear Rome's troubles in her place; indeed, one might almost say, bear her sins.³ The realization that Lucan was interested in Jewish thought enables a new reading of Cato, as a character deliberately modeled on, and deliberately distinct from, the Jewish and Christian concepts of the sacrificial Messiah.

Having established this cultural and literary context, I will begin Chapter One by demonstrating that the claim that Lucan knew the Septuagint is by no means as far-fetched as it might sound. I will then indicate places where parallels are evident between Lucan and specific Jewish texts. In the next chapters, I will explore how acknowledging the influence of Jewish thought can shape the interpretation of Lucan. Chapter Two will

³ Such religious language may seem tendentious, but in fact Cato himself uses expressions such as "to expose this condemned head to all the penalties" that the nation earned (*hoc caput in cunctas damnatum exponere poenas*, BC 2.307).

focus on the witch Erichtho, whose cruel zombifying magic becomes more than just a pointless exercise in blood and gore when read in the context of first-century Jewish debates over resurrection. Chapter Three will look at Lucan's portrayal of Cato, in many ways the central character of the poem, as a character with messianic qualities whose heroic attempts at self-sacrifice for his people still, inevitably, fail.

CHAPTER ONE

Lucan's Knowledge of Jewish Writings

For the questions I wish to raise about Lucan's readings of, relationship with, and response to the Septuagint and other Jewish writings to make sense, it must first be established that he actually knew these writings. It is plausible that Lucan would be interested in texts dealing with themes such as sacrifice and cosmic (dis)order, especially given his evident interest in "foreign" and non-Roman cults and practices. One might even wonder whether Lucan's lost work *De Incendio Urbis* discussed the fire's disputed attribution to members of a certain new but growing Jewish sect, namely Christianity, still considered an eccentric branch of Judaism in Lucan's day. Nevertheless, as attractive as the connection is, we cannot simply assume Lucan's knowledge of these texts as we can assume his knowledge of, say, Vergil or Ovid; as the previous chapter has noted, while some Jewish texts would have been available to an aristocratic intellectual in Neronian Rome, they would not have been default reading. A reference in Lucan's text gives plain evidence that he had some knowledge of the Jews and their unique religion, but what will really reveal that Lucan read and knew the texts are direct echoes of the Septuagint in the *Bellum Civile*. As it turns out, these do indeed exist. In this chapter I shall examine particular passages of Lucan that show parallels with the Septuagint and its associated writings, to show that Lucan did very likely access these works. This will provide the foundation for my exploration of Lucan's use of and response to Jewish religious thought, in Chapters Two and Three.

There is always some difficulty in determining whether a similarity between two texts indicates a direct reference, a common source, or simply a shared motif. This is even more the case when the text potentially being referenced, in this case the Septuagint, has frequently been overlooked by classicists as outside their discipline. Recent work (see Introduction) has demonstrated that Jewish religious texts may not have been such a niche interest in the early Empire as was once assumed, and we must be careful not to project an “Athens and Jerusalem” (or “Rome and Jerusalem”) dichotomy backwards, leading to the assumption that a classical author would not have read or taken seriously a biblical text. No single one of the parallels I demonstrate conclusively and on its own proves Lucan’s knowledge of the Septuagint. Rather, the concatenation of numerous instances of parallels and apparent references makes it more likely than not that Lucan did indeed read the Septuagint.

Cultural Knowledge of Judaism

Romans reading the Bible?

In a recent paper, Julia Dyson Hejduk makes a convincing argument not only that Vergil alludes via acrostics to the books of Genesis and Isaiah, but also that Ovid and Lucan responded to Vergil’s allusion through acrostics of their own. Hejduk points out the acrostic **ISAIA AIT** (“Isaiah says”) in the midst of Vergil’s tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, a story of failed resurrection, and shows how it connects to other Jewish influences on the poet. She then demonstrates how both Ovid and Lucan responded to this aspect of Vergil’s work, including (which will be significant for my later argument) an acrostic dialogue with Vergil’s Isaian allusions that occurs in references to the

virtuous, self-sacrificial Cato and the zombie-creating witch Erictho. Hejduk clearly demonstrates that the Hebrew scriptures, available to Greek-literate educated Romans through the Septuagint version, should be taken seriously as a potential influence on Roman authors, and that Lucan in particular was well aware of what Vergil was doing with them.

Reference to Judea itself

In Lucan's catalogues of foreign peoples, those that Rome ought to be fighting instead of herself or those that make up Pompey's impressive muster roll, the Jews are mentioned exactly once. This is when Pompey, in a speech to his troops, enumerates the foreign nations that acknowledge his preeminence. Among them is "Judea given over to the rites of an uncertain god" (*dedita sacris / incerti Iudaea dei*, 2.592-93). While brief, this reference is significant because it shows that Lucan thought of the Jewish people as defined primarily by their religion. None of the other peoples in the passage are identified by their worship of a mysterious deity, but rather by other proverbial characteristics (Egypt's hot weather, 585-86) or a mythological reference (Colchis' golden fleece, 591). Not only does this show that Lucan, like many other Romans,⁴ was aware of the unique importance of their religion to the Jewish people, but it also suggests connections with two moments in Lucan when the numinous—and terrifying—is

⁴ A scholium connects this passage of the *Bellum Civile* with a reference by Livy to the imageless temple at Jerusalem (Stern 1974: 330). According to Augustine (*De Civitate Dei* 6.11), Lucan's uncle Seneca criticized the popularity of Jewish religious customs at Rome, and in the *Epistulae Morales* 95.47 Seneca dismisses the value of Sabbath lamps alongside ceremonies for Jupiter and Juno, all of which he considers alike unnecessary superstition.

intensely present in the narrative, providing indirect evidence that he was interested in this sort of religion, in “the rites of an uncertain god.”

The unknown god

Judea’s god, according to Lucan, is *incertus*. In another context, W.R. Johnson writes that the classical Greco-Roman gods themselves are “displace[d] ... violently from the poem [the *Bellum Civile*]” by “strange gods... nameless powers whose spheres of action and whose relationships with the human world are unknown and indeed unknowable but whose capacity for intervening in human affairs is as fearful as it is manifest” (Johnson 1987: 4). The concept of unknown or unknowable divinities permeates Lucan’s epic; besides the reference to Judea’s religion, it also appears in other depictions of the exotic or deviant religious practices that so fascinate Lucan, and that he depicts as powerful or at the least emotionally compelling even as he excludes the traditional divine machinery of epic. One of these depictions is that of the sacred grove that Caesar destroys in the third book, a dark and mysterious place that terrifies the soldiers he orders to chop it down. The gods of the grove, it appears, are not like the Greek and Roman divinities:

simulacraque maesta deorum
arte carent caesisque extant informia truncis.
ipse situs putrique facit iam robore pallor
attonitos; non vulgaris sacrata figuris
numina sic timeant: tantum terroribus addit,
quos metuunt, non nosse, deos. (*BC* 3.412-417)

The gloomy models of the gods lack skill and stand out, shapeless, from chopped-down trunks. Neglect itself and the paleness of the rotting wood already makes people thunderstruck; they would not thus fear powers consecrated under common forms: so much does it add to terrors, not to know the gods whom they fear.

The gods of the grove have images, of a sort, but they are rough and do not depict human figures (3.412-13). Lucan lays stress on the unknown nature of these divinities and on the fear they cause, even to their priest:

medio cum Phoebus in axe est
aut caelum nox atra tenet, pavet ipse sacerdos
accessus dominumque timet deprendere luci. (3.423-25)

When Phoebus is in the midst of the sky or dark night holds heaven, the priest himself trembles at the approach and fears to surprise the master of the grove.

The idea that the place of worship is frightening and dangerous to enter, even to its priest, was unknown to Roman civic religion. Granted, the idea of the dangerously numinous grove is not foreign to the Romans, but even examples such as the *Rex Nemorensis* (“King of the Wood”) are often portrayed as somewhat foreign, even if this means Etruscan or Italian rather than Roman. Nor does it usually have such a strong emphasis on the danger to the priest of entering the sacred place. Such a concept was, however, an integral part of Judaism, in which even the high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and then only to make an offering for his own cleansing as well as the people’s. This is exactly the kind of ethnographical detail that a Roman interested in Jewish belief, as Lucan seems to have been, would pick up. He might well repurpose it for the description of a different but equally exotic and eerie barbarian rite, another set of *sacra incerti dei*.

Lucan's Knowledge of Specific Texts

The virgin conceives

A small but significant direct parallel not only in matter but in wording between Lucan and the Septuagint is found in Lucan's description of the Delphic oracle (*BC* 5.97), combining mythological tradition with Stoic-influenced speculation. Although he initially mentions the inspiration of Apollo, he then suggests that the power of the oracle may actually come from "a large part of Jove" (*pars magna Iovis*, 5.95), that is, of the great divinity who, according to the Stoic idea, created and inhabits the world and manifests as various gods. If so, he says, "this divine power is conceived in a virgin breast," that of the priestess (*hoc... virgineo conceptum est pectore numen*, 5.97). This closely parallels a phrase from the book of Isaiah, one of the Septuagint books whose traces we can see most clearly in Latin literature. Isaiah prophesies to King Ahaz that, even though the king has refused to ask for a sign, the Lord will send one. Among other things, ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει (*Is. 7:14, LXX*). Usually translated as something like "the virgin will conceive," this phrase can be more literally rendered "the virgin will have in her belly," a standard Greek idiom for pregnancy (*LSJ* s.v. ἔχω 2.4). In Lucan's text, the adjective *virgineo* parallels ἡ παρθένος, and the phrase *conceptum est*, combined with a reference to a body part, *pectore*, is reminiscent of the idiom ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει. Like the sign Isaiah promises, the priestess' inspiration authenticates the prophecy that will follow.

Of course, the virgin priestess does not literally conceive, but images of fertility and childbirth pervade Lucan's passage, from the recollection of Leto's pregnancy (*BC* 5.79-80) to the orgasmic energy of the god's "entrance" into the priestess (116-120). The

parallel is especially significant considering the high probability that Lucan became interested in Jewish writings through observing and responding to Virgil's use of the same texts. If Jewish influence is evident anywhere in Vergil, it is in the famous Fourth Eclogue, which relates to precisely this passage of the Septuagint (see, for instance, Horsfall 2012). A brief allusion to a prophetic text, known to him through the medium of the model epic whose generic expectations he is engaged in resisting, is a very Lucanian ornament to add to the passage's texture.

Cato and the snakes

In *BC* 9, Cato's men are journeying through the desert and are attacked by a series of terrible snakes. A plague of snakes in the desert, of course, memorably appears also in the Israelites' journey in Numbers 21:6-9. Reading these two passages side by side points to several important connections. Lucan describes a snake-infested region and the republican army's sufferings there—sufferings to which the Stoic hero Cato refuses to give in:

Has inter pestes duro Cato milite siccum
emetitur iter, tot tristia fata suorum
insolitasque videns parvo cum volnere mortes.
.....
Non decus imperii, non maesti iura Catonis
ardentem tenuere virum, ne spargere signa
auderet totisque furens exquireret arvis
quas poscebat aquas sitiens in corde venenum.
.....
... Cogit tantos tolerare labores
summa ducis virtus, qui nuda fusus harena
excubat atque omni fortunam provocat hora.
Omnibus unus adest fatis; quocumque vocatus
advolat atque ingens meritum maiusque salute
contulit, in letum vires; puduitque gementem
illo teste mori. Quod ius habuisset in ipsum
ulla lues? casus alieno in pectore vincit

spectatorque docet magnos nil posse dolores.
(BC 9.734-36, 746-50, 881-89)

Among these plagues Cato measures out the dry journey with his tough soldiery, seeing so many sad fates of his men and strange deaths with a small wound. ... [A standard-bearer is bitten by a snake whose venom produces insatiable thirst.] Neither the dignity of empire nor the laws of solemn Cato could hold back the man who burned or stop him daring to drop the standard and, raving, seek in all the fields for the waters which the thirsty poison in his heart demanded. ... The highest virtue of their commander, who keeps watch lying on the bare sand and provokes fortune at every hour, forces them to bear such sufferings. A single man, he is present at all their deaths; wherever he is summoned, he flies, and he confers a huge favor—one greater than safety—strength in death; and one was ashamed to die groaning with *him* as witness. What power could any plague have over himself? He conquers ill-fortune in others' hearts and, as an observer, teaches that great pains can do nothing.

The soldiers finally find relief from their sufferings when they meet a friendly people called the Psylli, who have the unique power of driving away these snakes and curing their bite (BC 9.890-937), but not before many of Cato's men have died in poisoned agony, struggling to be Stoic under his inspiring eye.

The Septuagint passage, which also features a desert journey, deadly snakebites, and a cure from an outside source, describes God's response to one of the Israelites' many episodes of rebellion. The people have been complaining that their present condition is worse than slavery in Egypt, where at least they had food and water:

καὶ ἀπέστειλεν κύριος εἰς τὸν λαὸν τοὺς ὄφεις τοὺς θανατοῦντας, καὶ ἔδακνον τὸν λαόν, καὶ ἀπέθανεν λαὸς πολὺς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραηλ. καὶ παραγενόμενος ὁ λαὸς πρὸς Μωυσῆν ἔλεγον ὅτι ἡμάρτομεν ὅτι κατελαλήσαμεν κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ σοῦ· εὗξαι οὖν πρὸς κύριον, καὶ ἀφελέτω ἀφ' ἡμῶν τὸν ὄφιν. καὶ ἠύξατο Μωυσῆς πρὸς κύριον περὶ τοῦ λαοῦ. καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν Ποίησον σεαυτῷ ὄφιν καὶ θῆς αὐτὸν ἐπὶ σημείου, καὶ ἔσται ἐὰν δάκη ὄφιν ἄνθρωπον, πᾶς ὁ δεδηγμένος ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ζήσεται. καὶ ἐποίησεν Μωυσῆς ὄφιν χαλκοῦν καὶ ἔστησεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ σημείου, καὶ ἐγένετο ὅταν ἔδακνεν ὄφιν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὸν ὄφιν τὸν χαλκοῦν καὶ ἔζη.
(Numbers 21:6-9)

And the Lord sent deadly serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much of the people of the sons of Israel died. And the people, being near Moses, said, "Because we were sinning, because we have spoken against the Lord and against you, pray then to the Lord and let him take away the serpent from us." And Moses prayed to the Lord on behalf of the people, and the Lord said to Moses, "Make for yourself a serpent and set it upon a standard, and if it shall be that a serpent bites a person, everyone bitten who looks at it shall live." And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a standard, and it happened that a serpent bit a person and [the person] looked at the bronze serpent and lived.

Like the Libyan snakes, which sprang from Medusa's blood dripping on the desert's infertile soil (*BC* 9.695-99), the divinely-sent snakes in Numbers have a supernatural source.

Many scholars have identified various sources and inspirations for the snake incident, although none of the suggestions align particularly closely with the actual details of Lucan's version. Ahl views the scene as Lucan's attempt to create a more historically and biologically plausible version of earlier, mythological snake stories, such as the snakes that killed Laocoön and his sons in *Aeneid* 2.199-233 or the African snake said to have attacked Regulus (e.g. Livy *Per.* 18, Silius Italicus *Punica* 6.140-260), to give his hero Cato the opportunity to outdo previous heroes' exploits. Ahl sees this updated imitation of past snakes as something of a failure; Lucan has fallen between the two stools of drama and realism and achieved neither (Ahl 1976: 73-74). He emphasizes the connection not only with Regulus (a principled Roman hero fighting a serpent in Libya) but also with Hercules and Alexander, who have adventures in the same region: "Lucan wants us to see Cato as a match for Caesar and Alexander, the great conquerors; a match for the great patriot, Regulus, and the civilizing Hercules. He has all their strengths and none of their weaknesses" (274).

Among this thick tissue of allusions to storied leaders, it seems natural to list Moses as well. Like Cato but unlike the other subjects of allusion, who face individual snakes in single combat that displays their personal virtues alone, he is the leader of a *group* that fights a *group* of snakes. This is an especially significant similarity in the context of Lucan's insistence on the difference between republic and monarchy, between Senate and Caesar. Greek and Roman intellectuals thought of Moses as an archetypal civilizing figure, if a foreign one; indeed, according to Louis H. Feldman, Moses as a lawgiver or national founder is a major figure in how non-Jewish thinkers understood the Jews (1993: 233). By the time of the historian Eupolemus in the second century BC, Moses was described as a "wise man" and the invention of the alphabet was at times attributed to him. He was sometimes identified with Musaeus, the teacher of Orpheus (242), and even Apion, a denigrator of Judaism whose works aroused Josephus' opposition, apparently considered Moses a law-giving figure (Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 25). For the Romans, Moses stood among other famous and honored figures of various peoples. An allusion to Moses' tribulations in the desert thus enriches the tale of Cato's similar struggles, just as do the other allusions Ahl discovers in this passage.

Besides the similar position of the republican soldiers and the Israelites, there is also a similarity in their response. The Israelites respond to their hardships by wishing that they could return to Egypt, the place of suffering and tyranny from which they have come, rather than dying pointlessly in the desert (Num. 21:5; a similar story appears in more detail in Exodus 16:2-3). Likewise, the republican soldiers pray to return to the battle of Pharsalia, even though they were losing it to Caesar the tyrant. Lucan tells us that "they shout, 'Gods, give back to us wretches the arms we fled; give back Thessaly'"

(*Reddite, di, clamant 'miseris quae fugimus arma, / reddite Thessaliam,' 9.848-49*).

This is one of very few invocations of the gods by characters in the *Bellum Civile*. It is striking that Cato's men turn, in this one moment, to gods who have never intervened in or affected their journey in any discernible way, even though elsewhere Cato himself is the man to whom they look for guidance and explanation. The oddly religious inflection of this outcry is again reminiscent of the Israelites' speech "against God and against Moses" (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ κατὰ Μωϋσῆ, Num 21:5). For the Israelites, the attack of serpents is a punishment for their lack of faith; for Cato's men, in a world apparently lacking divine agency—at least from the narrator's perspective, whatever the desperate republicans think or hope—the serpents are merely part of the hardships that prompt their outburst. Nevertheless, the parallel is much closer than any of the other sources scholars have suggested. The literary evidence shows that Lucan's snake attack was influenced by the one in Numbers, in addition to its other literary and mythological sources.

Cato and the water

Another allusion to an Old Testament story is present in Cato's journey through the desert in book 9. The thirsty republican soldiers at long last reach a small stream:

Conspecta est parva maligna
unda procul vena, quam vix e pulvere miles
corripiens patulum galeae confudit in orbem
porrexitque duci. Squalebant pulvere fauces
cunctorum, minimumque tenens dux ipse liquoris
invidiosus erat. "Mene" inquit "degener unum
miles in hac turba vacuum virtute putasti?
Usque adeo mollis primisque caloribus inpar
sum visus? quanto poena tu dignior ista es,
qui populo sitiente bibas!" Sic concitus ira
excussit galeam, suffecitque omnibus unda. (*BC* 9.500-510)

They came to a small, stingy stream, spotted from far off, which the soldier, scarcely seizing it from the dust, poured in the open sphere of his helmet and offered to the leader. The jaws of all were filthy with dust, and the leader himself was the object of envy, holding the least bit of water. “Did you think me,” he said, “the only worthless soldier, empty of virtue, in this crowd? Did I seem that weak, unequal to the first heat? How much worthier you are of this punishment—to drink while the people are thirsty!” Thus, stirred with anger, he shook out the helmet, and the water sufficed for all.

Cato says that the act of drinking this water would be a punishment, and therefore deserved by the erring soldier rather than the virtuous leader, because it would set the drinker apart from his comrades as unwilling or unable to endure the hardships of the desert. This is, of course, a prime example of Stoic virtue. It might, perhaps, also be read as a symbol of the useless waste (of water, of lives) that Stoic principles can cause, but Lucan does not emphasize that aspect of the scene. Instead, Cato’s courageous example, as refreshing to the Stoic heart as water is to the body, inspires admiration and emulation among his men.

Unlike the previous example of Cato’s virtue, his struggle against the snakes, this is an episode with very few models in other texts. Ahl identifies one tale as “quite possibly the archetype for this scene,” namely a similar deed by Alexander the Great. He cites Arrian’s recounting of Alexander’s deed (Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandri* 6.26), although Arrian postdates Lucan, as does Plutarch, who also tells the story; Ahl appears to assume that Lucan would have known the same story from some other source. Ahl argues that Lucan parallels Cato and Alexander in order to contrast their divergent motivations (Ahl 1976: 258). Intriguingly, Ahl also notes another ancient parallel: King David’s rejection of water in 2 Samuel 23:14-17. He assumes that Lucan did not know of this passage and relied entirely on some account of Alexander and his own imagination.

Yet there seem to be no clear grounds for Ahl's immediate dismissal of the Septuagint as a source, especially given the known presence of the Septuagint in Rome and the other traces of its influence on Lucan that we have seen. This thread that Ahl grasps and then abandons is worth tracing a little further.

The relevant passage in the Septuagint occurs in the midst of a retrospective look at David's career, especially the actions of his "three mighty ones," a trio of champions who were his supporters. It is a nearly self-contained anecdote that illustrates David's human weakness and the good leadership he displays in overcoming it, and also exhibits the prowess of the three mighty ones:

καὶ Δαυὶδ τότε ἐν τῇ περιοχῇ, καὶ τὸ ὑπόστημα τῶν ἀλλοφύλων τότε ἐν Βαιθλεεμ. καὶ ἐπεθύμησεν Δαυὶδ καὶ εἶπεν Τίς ποτιεῖ με ὕδωρ ἐκ τοῦ λάκκου τοῦ ἐν Βαιθλεεμ τοῦ ἐν τῇ πύλῃ; τὸ δὲ σύστημα τῶν ἀλλοφύλων τότε ἐν Βαιθλεεμ. καὶ διέρρηξαν οἱ τρεῖς δυνατοὶ ἐν τῇ παρεμβολῇ τῶν ἀλλοφύλων καὶ ὑδρεύσαντο ὕδωρ ἐκ τοῦ λάκκου τοῦ ἐν Βαιθλεεμ τοῦ ἐν τῇ πύλῃ καὶ ἔλαβαν καὶ παρεγένοντο πρὸς Δαυὶδ, καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησεν πιεῖν αὐτὸ καὶ ἔσπεισεν αὐτὸ τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ εἶπεν Ἴλεως μοι, κύριε, τοῦ ποιῆσαι τοῦτο εἰ αἷμα τῶν ἀνδρῶν τῶν πορευθέντων ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς αὐτῶν πίομαι; καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησεν πιεῖν αὐτό. ταῦτα ἐποίησαν οἱ τρεῖς δυνατοί. (2 Samuel 23:14-17)

And David was then in the fortification, and the camp of the foreigners was then in Bethlehem. And David desired and said, "Who will give me water to drink from the reservoir in Bethlehem, that is within the gate?" And the corps of the foreigners was then in Bethlehem. And the three mighty ones broke through into the company of the foreigners and drew water from the reservoir in Bethlehem that is within the gate, and they took it and brought it to David, and he was not willing to drink it and poured it as a drink-offering to the Lord. And he said, "Far be it from me, Lord, to do this, if I drink the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives," and he was not willing to drink it. These things the three mighty ones did.

A substantively identical account, with only slight differences in wording, occurs in 1 Chronicles 11:16-19, placed earlier in David's life (where it fits better chronologically). According to David A. deSilva, the story of David's thirst is an example of "rewritten

Bible,” in that it is adapted both by Josephus (in *Judean Antiquities*) and by the author of *4 Maccabees* (DeSilva 2006: 16). Although these sources come from after Lucan’s death, their existence shows that this story stood out as worth retelling both to the author of a work targeted at the Greco-Roman elite (Josephus) and to an author interested in, though not committed to, Stoic doctrine (*4 Maccabees*).

The parallels are not exact, but Cato’s deed is more like King David’s than it may appear at first glance. Like Cato in the desert, David is depicted as being in a sort of wilderness (2 Samuel 23:13 says he is in the “cave of Adullam”), having been exiled due to his enmity with the overbearing King Saul, a character type familiar to readers who know Lucan’s Caesar. DeSilva explains that David’s motivation may not be physical thirst, but a desire to unseat the Philistines from his hometown of Bethlehem; his wish for water is perhaps “but the concrete and poetic expression of his deeper longing,” which is to take back Bethlehem itself. The three mighty ones fulfill his request literally as a way of “express[ing] their utter devotion to David... a tribute to David and his charisma” (deSilva 2006: 22). Unlike David, Cato makes no request for water; instead, the need for water is obvious from the desert surroundings, which is not the case for David. As in the Septuagint passage, however, the symbolic significance of this water is more important than its physiological value, both within the narrative and for the reader.

Within the narrative, the bringing of the water represents the warriors’ devotion to their leader. Lucan emphasizes Cato’s role as a figure of authority by referring to him as *dux* (“leader” or “chief,” *BC* 9.504), implying that this is what motivates the soldier’s mistaken gesture of respect. Likewise, the story of David’s thirst occurs in the context of his three mighty men’s great exploits and devotion to their king. Also in both instances,

the rejection of the water by the leader is an event with ethical significance; it illustrates the leader's superior understanding of the situation's ethics. David responds angrily that the water is "the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives" (2 Samuel 23:17), displaying insight into the water's true value and indignation that his soldiers would assume he would accept such a gift. In just the same way, Cato refers to "drink[ing] when the people are thirsty" (*populo sitiente bibas*) as a "punishment" (*poena*, BC 9.508-509). Like David (and, as it happens, unlike Arrian's Alexander), Cato responds with angry indignation at the very idea that he would be so morally weak as to accept this water, even though it was offered as a sign of respect. In both of these stories, the hero's response to the offer of water is not merely charismatic but strongly moral: David treats the idea of drinking the water as a crime, Cato as a punishment, and so they both rebuke the man who brings the water. By contrast, Arrian says that Alexander praises the well-meaning soldier, even though, in a ploy to increase morale, he pours out the water (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 6.26). The motif is the same in all three sources, but the core of the story is much closer between David and Cato.

Ahl dismisses the potential role of the Septuagint as a source in favor of the tale about Alexander retold in Arrian and elsewhere, but there is no reason why Lucan's source must be only one of these stories. Some Alexander tale probably *is* one of the sources for this episode in Lucan—alongside the Septuagint. The reasons for identifying the Septuagint as a source for Lucan are the same as the reasons for identifying an Alexander story as a source: the motifs' similarity, their parallel significance, and the probability that the work was available to Lucan. Further, there are elements in Lucan's version of the scene, especially in its moral outlook, which have no source in the

Alexander story but do in the King David story. Lucan is an author addicted to complexity, and his instances of allusion often feature multi-layered references to more than one text at once. This passage, crucial for the development of Cato's character as the prototypical Stoic, is no exception.

DeSilva notes the parallel between the soldiers' response in the legend of Alexander (he consults the version retold by Plutarch, *Alexander* 42.3-6, but Arrian's version is similar), in which they "re-invest themselves in the march and despise their own hardships," and the implied sequel to the Septuagint's story of David (deSilva 2006: 23). The same is true of Cato's men, who find that "the water sufficed for all" (*suffecit omnibus unda*, *BC* 5.510) once Cato rejects the drink; that is, all were happy to be equally waterless. The significance of the double allusion is apparent in another way as well. Alexander and David have one thing in common besides their rejection of water: they are foreign kings, while Cato is a Roman republican. There seems to be something deliberately exoticizing, even alienating, about Lucan's depiction of his hero at this crucial moment. Cato stands for Stoicism, but not just for Stoicism: he stands for anything that could provide hope and inspiration, and as we shall see, even he is not enough.

The Genre of the Apocalypse

Lucan's apocalyptic style

In addition to these very specific textual parallels between the *Bellum Civile* and parts of the Septuagint, there are broader thematic connections between Lucan's work and Jewish religious thought. It is almost a critical commonplace to describe Lucan's

spectacular, violent, shocking vision of the world as apocalyptic. Michael Lapidge, although he does not use the term “apocalypse,” highlights Lucan’s “imagery of cosmic dissolution” and, quite properly, attributes its source to contemporary Stoic cosmology (Lapidge 1979: 345-46). He admits that the imagery’s “recurrence in the poem has little to do with doctrinaire Stoicism” but rather with Lucan’s political obsessions (363).

While much of Lucan’s imagery undoubtedly is Stoic, his vision of cosmic dissolution differs from that of other Stoics in that, like so much of Lucan’s philosophy, it leaves no room for hope. Lucan’s uncle Seneca, for instance, a fairly orthodox Stoic in his writings, in an account of *ekpyrosis* (the Stoic idea of the collapse of cosmic stability into the element of fire), says that “the world, which is to renew itself, must extinguish itself” (*se mundus renovaturus extinguat, Cons. ad Marc.* 6.26.6). The Greek Stoic Chrysippus, in a fragment preserved in Plutarch, declares the same belief:

διόλου μὲν γὰρ ὦν ὁ κόσμος πυρώδης εὐθύς καὶ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἡγεμονικόν· ὅτε δὲ, μεταβαλὼν εἰς τὸ ὑγρὸν καὶ τὴν ἐναπολειφθεῖσαν ψυχὴν, τρόπον τινὰ εἰς σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴν μετέβαλεν, ὥστε συνεστάναι ἐκ τούτων, ἄλλον τινὰ ἔσχε λόγον. (*SVF* 2.605)

For on the one hand, altogether, the world, being thoroughly fiery, is both its own soul and its governor; on the other hand, when, having changed into moisture and enclosed soul, it has somehow changed into body and soul so as to be a composite of these, it has some other guiding principle.

The idea, as Lapidge explains, is that the worn-out world must dissolve into the fire from which it came, so that it can renew itself through this purifying conflagration, an idea which Lucan’s own teacher Cornutus echoes in his *Theologia Graeca* (Lapidge 1979: 362). Lapidge explains that Lucan’s depiction of the world’s destruction does not correspond to this Stoic doctrine:

[T]he *furor* which in Lucan’s poem destroys cosmic and human bonds has no correlate in Stoic cosmological theory concerning the ἐκπυρόσις. What causes

the cosmic dissolution is never clearly stated in surviving documents, but there is nothing to suggest that any agent was involved; rather the cause seems to be the periodic need of the universe to be purified (καθαίρεσθαι) and renewed (SVF II 598). (Lapidge 367, fn 85)

As Lee Fratantuono has demonstrated, this *furor* is not merely a recurrent motif but a dominant theme of the *Bellum Civile* (Fratantuono 2012). The destruction, not the rebirth, is the part of the story that he draws on. Lucan's world, in other words, unlike that of typical Stoicism, is not "to renew itself."

Had he wanted to do so, Lucan could easily have built an epic around the orthodox Stoic eschatology. The sweeping overview of Roman history that introduces his tale seems to feint in that direction. The "final hour" (*suprema... hora*), the literal end of the world described in *BC* 1.73 as a simile for the collapse of the Republic, could easily lead to renewal. Lucan's cosmological simile concludes with the famous aphorism, "great things fall on themselves: the divine powers put this limit to the growth of fortunate things" (*in se magna ruunt: laetis hunc numina rebus / crescendi posuere modum*, *BC* 1.81-82). An orthodox Stoic would require only the slightest expansion of the metaphor of growth to invoke the circle of life: death and decay producing the soil for a renewal of fertility and life. It is no accident that Lucan, unlike the hypothetical orthodox Stoic author, jumps immediately back to Rome's case, and specifically to fixing the blame on the Romans themselves. The metaphors for Rome's decline lead to no renewal but only to a longer discussion of why the Republic fell.

Lucan's dark eschatology

Lucan has an eschatological obsession, forever bringing up the end of the world in his prophetic role as *vates*; his eschatology, like that of Judaism but unlike that of

Stoicism, is not cyclical. He steps out of time in a vision of “the full, uncompromising truth about the past and the future” (O’Higgins 1988: 226). Hardie notes that Vergil’s dualistic underworld (Elysium/Tartarus) came to be “projected” onto the living world in later epic, in a motif he calls “Hell on Earth.” He writes that “the projection of eschatological states into the here-and-now... seems to correspond at a deep level to the Romans’ experience of their history in the first century A.D.” (Hardie 1993: 59). This eschatological motif is especially powerful in Lucan. Likewise, Masters notes several instances of “the idea that everything—or a great number of things—is converging to one point in time, in space.” Deaths especially converge, finally meeting in the slaughter of the whole world (as Lucan sometimes depicts it) at Pharsalia (Masters 1992: 146). His eschatological scenes are simply the most cosmic in scale of his many scenes of destruction.

Although the informal connotations of the adjective “apocalyptic” are appropriate to Lucan’s style, in a technical sense the *Bellum Civile* is very far from being an example of the apocalyptic genre. John J. Collins gives a feature-based definition of the ancient Jewish apocalypse:

Apocalyptic revelations are typically mediated to the human recipient by an angelic figure, who functions either as an interpreter or as a heavenly guide. These revelations typically disclose a supernatural world, either by reporting actions of angelic or demonic beings or by describing otherworldly places. While they often give an overview of history, they invariably refer to an eschatological judgment. In many cases this involves a new creation, or a radical break with the present order. It invariably involves a judgment of the dead. (Collins 25)

Despite the thematic similarities—events that affect the entire world, supernatural revelations, a climax of history—neither Lucan’s epic nor any of its major episodes fits these criteria in a straightforward way. Lucan has not written an apocalypse, even if we

examine Erictho's scenes, which come closest: there is no angel guide, only a report from a dead man; no vision of paradise, only an underworld ruled by dark magic; no eschatological judgment, only eschatological destruction. In fact, the opposition is *so* exact that it begins to look suspiciously intentional, the work of a writer familiar with the apocalyptic genre who was determined to subvert that genre's key assumptions.

For instance, Collins gives the book of Zechariah as an example of a "proto-apocalyptic" work (26) whose vision of the future and the trajectory of history foreshadows later developments in the genre of apocalypse. Collins sees Zechariah as expecting a divine eschatological intervention, but (unlike in some later apocalypses) it is one that comes from within history and brings history to its climax in "the restoration of the Judean monarchy and its integration into a new political order" (31). Lucan, too, speaks about history's climactic event, but it is Pharsalia, an event of destruction, not of re-creation. He, too, knows of the restoration of a long-lost kingship, but Caesar's monarchy is the ultimate disaster. It is divine inaction that precipitates the disaster, and the prophet, the *vates*, looks backward, not forward, to the climax he describes. Just as he does with Stoic beliefs, Lucan echoes elements of Jewish beliefs about the end of the world, but he strips them of their potential for hope.

The textual presence of the Septuagint in Lucan

This chapter has demonstrated that Lucan was most probably aware of significant parts of Jewish scripture through the Septuagint, as can be seen in his imitation of certain scenes and motifs such as the combat with snakes and the rejection of water. The parallels between Septuagint figures and Lucan's characters, especially his Cato, are close enough that, for any other text, it would be considered obvious that Lucan knew it

and intentionally built on it. Inaccurate assumptions about Lucan's access to or interest in the Septuagint are all that has kept scholars from recognizing the association. The two following chapters will show how a knowledge of Lucan's Jewish sources affects the interpretation of two major and controversial figures in the *Bellum Civile*: Erictho and Cato.

CHAPTER TWO

Erictho's Resurrection Nightmare

Reading deeper into Erictho

The previous chapter has established that Lucan was likely familiar with some Jewish religious ideas, probably through the Septuagint as well as through general cultural familiarity. The question now arises: why does this matter? In an author as heavily allusive as Lucan, what exactly can we learn from identifying a few more allusions? As it turns out, an understanding of Lucan's Jewish influences provides a useful lens through which to examine some of his most central scenes, scenes which puzzle and surprise his readers. This chapter will examine the bizarre and chilling episode of the witch Erictho. Erictho's evil god and twisted resurrection magic are deliberately dark reflections of Jewish and early Christian ideas, with all the hope, in Lucan's characteristic fashion, taken out.

Erictho's Evil God

The introduction of Erictho

After Caesar's men have been struck by a plague while besieging Pompey's men in Dyrrhachium at the beginning of Lucan's book 6, Pompey breaks out with an attack on Caesar and pursues him to Thessaly. The attentive reader of Lucan already knows, since it has been mentioned several times, that Thessaly is the site of the fated climactic battle that will spell the end of the Roman republic. Sextus Pompey, son of the republican leader, sneaks out of the camp in search of one of Thessaly's famous witches, who Lucan

tells us are the most powerful and sinister of all witches. He wants to know the future, specifically whether he will die in the upcoming fight, but does not trust the normal methods of divination or the oracles of the Olympian gods. He believes that only acts of witchcraft can wring out the truth about the future; Lucan says that “it was clear to the wretch that the gods above knew too little” (*miseroque liquebat / scire parum superos*, *BC* 6.433-34), so he turns to the gods below. Lucan recounts a series of feats common to Roman witch lore, such as turning rivers from their courses, poisoning, creating love-potions, and even drawing the moon down from the sky (*BC* 6.452-506; cf. Propertius 1.1). Young Pompey, impressed by all this, seeks out Erictho, the most powerful and most wicked of all the Thessalian witches. Lucan describes her horrifying way of life, even compared to that of her sisters-in-crime:

Hos scelerum ritus, haec dirae crimina gentis
effera damnarat nimiae pietatis Erictho
inque novos ritus pollutam duxerat artem.
Illi namque nefas urbis summittere tecto
aut laribus ferale caput, desertaque busta
incolit et tumulos expulsis obtinet umbris
grata deis Erebi.... (*BC* 6.507-513)

Erictho had condemned these rites of sins, these savage crimes of a dread people, as too pious and had led the unclean art into new rites. For to her it is unspeakable to submit her wild head to the roof of a city or to hearth-gods, and, pleasing to the gods of Erebus, she inhabits deserted pyres and holds burial mounds with the shades having been driven out....

Since she appears in only one book, Erictho has been passed over by many interpreters of the *Bellum Civile*, while others have seen her as the linchpin for the whole epic and its vision of the world. W. R. Johnson sees Erictho, with her destructive energy and her gleeful aestheticization of macabre violence, as a figure definitive for Lucan’s endeavor. She is the priestess and representative of Lucan’s gods, the irrational, destructive, even

insane “strange gods” who do not fit into human experience and who have replaced the familiar Olympians in Lucan’s poem (Johnson 1987: 4). The energy that drives Erictho, according to Johnson, is the energy that drives the whole poem.

Frederick Ahl does not give her quite so much importance, but he does see her as a significant instance of several of Lucan’s major themes. He contrasts her vividly with the conventional but unwilling prophetess, the Pythia of book 5 (Ahl 1976: 130-131), and notes a potential source for the episode in a related story told by Pliny. The story is of Gabienus, a soldier of Octavian in the 30s BC, whom Sextus Pompey, by now turned pirate, captured and killed. Gabienus, dying of a cut throat, claimed he had been sent briefly back from the dead with one last message: that the war’s outcome would be what Pompey wanted (Ahl 1976: 134, citing Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 7.178-79). Ahl suggests that Lucan adapted this tale for his own purposes, noting that both stories cast Sextus in a decidedly negative light (137). As he usually does, Ahl here provides a useful summary of more or less received wisdom about Lucan and his poem.

Erictho and the Sibyl

Lee Fratantuono offers a close reading of the whole Erictho episode in his detailed commentary/monograph *Madness Triumphant: A Reading of Lucan’s Pharsalia*. Although he sees Erictho as a closer parallel to Allecto, Vergil’s Fury, than to Vergil’s Sibyl (Fratantuono 2012: 244), he nevertheless acknowledges the importance of the Sibyl comparison. For instance, he points out that Sextus Pompey is described as “pluck[ing] his path” (*BC* 6.572), using a form of the same verb *carpere* that Vergil uses of Aeneas plucking the Golden Bough that allows him to descend to the Underworld under the Sibyl’s guidance (Fratantuono 2012: 245; *Aen.* 6.141). Erictho, the wild-dwelling

prophetess who knows things beyond the ken of our hero, especially about the Underworld, is similar enough to the Sibyl that the salient difference, namely that Erictho is utterly malevolent and impious, stands out all the more clearly.

Erictho's character is created within a literary context rich in witches, soothsayers, and other such figures. Given Lucan's ongoing, complex dialogue with Vergil's *Aeneid*, it is especially worth reading Erictho alongside the Cumaean Sibyl. True, Fratantuono denies any such connection; he argues that Phe-monoe, the Delphic oracle priestess of book 5, is Lucan's answer to the Sibyl, and that Erictho corresponds instead to Vergil's Fury Allecto (242). Fratantuono is right to connect Erictho with Allecto, but the dichotomy he draws between the Sibylline Phe-monoe and the Fury-like, therefore not Sibylline, Erictho is too strict. The witch is a figure drawn both from Allecto and from the Sibyl. The doubling of Lucan's Sibyl-like characters, like reflections in a shattered mirror, is entirely consistent with the way he interacts with Vergil.⁵

Vergil's portrayal of the Sibyl, in turn, is influenced by Jewish prophetic traditions, which, as Julia Hejduk and others have demonstrated, were certainly known to Vergil, providing a non-supernatural explanation for the parallels evident in the "Messianic Eclogue" (Hejduk 2018). In the Introduction I discussed the articles by Nicholas Horsfall and Jan Bremmer that support the claim that Vergil knew Jewish texts

⁵ This phenomenon, referred to as "distribution" of themes or references, is common in Latin literature. See the very useful discussions by Hardie 1984, who analyzes Vergil's "distribution" of allusions to Lucretius' depiction of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia across various scenes, and Dyson 1999, who shows Ovid doing the same thing with Vergil's image of Lavinia's blush.

including Genesis, Isaiah, the *Third Sibylline Oracle* (a text where Jewish and Roman traditions interact), and *I Enoch*. Hejduk 2018 focuses on an acrostic allusion to Isaiah in the *Georgics*, but she also points out the Sibyl as one of the clearer points of contact between Vergil and Judaism. Despite its name redolent of Roman myth, the *Third Sibylline Oracle* is actually a Jewish contribution to the originally Greco-Roman genre of Sibylline oracles. Erich S. Gruen writes that “[t]he Sibylline pronouncements fit snugly within that setting [of Jewish prophecy and apocalypse], a complex of thoroughly Jewish traditions,” but that the authors also “purposefully and pointedly donned the cloak of the pagan Sibyl” (2016: 469-470).

The indirect influence of Jewish prophecy on Lucan’s *Erictho*, via Vergil’s Sibyl, is clear, but as shown earlier, there are also direct parallels. We know from Cicero (*Div.* 2.112) that the Romans expected Sibylline oracles to feature acrostics, and we have seen that the Sibylline tradition is a point of contact between Jewish and Roman prophetic texts; I have shown elsewhere (Wheeler, forthcoming) that Lucan echoes the phenomenon of the Sibylline acrostics through a meaningful acrostic in a prophetic scene where omens are described (*BC* 7.153-158). Prophecy in Lucan is thus linked with this widely known form of prophecy that is known to have incorporated Jewish texts, such as the *Third Sibylline Oracle*. Prophecy in Lucan, especially *Erictho*’s prophecy, is influenced both by the figure of the Sibyl in Roman culture and by the Sibyl who appears as a character in the *Aeneid*.

Erictho’s nameless god and contemporary magic practice

In addition to connections between texts, there are also links between Lucan’s poem and the religious practice of his day. For instance, one quality frequently remarked

on by Greco-Roman observers of Jewish religion is the nameless, imageless nature of the god of the Jews. To them, it is bizarre and surprising to have a god who is not the god of anything in particular, and who has no proper name, but is simply the divine. The unknown nature of the Jewish god is paralleled in Erictho's infernal invocation. After calling on a series of chthonic gods, not so much appealing to them as blackmailing them with the dark secrets she knows, she threatens—successfully—to invoke a god from still deeper:

Paretis? an ille
compellendus erit, quo numquam terra vocato
non concussa tremit, qui Gorgona cernit apertam
verberibusque suis trepidam castigat Erinyn,
indespecta tenet vobis qui Tartara, cuius
vos estis superi, Stygias qui peierat undas? (BC 6.744-749)

Do you obey? Or do I have to summon that one at whose calling the earth is always shaken and trembles, who perceives the Gorgon uncovered and strikes the fearful Fury with her own whips, who holds a Tartarus unseen to you, to whom you are the powers above, who swears falsely on the Stygian waves?

The god on whom Erictho finally calls is not named but merely designated as *ille*; M. P. O. Morford refers to him as “the great nameless deity” of Erictho's incantation (1967: 72). This is a still more frightening version of the concept of the unknowable god: Erictho depicts him as even worse than the typical evil gods (BC 6.746-49). The rites with which she invokes him might also have reminded a Roman reader of what was said about the Jews. The Romans spread stories about Jewish human sacrifice and cannibalism; they were especially suspicious of their perceived aloofness from other peoples and secretiveness about their rites, which they interpreted as like a mystery religion (Feldman 1993: 126-28). Erictho's gleefully sacrilegious, cannibalistic rites

evoke the Romans' worst—although in the case of the Jews totally unfounded—fears about foreign religions.

Erictho finds her fellow witches' practices too tame and ordinary, too reverent (*nimiae pietatis*, 6.508), and has inaugurated “new rites” (*novos ritus*, 6.509). The word *novus* had a generally negative connotation for the Romans (compare the term for a political revolution, *res novae*), and this is fitting for Erictho's rites. She lives in graveyards and collects unholy materials from the graves; she buries living people and brings the dead back (6.510-32). The modern reader should note that bringing the dead back is not presented as a joyful miracle but as a horror, the violation of the natural order of things and the inverse and concomitant of the burial of the living. Erictho also disrupts the natural order in other ways: she dismembers corpses, especially those of executed criminals (6.538-546), and is happy to create cadavers for her own use when she needs them (6.554). With a sort of insane gusto, she violates every taboo she encounters, and the gods themselves, Lucan says, are so frightened of her that they give her whatever she wants, simply so that she will stop her incantations (6.527-28).

Outside of the world of fiction, Greco-Roman magic practice often included elements influenced by Jewish culture and religion, a part of the fascination with the supposed occult knowledge of “the East” that also led to phenomena like Mithraism. For example, the Greek magical papyri often feature the word *Iao*, the Greek version of the Hebrew *YHWH*, either as a meaningless word of incantation or as the invocation by name of the supreme god in various magic systems (Pleše 2013). Practical magic was not only a part of Jewish culture but a place where Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures met and exchanged influence (Harari 2015: 231-32).

Loretta Baldini Moscadi, as long ago as 1976, connected Erictho's invocations of her infernal god with contemporary magic practice, including recorded spells that invoke the Hebrew god. Baldini Moscadi lists several suggestions by various scholars of different sources for Erictho's god, ranging from Hermes Trismegistos to the Orphic Demogorgon to Ahriman. She acknowledges that these may be influences, but she sees another influence as more prevailing. Citing examples from *Papyri Graeci Magici*, she argues for the influence of the Jewish concept of divinity, specifically as filtered through the magical tradition:

I would like to add something else about this unknown god. Lucan presents him as the one at whose name the earth shakes, in front of whom the divinities are seized with fear, who breaks even the oath made on the Styx, a thing not permitted even to Jove: a god, therefore, supremely powerful, who, precisely because of this power of his connected to the name, because of this capacity of his to make the earth tremble and to overturn the laws of Hades, I would approximate rather to the supreme God invoked in the papyri, a divinity who is not ever assimilated to Hermes Trismegistos, but, if anything, to the god of the Hebrews. (Baldini Moscadi 1976: 182; translation my own)⁶

Erictho mentions characteristics of her god that not only identify him as different from the other gods whom she threatens but also hint at a specific identity for him: the god of the Jews. The connection to recorded magic practice gives us a sense of just how seriously Lucan wants us to take Erictho; very seriously, that is, if she is in some sense

⁶ “[V]orrei aggiungere ancora qualcosa a proposito di questo dio sconosciuto. Lucano ce lo presenta come colui al cui nome la terra trema, di fronte al quale le divinità sono prese da paura, che rompe perfino il giuramento fatto sullo Stige, cosa che non è permessa neppure a Giove: un dio, quindi, potentissimo, che, proprio per questa sua potenza connessa la nome, per questa sua capacità di far tremare la terra, e di sconvolgere le leggi dell’Ade, avvicinerei piuttosto al Dio supremo invocato nei papiri, divinità che non è mai assimilata a Hermes Trismegistos, ma, caso mai, al dio degli Ebrei.”

realistically depicted despite the frequent absurdity of her behavior. It also reveals some of the cultural context in which Lucan wants Erictho's deeds to be read.

Erictho's Resurrection Magic

The act of resurrection

We first meet Erictho laying a spell on Thessaly itself, to ensure that the climactic battle will in fact take place there. Lucan explains her reasons for doing so: she is looking forward to having so many bodies of kings and nobles from around the world, all at her gruesome disposal (6.574-587). When Sextus Pompey asks his question—what will be his fate in the upcoming battle?—she explains that the best way to find out is to bring back a recently slain man, who has already made it to the afterlife but whose body is still fresh enough to speak (6.619-624). In a bizarre inversion of narrative order that has never been fully explained, Erictho apparently has access to the corpse-strewn field of the battle yet to be fought, and she selects and drags away one of the bodies (6.621-41).

Assembling her materials in a yew-shaded cave and preparing herself for the ritual (including tying back her hair with vipers, 6.656), the witch prepares a disgusting potion with exotic ingredients and begins a hideous chant invoking a series of increasingly grim deities (6.667-718). The ghost is reluctant to return to its body and re-experience its suffering; the narrator pities it for not being allowed even to die (6.724-725). To overcome its resistance, Erictho calls upon underworld gods including the Furies, Hecate, and Hades (6.725-743); she compels their assistance by threatening to invoke the nameless deity who is worse and more terrifying than all of them, who lives in

a Tartarus deeper than theirs (6.744-749). This works, and the soul returns to the body, unnaturally and by force, with a wealth of detail from Lucan's gory imagination:

Protinus astrictus caluit cruor atraque fovit
volnera et in venas extremaque membra cucurrit.
Percussae gelido trepidant sub pectore fibrae,
et nova desuetis subrepens vita medullis
miscetur morti. Tunc omnes palpitat artus,
tenduntur nervi; nec se tellure cadaver
paulatim per membra levat, terraque repulsum est
erectumque semel. Distento lumina rictu
nudantur. Nondum facies viventis in illo,
iam morientis erat; remanet pallorque rigorque,
et stupet inlatus mundo. (*BC* 6.750-60)

At once the clotted gore grew hot and warmed up the dark wounds and flowed in the veins and the ends of the limbs. The fibers, struck, tremble under the chilled chest, and a new life, creeping into the marrow that had grown unaccustomed to it, is mixed with death. Then he trembles in all his joints, his nerves are stretched, and the corpse does not raise himself little by little with his limbs from the earth; he is both repelled from the earth and set upright at one time. His eyes are wide with a gaping grimace. There was not yet the face of a living man on him, still that of a dead one; the paleness and stiffness remain, and, brought back to the world, he was stunned.

Erictho urges the undead soldier to speak with the promise that, if he does so, he will then receive the only blessing he can now receive: eternal, unbroken oblivion in death (6.768-770). The information he has to give has little to do with Sextus Pompey's fate, though at the end of the speech, he does reveal that the family of Pompey will perish elsewhere than at Pharsalia; for the most part, however, he announces the sorrow of the virtuous dead at the state of Rome (the only cheerful one is the original tyrannicidal Brutus; as Frederick Ahl points out, he must be proud of his descendant's upcoming deed [Ahl 1976: 139]), and the rejoicing of wicked shades like Catiline (6.776-820). Erictho burns the reanimated corpse on a pyre, using spells and potions to set the ghost free again, and she escorts Sextus to the Pompeian camp (6.820-830).

Resurrection in Judaism

Not only do Erictho's spells reference Jewish elements in ancient magic practice, their effect also brings up a topic that was hotly contested within first-century Judaism: resurrection. As discussed in the Introduction (page 12), Elledge shows that the doctrine of resurrection was a subject of controversy among Jews in this period, although the rabbinic traditions that embraced it turned out to be the ones to survive (Elledge 2017: 13). Lucan subverts the resurrection-based theodicy that was developing in the Judaism of his time, founded in texts such as Isaiah 26 and Ezekiel 37, as deliberately and brutally as he does Vergil's Roman theodicy.

While Jewish writings used many different images for resurrection, and especially for the eschatological life that was to follow resurrection, some of them, such as the Valley of Dry Bones, find visible parallels in Lucan's Erictho scenes. In Ezekiel 37, the prophet Ezekiel receives a vision of a valley full of bones, not unlike the inexplicable battlefield to which Erictho has access. At God's command, the bones knit together and are covered with flesh, but, as for Erictho, to put breath in the body requires an additional step (37:7-8). Ezekiel must invoke the power of his God, the god of the Jews (37:9). As quickly for him as for Erictho does the breath and life then return to the corpses (37:10). He then delivers to them a prophetic message that promises hope, restoration, and homecoming to the Jewish people, in the terms of resurrection (37:11-14).

Feldman gives a useful caveat when he notes that "in comments on every detail of Jewish observance the pagans, throughout the entire period of antiquity, viewed the Jews as a group, making almost no differentiation among subgroups of Jews" (1993: 45). Even an author like Lucan, who, as we have seen, shows demonstrable interest in Jewish

belief and customs, should not be assumed to understand the differences between Pharisees and Sadducees, or the exact points at issue in contemporary debates over resurrection. What he would know is that Jews talked and wrote about resurrection, and that, as in the Valley of Dry Bones, their portrayals of it were positive. They saw in it a source of hope, a genuine restoration of life.

Early Christianity

Of course, the modern reader hears the word “resurrection” and immediately asks whether Lucan knew about Christianity. Although the case for Jewish influence holds even without including Christianity in the mix, it was in Lucan’s lifetime still closely linked with Judaism and often counted as merely a sect of Judaism. It is thus worth considering the possibility that Lucan’s dialogue with Jewish texts also incorporates some knowledge of Christianity, even if only through the vague cultural knowledge that a member of Nero’s court would derive from gossip and scandal.

For Lucan to have been somewhat familiar with Christianity is certainly possible, especially when one remembers that Christianity was still mostly lumped together with other Jewish groups; Lucan’s own uncle Gallio was the official who famously dismissed a legal case between Jews and Christians as “a matter of questions about words and names and your own law” (Acts 18:15 ESV). Lucan might not even have realized that he was alluding to two quite different theologies of resurrection, the more conventional Jewish and the radically novel Christian. If Lucan *is* responding to specifically Christian concepts of resurrection, he takes the anti-Christian side. He imagines resurrection not as salvific but as ironically destructive. Erichtho’s god is capable of resurrecting a dead man, not as the triumph of life over the destruction of death, but as a still further destruction.

The *pallorque rigorque* of death remain as the spirit is forced unwillingly back into a still-broken body (*BC* 6.759). This is exactly how someone determined to see the world as dark and hopeless would parody the Christ story: a man dies and returns not long after, having had a whirlwind tour of the dead greats, an ineffectual rendering of the Harrowing of Hell motif. He brings not salvation but only the prediction of more destruction to come. The only scrap of comfort is that he will finally be allowed to die completely (762-770). Lucan references the outline of a story of hope only to drive home the absence of hope in the world he himself describes.

The significance of Lucan's mockery of resurrection

Lucan's philosophical engagement with the Jewish/Christian concept of resurrection has literary consequences as well. Erictho may be Thessalian, but the Jewish influence on her characterization helps to align her with "Eastern" peoples and places that are foreign both to her supposed homeland and to Lucan's Roman context. The Sibylline figure, the aged prophetess found in her rural domain, is already displaced from Italy, home of the "original" and certainly the definitive Vergilian Sibyl, into Thessaly, and now her magic practice identifies her not merely with a foreign people group, but with one notoriously (and, for the Romans, frustratingly) resistant to assimilation. Alignment with this uncooperatively monotheistic "Eastern" belief makes Erictho a definitively non-Roman and non-Greek figure. The exoticizing of Erictho plays into Lucan's idea that Rome's proper strengths, including the prophetic powers of the Sibyl, are leaving Rome and going into foreign lands.

In depicting Erictho's gruesome parody of resurrection, Lucan takes a particular source of hope, one held to by people (including some quite influential people) in his own

day, and deliberately perverts it into a self-mockery. He does this over and over, including with Stoic, Epicurean, and Roman civic ideals. In this case it is the hope of resurrection into a better afterlife shared by several first-century sects of Judaism. Elsewhere in the poem, Lucan's other parodies of hope mostly target Roman and well-assimilated Greek mindsets. This might lead the reader, if more optimistic than the poet, to agree that Rome is doomed through her hubristic self-destruction, but to conclude that hope might still exist elsewhere, outside the bounds of the ruined Roman world. Lucan does not wish to leave open even this sliver of possibility for trust in a well-intentioned universe. Makowski argues that the corpse's prophecy, in naming many famous men and countries, "develops the theme of universal doom introduced earlier at Delphi" (1977: 200), an effect heightened by the fact that the prophetic scene is philosophically and stylistically engaged with the religious concerns of a foreign nation. Lucan insists that religions, governments, philosophies, leaders fail equally everywhere, and he demonstrates his belief using one of the most visible non-Roman religions in Rome, namely Judaism.

It is not just through the mockery of resurrection that Lucan undermines the potential of Jewish belief as a source of hope in his poem. He also creates a messianic figure, interpreted through a bit of a Stoic lens (something not entirely foreign to first-century Jews themselves), but a truly great and good one who performs and inspires great deeds—and he, too, as is inevitable in Lucan's universe, fails. It is time to see Lucan's Stoic savior in action. It is time to turn to Cato.

CHAPTER THREE

Cato as a Failed Stoic Messiah

Interpreting Lucan's Cato

Lucan's Cato is in some ways the core of his epic. Most of the poem focuses on Pompey and Caesar, and Cato only really emerges as a main character when he steps up as leader of the republicans after Pompey's death, but Cato's early appearance in book 2, when he discusses with Brutus the ethics of participating in civil war, establishes him as thematically central. When scholars talk about Cato, they generally talk about Stoicism, the destructive division of civil war, the nature of good leadership and its inability to stop the catastrophes of the world. In dealing with these themes, Lucan's depiction of Cato constantly invokes the Roman concept of *devotio*. Lucan depicts Cato as a would-be *devotus* and links *devotio* with Jewish and Christian messianic concepts, leading to the portrayal of Cato as a kind of "Stoic messiah" whose inevitable failure shows the collapse of yet another potential source of hope in Lucan's dark universe.

Cato In and Out of the Text

Scholarly views of Cato and his place in the text

The nature of Cato's role in the text is the object of debate among scholars. Some consider him a third hero, alongside the two opposing protagonists Pompey and Caesar, such as Ahl, who calls them "the three major characters of the *Pharsalia*" and grants each man one chapter (Ahl 1976: 150); others even frame Cato as a direct and equally exaggerated counterpoint to Caesar (Johnson 1987: 55). Another view, held by scholars

such as Isabelle Cogitore, who calls Cato “Pompey’s continuator” (“le continuateur de Pompée,” Cogitore 2010: 174) and says that “Cato clearly takes up Magnus’ inheritance” (“Caton assume pleinement l’héritage de Magnus,” 176), considers Cato a narrative replacement for Pompey, since he takes up the mantle of the republican general. Additionally, there is significant debate over what exactly is Lucan’s and his narrator’s attitude toward Cato. J. Mira Seo identifies him as an unattainable ideal, destructive to others in the very impossibility of their living up to his standard, and argues that the disastrous continual failure of his would-be imitators “contaminates the original” (Seo 2011: 209). Others hold that Lucan portrays him as a more idealized figure who acts as any good citizen should in bad times (e.g. Ahl 1976: 247).

Historical perceptions of Cato

The perception and role of Cato outside of Lucan’s text is equally complex. In the imperial context from which Lucan wrote, Cato’s legacy was mixed and controversial: he was widely admired as a heroic Stoic Roman, but admiration for him was often divorced from his political commitments, which, being staunchly republican, were dangerous in the Neronian period. David B. George claims that “by Lucan’s day men could admire Cato, Brutus, and Cassius without even a hint of that type of Republicanism for which they fought and died” (George 1991: 239). He argues that Lucan, however, was a genuine republican, and that he portrays Cato as both a good republican and a good Stoic in the context of one form of Stoic political theory. For many of Lucan’s contemporaries, Cato was seen as an *exemplum*, but one outside of the course of history. For instance, Robert J. Goar cites the rhetorician Valerius Maximus’ references to Cato; they form a positive portrait, but one Goar describes as “the Cato of a

rhetorician's handbook, divorced from politics, history, and Stoicism" (1987: 34).

According to Goar, this is not merely an artifact of Valerius' profession, but "a good indication of the sentiments of the average patriotic Roman of the era regarding the man of Utica" (35). Precisely because Valerius was a rhetorician, he had to present a view that was widely acceptable to a general audience; the acceptable view of Cato was as a man composite of all the virtues, but with no political or even specifically Stoic significance. Those parts of his life were carefully glossed over.

Such was not the case in the writings of Lucan's uncle Seneca. Goar explains that Cato was for Seneca "the man who proved that the Stoic ideal can be realized, though he may actually have surpassed the ideal." He was the perfect *sapiens*, a figure that the Stoic Seneca knew his school had to have "in order to be able to offer some hope to their adherents" (35-36). This assessment of Cato as a source of hope for Stoics will prove significant as we see Lucan's portrayal of Cato, which also depicts him as a source of hope but shows that hope ultimately failing.

George claims that Lucan, along with a certain branch of Stoicism, held to an opinion quite contrary to the common view represented by Valerius. This contrary opinion was the view that Cato was not only morally admirable but politically right (239). Seneca argued that Cato should have withdrawn from politics because "Rome was no longer good enough for Republican government" (244). His branch of Stoicism held that the appropriate response to the Principate is to try to make it as good as possible, or if that fails and it becomes a tyranny, "to withdraw from government and finally from life" (245). Lucan, along with some other Stoics such as Helvidius Priscus, disagreed. "For them," says George, "the choice would not have been between good king or bad

king but between systems of government, a just Republic or a monarchy that would always degenerate into tyranny” (245). The Stoic ideal is inextricably intertwined with Rome’s republican traditions, and Lucan’s Cato is a defender of both. We will see that Lucan also weaves Jewish ideas into this linkage of Roman and Greek concepts, and that Cato’s valiant defense of the whole complex is set up, like all other potential sources of hope in Lucan’s universe, to fail.

Cato’s devotio

Lucan repeatedly links Cato with the Roman concept of *devotio*, a voluntary self-sacrifice made typically by the general of an army in danger of defeat. The first major speech we hear from Cato is one that illustrates his voluntary self-sacrifice and its potential ineffectiveness. In the second book, when Brutus asks him whether he will participate in the war or not (strongly hinting that, as a Stoic *sapiens*, he should not), Cato replies that, on the contrary, it is his duty to take up the war with Pompey, not for his own benefit but for that of the republic. He has the option of enjoying *otia*, peace and leisure, but he refuses to do so if he must do so alone (*solus*, 2.295). Indeed, he wishes that instead of enjoying leisure alone he might bear the suffering of the war alone:

o utinam caelique deis Erebique liceret
hoc caput in cunctas damnatum exponere poenas!
devotum hostiles Decium pressere catervae:
.....
hic redimat sanguis populos, hac caede luatur,
quidquid Romani meruerunt pendere mores (*BC* 2.306-08, 312-13).

O would that it might be permitted, by the gods both of heaven and of Erebus, to expose this head to all the penalties! Enemy troops pressed *devotus* Decius: [may the same happen to me.] ... May this blood redeem the peoples, by this slaughter may it be paid, whatever Roman manners have deserved to suffer.

Leigh explains what it means to be, like Decius, *devotus*: a general whose army is losing calls down the anger of the gods upon himself instead of his men, and then he charges the enemy, carrying the gods' anger into their lines (1997: 130).⁷ Similarly, the republican soldiers who charge Caesar's men without hope of victory in *BC* 4.272 are described as *devotos*, even though they have not carried out the formal ceremony, because they voluntarily rush upon death for the sake of their country. Cato wishes to carry out something like this, not necessarily literally in battle, but by accepting the guilt of Rome: both the guilt that their wicked *mores* have incurred (*BC* 2.313) and the guilt of the civil war, in which he will participate.

While *devotio* is a Roman concept which evolved alongside Jewish civilization, rather than being directly borrowed from it (although we need not assume a total lack of mutual relationship between the two Mediterranean societies as their worldviews developed), the parallels are easy to see. Indeed, H. S. Versnel cites Joshua 6.16ff. as an elucidatory parallel case, although he implies no direct connection (Versnel 1971: 401). Lucan's spiritualization of the concept in Cato's case only makes the resonances clearer. The Decii, archetypal *devoti*, only hoped to win the battle. Cato wishes he could save his countrymen and the republic itself. There is an implication that, if he could do this, he would not merely prevent them from being killed in civil war but make them better: he would take away the *mores* that deserved such a hideous consequence (313).

⁷ For a historical account of Decius' deed, see Livy 8.9.1-10.

Cato and Self-Sacrifice in Lucan

Is Cato's self-sacrifice for Rome efficacious?

Cato's wish is counterfactual. Even as he determines to take this course, he knows that his sacrifice will not be successful, as Johnson emphasizes. Johnson describes Cato as "the great puritan," a fanatic who is willing to sacrifice his mortal existence for the sake of Liberty's "empty shadow" (*inanem... umbram*, *BC* 2.303; Johnson 1987: 40-41). He interprets as fanaticism, but an almost laudable fanaticism, Cato's willingness to sacrifice himself for a cause that he knows is lost (Johnson 1987: 42). The element of cognitive dissonance evident here should not be surprising: a Stoic Christ is impossible, as is a true Stoic *devotio*, because the Stoic god does not relate to humanity either like the Christian God or like the traditional Roman powers. There is nothing in heaven that can be angry or accept propitiation. Further, Lucan's own version of Stoicism is even grimmer than so-called orthodox Stoicism and offers even less potential for redemptive action.

"In the *Pharsalia*," Ahl claims, "Lucan wishes to reestablish the notion that self-sacrifice in a doomed but worthy cause is not futile, that clinging to the ghosts of the past may, in fact, be morally correct" (1976: 241). Analysis of Lucan since Ahl has, however, become significantly more cynical about the futility of Lucan's world, a world that Johnson (whose reading of Lucan is, granted, among the darkest) describes as "the Stoic machine gone mad" in which "[c]reation and destruction... become an all but identical process... wholly without purpose or meaning" (Johnson 1987: 10). In a world that follows this pattern, "futile" and "morally correct" may not be contradictory adjectives for Lucan. Merely showing, as Ahl does, that Lucan admires Cato's choice of self-

sacrifice—genuinely admires it, not merely on a political or aesthetic but on a moral level—does not necessarily imply that he sees it as useful, purposeful, or ultimately meaningful in a meaningless universe.

Other instances of self-sacrifice

While Lucan does depict self-sacrifice with sympathy and admiration, most of the instances he portrays are decidedly unsuccessful. For J. Mira Seo, who sees Cato as an exemplary figure for characters within the epic but a failed *exemplum* from Lucan's own perspective, the series of imitative "*Catones manqués*"—deaths such as Domitius' (7.597-616) and Pompey's (8.595-636) that emulate Cato's deliberate death for the republic—are even more failed (Seo 2011: 206). Deaths like this echo noble self-sacrifice, but either the sacrifice is for an inappropriate cause (Vulteius' devotion to Caesar in *BC* 4.474-581) or it is not genuinely voluntary (Domitius' historically inaccurate death in *BC* 7.597-616), or something else is wrong. Even in these failed instances, Lucan reveals his preoccupation with self-sacrifice.

Caesar's and Pompey's versions of self-sacrifice

Both Caesar and Pompey at various points offer themselves as some kind of scapegoat or speak as if they were willing to bear the guilt of the war on their shoulders. Nevertheless, neither of them consistently rises to a messianic role. In *BC* 3.436-47, Caesar offers to bear the guilt of chopping down a sacred grove when he orders his soldiers to do so. He makes the first chop and offers to be held responsible for the whole sacrilege. Still, his offer is empty and meaningless for the simple reason that he does not believe the grove is actually holy; he holds it to be a mere superstition. Later, in a speech

before battle, Caesar implies that the allocation of guilt for the entire civil war depends on the battle's outcome when he says, "This battle will make the conquered guilty" (*haec acies victum factura nocentem est, BC 7.260*). After naming his soldiers' crimes of civil war, he adds, "clear your guilt with the sword: no hand is clean, if the judge of war is changed [i.e. if Caesar no longer holds the upper hand]" (*gladioque exsolvite culpam: / nulla manus, belli mutato iudice, pura est, BC 7.262-63*). If he is victorious, then, he will do the opposite of a messianic redeemer: he will offload the guilt onto the weaker party. Nevertheless, a few lines later he offers to take any position as long as his soldiers may rule: "as long as everything is permitted to you, there is nothing I refuse to be. Rule through my unpopularity" (*omnia dum vobis liceant, nihil esse recuso. / invidia regnate mea, BC 7.268-69*). Caesar thus does occasionally employ the rhetoric of a redemptive, guilt-bearing figure, but really to be one is basically outside his character as Lucan depicts it.

Pompey makes a more consistent attempt to be a redeemer for Rome and for the other republicans, but he comes to it late and remains conflicted. In his speech before the battle of Pharsalia, parallel to that of Caesar just cited, he suggests that he could bear the guilt of the war, even though he insists he is not in fact responsible for it. Pompey wanted to wait and starve Caesar into surrender; in agreeing to join battle, he says, he is following the army's desire voiced by Cicero, not his own best judgment. In this context, he casts the responsibility on Fortune and says that "to Pompey the war will be neither guilt nor glory" (*Pompei nec crimen erit nec gloria bellum, BC 7.112*). Yet only a few lines later he wishes that he could die once for all:

prima velim caput hoc funesti lancea belli,
si sine momento rerum partisque ruina

casurum est, feriat; neque enim victoria Magno
laetior. (*BC* 7.117-120)

I could wish the first spear of this cruel war to strike this head, if it would fall without an effect on public affairs and the ruin of our party; for not even victory would be happier for Magnus.

He wishes to be, or imagines himself as, the innocent victim bearing others' guilt in their place, but only because he cannot bear the thought of himself being responsible for Rome's ruin. Later, in the midst of the battle, Pompey claims that the Decii "devoting their fated heads" (*Deciosque caput fatale voventes*, 7.359), along with other Roman worthies, would be on his side if they were living. Again, he associates himself with the wording and imagery of a redeemer, but he cannot stick with it. He is, as Lucan so often shows us, just a little too self-interested; however much he means it at the time, his hands are not quite clean enough.

The Decii

The Decii, already mentioned in several of the characters' speeches analyzed above, are the archetypal *devoti*. They appear again in the *Bellum Civile*, not directly, but in the form of one of Lucan's favorite devices for wordplay and allusion: an acrostic. In *BC* 1.608-11, the Etruscan soothsayer Arruns is beginning to sacrifice a bull to determine the omens for Rome in the newly beginning war, which, it turns out, are very bad, as revealed by the bull's repulsively malformed innards. When Arruns prepares the bull for sacrifice, it shows unwillingness (*non grati victima sacri*, 611), which for Romans was a very bad sign and disrupted the rites, to the point that many scholars believe they

customarily made the animal nod so that it would “assent” to its own sacrifice.⁸ In these very lines appears the acrostic **DECI**, a genitive or vocative form of the family name

Decius:

...Arruns dispersos fulminis ignes
colligit et terrae maesto cum murmure condit
Datque locis numen; sacris tunc admovet aris
Electa cervice marem. Iam fundere Bacchum
Cooperat obliquoque molas inducere cultro,
Inpatiensque diu non grati victima sacri,
cornua succincti premerent cum torva ministri,
deposito victum praebebat poplite collum. (*BC* 1.606-613)

Arruns [the augur] collects the scattered fires of the lightning and hides them in the earth with a sad murmur and gives divinity to the place; then he moves the victim with chosen neck to the holy altars. Now he had begun to pour out the wine and apply the meal with a slanted knife, and the victim, long not permitting the unwelcome rite, when the girt attendants pushed down its fierce horns, offered its conquered neck with a lowered knee.

While my interpretation of Lucan does not by any means hinge on this acrostic,⁹ it is a thought-provoking juxtaposition: the Decii, the Roman archetypes of voluntary self-sacrifice, are put alongside a bull who resists his sacrifice and gives ill omens.

Tantalizingly, the same acrostic occurs alongside a scene of self-sacrifice in a very

⁸ Aldrete 2014 offers a good overview of the current state of this debated question. He argues that, while the purpose of sprinkling water on the animal’s head and the meaning of the ensuing “nod” gesture are debatable, archaeological and artistic records of sacrificial practice reveal a commitment to sacrificing a victim that was at least stunned and unresisting, if not consenting.

⁹ This is not the place for a full defense of the intentionality of this interesting acrostic, but it is worth pointing out two key words that frequently signal the presence of acrostics: *cooperat* points to the “beginning” of the line, while *cornua* could reference the horns of the moon, which also herald the famous and much-imitated **ΛΕΠΤΗ** acrostic in Aratus 783-7 (a reference discussed by Hanses 2014: 610-611). The latter connection was suggested to me by Julia Dyson Hejduk, whom I thank.

different sense in Vergil, when Dido prepares for suicide (*Aen.* 4.475-78).¹⁰ This is only the first of many examples of sacrifice and *devotio* gone wrong in Lucan.

Messianic self-sacrifice

Although *devotio* is a time-honored and very Roman practice, reading Lucan with an awareness of his Jewish sources invites comparison between his interpretation of self-sacrifice and that found in the Septuagint and other Jewish writings. First-century Jewish messianism was not a monolithic ideology but a constellation of variously related hopes, expectations, and interpretations (Charlesworth 1992: 4-7). J. H. Charlesworth explains that some early (first-century BC) Jews believed that the Messiah would “perform the actions formerly attributed to God. He would save Israel. He would judge the nations and Israel,” although there would later be a reaction against this distribution of divine functions (Charlesworth 1992: 30). While for some the Messiah had a primarily eschatological role (his presence would set off the end of the world, a role which has a certain relation to our study, given that Lucan’s world is in a sense ending), for others his role would be primarily redemptive.

The concept of the self-sacrificial redeemer whose blood is shed for the sins of the people was not yet clearly articulated in the first century BC, but by Lucan’s time it would be, by the offshoot branch of Judaism that we know as Christianity. Characters who are not specifically identified as the Messiah but who “give occasion for the expression of redemptive hope” through their “prophetic and martyr-like characteristics” appear in the narrative books of the Apocrypha (Horbury 2003: 42), and this complex of

¹⁰ Thanks to Julia Dyson Hejduk for pointing out the *Aeneid* acrostic, as yet unpublished.

ideas becomes increasingly important and well-established through the next few centuries. Interestingly, the element of guilt and its reallocation, so prominent in the attempts at self-sacrificial behavior by Lucan's Caesar and Pompey, is not a factor in traditional Roman *devotio*. Traditional—we might call it Decian—*devotio* is a means of cursing the enemy, thereby saving one's people in a very literal, physical sense: preventing the enemy from killing them. Until the troubled days of civil war come to blur the lines between enemy and self and raise the question of what Rome did to deserve such suffering, there is no question of saving one's people from themselves in any sense, much less of bearing their moral guilt—and in that post-civil-war ethical turn, Roman authors such as Vergil and Lucan look outside their own tradition for models. They find some in the Jewish tradition, which has long been preoccupied with issues of national and personal guilt and responsibility. In short, the ideal portrayed by Lucan (however spectacularly his deeply flawed characters fail to live up to it) has more implications for individual morality than the purely Roman concept would ever give. It has influences from other sources, and specifically, from the redemptive self-sacrifice of Jewish messiah figures. The route from the Decii to Cato lies through Isaiah.

It thus appears that Lucan's concept of *devotio* had parallels in the ideas of other cultures, specifically in the messianic concepts active in Judaism and in developing Christian teachings. The motif of death as a sacrifice for others, while based on the traditional Roman concept of *devotio*, occurs with a frequency and emphasis in Lucan that parallels its rising importance in Jewish teaching and its centrality in Christian theology. Still, Lucan's depiction of self-sacrifice is by no means the message of hope seen in Christianity, which preaches an unambiguously *effectual* sacrifice.

A Stoic messiah?

As we have already seen, Lucan sets up deliberate parallels between Cato and Moses, and between Cato and David. These parallels have specifically to do with Cato's leadership. Along with the messianic connotations that Lucan gives to *devotio*, the result is a strong association of Cato with Jewish salvific figures; to speak loosely, with messianic figures. Cato's messianic qualities, such as his role as a leader who synecdochically represents his people, his bloody self-sacrifice, and his combination of political and moral authority, are essentially what define his character in the *Bellum Civile*. Cato's purpose in the epic is to represent in a single character the potential for redemption through the self-denial of Stoicism and the self-sacrifice of Roman patriotism. Cato's failure then becomes the failure of these sources of redemption, and his memory becomes their memory. Arguably, it is Cato's very messianic qualities that lead to his failure. Because of who he is, he cannot be the sort of person who wins civil wars.

One may well ask whether we should be comfortable using terms like "Stoic messiah" about Cato. We must acknowledge that both the term "messiah" and, in fact, the term "Stoic" are used loosely in this case. Cato is not a Jewish messiah but is depicted with many of the relevant characteristics, and he departs even in his initial conversation with Brutus from the perfect imperturbability of Stoicism. In fact, the close juxtaposition of Stoic and Jewish ideas would actually not be as jarring to a Roman as it is to contemporary readers who are accustomed to study the former in departments of classics and the latter in departments of religion. This is because of the syncretistic movements that incorporated many Stoic ideas into Jewish thought, seeing the two as

similar in philosophical outlook. For example, the first-century author of *4 Maccabees* interprets the story of David's thirst, the very same story echoed in Lucan's ninth book, in terms of the Stoic value of becoming "absolute master of the passions" (*4 Maccabees* 1.1, trans. DeSilva 2006), with the aim of proving that Judaism actually builds self-mastery better than its Greek rivals (DeSilva 2006: 30-31). Stoicism was as amenable to many ancient Jews as Aristotle was to medieval Christians and had a comparable influence on some strands of Jewish thought. Philo of Alexandria, for instance, an elder contemporary of Lucan's, was a Jew who was deeply influenced by Stoic philosophy and worked to synthesize it productively with his theology (Niehoff 2018: 8). It would not seem odd to Lucan, who might well have read explicitly Stoic-influenced Jewish texts or discussed Stoicism with Jewish intellectuals, to combine the two philosophies in the same character of Cato; thus, although acknowledging that I am stretching the meanings of words somewhat, I am willing to think of Cato as, among other things, a "Stoic messiah."

Cato as a Stoic messiah, however, is not successful. Granting Sklenář's contention that Lucan intends Cato to be taken seriously, not as the mockery of Stoic ideas that Johnson sees, only strengthens the contrast between his noble intentions and his ultimate failure. Cato does not save Rome: Lucan invites the reader to look around at Nero's Rome and ask if this is a state that has been saved. It is, in fact, conceivable that Lucan's interest in the divine-human messianic figure could be related to the central place of deification in imperial ideology, and especially to Nero's self-divinization, an established imperial habit which the last Julio-Claudian kept flourishing, including the worship of the emperor himself as a god by communities outside Rome (Šterbenc Erker 2013: 119-126). Lucan plays with this idea in his famous or infamous panegyric of Nero

in the proem, which I for one cannot read other than ironically, when he promises Nero whatever place he chooses in the heavens, predicts his divinization leading to another golden age, and says that the emperor suffices instead of Bacchus or Apollo to inspire a poet (*BC* 1.45-66).¹¹ This, Lucan seems to say, is what we have now, instead of “holy Cato” (*sancto... Catone*, *BC* 6.311).

Cato in the wilderness

A messianic depiction is particularly apt during the republicans’ desert wanderings in book 9, a section where Lucan’s Stoic veneer is at its thinnest. Although Cato can overcome the torments of the Libyan desert himself and even inspire some of his men to die bravely, he cannot actually stop their suffering, and for many readers his journey has seemed an exercise in futility, unimpressive as a showpiece for Stoicism, if it was even meant to be such. Matthew Leigh sees this scene as the climactic moment in Lucan’s ongoing “autosubversion” of Stoicism, as he transforms depictions of Stoic virtue into gladiatorial performances (265-282), although Bexley defends “Cato’s ethical gaze” as the development of a Senecan concept (Bexley 2010: 146-47). W. R. Johnson interprets the snake attacks as a brilliant scene of black comedy. For Johnson, Cato’s is a

¹¹ Scholarly opinion has historically varied regarding the proper interpretation of this passage (*BC* 1.45-66) as either a sincere, if tastelessly overblown, praise of the emperor or a subtle parody which might fly under Nero’s radar, but which a sensitive reader would see undermines his pretensions to ultimate authority. Although Lucan’s biography, given that he shifted from being a personal friend of the emperor’s to allegedly plotting his assassination, could support either interpretation depending on when the proem is supposed to have been written, both the generally anti-Caesarist context of the rest of the *Bellum Civile* and the parallels in description between the apotheosis of Nero and the destruction of the world (*BC* 1.67-97) pointed out by Kessler 2011 make the latter interpretation by far the more probable.

“hollow, funny victory” that reveals his “fanaticism,” the “dark side of Stoicism” (Johnson 1987: 55).

It seems to me that Leigh and Johnson’s interpretations take the debunking attitude somewhat too far. The interpretation that would consider Lucan’s Cato a figure of mockery, a parodically over-the-top Stoic, seems lacking in textual support; Cato’s men admire him, and the narrator praises him with none of the painful dramatic ironies attendant on his attempts at praising Pompey.¹² Lucan portrays Cato as a heroic figure, not a detestable strawman, but the heroism he displays is not quite the passionlessness of traditional Stoicism. Lucan himself is no orthodox Stoic in the traditional sense; if he were, this Cato—who shows anger, fights wars, and is much too devoted to his self-destructing country to be truly tranquil—would not be admirable to him. He is not an orthodox Stoic, but he is a Stoic of the kind discussed by George, for whom Cato’s beloved Republic really was the best form of government, worth protecting and even fighting for (1991: 245). In the torments of the desert, Lucan’s Cato is still a hero, but the pure Stoicism by which he was traditionally characterized is increasingly adapted to circumstances—specifically, the circumstances of being the sole remaining leader of liberty’s sole remaining hope.

Lucan constantly seeks a possible source of hope, even though he rejects each one that he finds; along these lines, R. Sklenář offers a more nuanced account of the “desperate absurdity” of Cato’s position (Sklenář 2003: 100). He sees Cato as a genuine example of real Stoic virtue. The problem is that Stoicism itself does not work, not in the

¹² See the discussion in Bartsch 1997: 77-85, who argues that the narrator both expresses “wild enthusiasm” for Pompey (84) and allows hints to slip through his narration indicating that Pompey does not deserve such adulation.

universe that Lucan depicts; Cato “can neither escape nor, as a Stoic, fully accept the reality into which Lucan has placed him—that of a universe governed by no providence at all, benevolent or malign” (Sklenář 2003: 96-100). Lucan’s Cato is neither a conventional Roman hero like his counterpart Regulus nor a perfect Greco-Roman Stoic, however polished his virtue, Stoic or otherwise. As a syncretistically depicted Stoic messiah, he remains tragically heroic in a world where Stoicism fails.

The redemptive failure of self-sacrifice

In Cato the *devotus*, Lucan brings together a supposedly Stoic hero with an ancient Roman practice, reshaped after a messianic model. The result is that none of those three belief systems comes out very well. Each promises some kind of meaning, but in Lucan’s view they all fail to deliver. The parallel with the Jewish/Christian promise of redemption only emphasizes that none of these promises of hope corresponds with the darkness of Lucan’s world. This is typical of his attitude toward systems, whether philosophical or religious, that claim to portray an ordered cosmos with a potential for hope. While his interaction with Judaism and Christianity, foreign religions to him, is not as central a concern in the poem as his interaction with the Stoicism in which he was educated, he does, as I have shown, reference Jewish texts with some frequency, and he seems to have had at least a passing familiarity with the special concerns of the fast-growing Christian sect. When he references these beliefs, he does the same thing that he does with the Stoic conflagration and, for that matter, with Epicurean and other philosophies that he addresses: he distorts and twists it into a dark, nihilistic version of itself. The attempts at redemptive self-sacrifice that appear in Lucan,

even those made by the best man Lucan's universe has to offer, cannot provide the hope they promise, and that is precisely why he depicts them.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate two major points: first, that Lucan's *Bellum Civile* shows demonstrable literary and intellectual influence from Jewish religious writings, most centrally the Septuagint; and second, that knowledge of this influence permits a better understanding of Lucan's purpose in his epic, in which he continually offers up popular values and philosophies as potential sources of hope for redemption of society, the state, and the individual, only to reveal their ultimate inefficacy. He thus drives home the basic lack of hope inherent in the universe as he sees it. At various points throughout the epic he engages in this process with Stoicism, Roman citizenship, and, it now becomes apparent, Judaism, at least as he understood it. Both Erictho's dark parody of divine resurrection and Cato's gallant but doomed self-sacrifice for the sins of his people are close points of contact with Jewish texts and thought.

The known influence of Jewish texts such as Isaiah upon Vergil and Lucan's response to the same Vergilian elements indicates the high probability that such texts were also known to Lucan. Motifs such as the nameless god (also related to Jewish-influenced Hellenistic magic) and specific parallels in phrasing strengthen the link between Lucan and Jewish writings, and two memorable scenes from Cato's desert journey are allusions to stories of Moses and King David, respectively. Lucan's vision of the course of history uses tropes and themes similar to those found in the apocalyptic genre, characteristic of Jewish prophetic sources, although Lucan's all imply hopelessness.

Lucan's depiction of the witch Erichtho, in particular, yields new insights when read in the context of Jewish thought and writings. The concept of resurrection, under active debate within first-century Judaism as well as between Jews and Christians, appears in parodic form when Erichtho brings a dead soldier to tortured life as a way of foretelling the (grim) future. Erichtho's links to Sibylline literature and to contemporary magic practice, as well as her much-emphasized foreignness, suggest that her actions are to be read as a parody of the salvific resurrection discussed in Judaism and central to Judaism's new offshoot, Christianity. This is the first of two major ways in which Lucan references sources of hope and redemption found in Jewish belief, only to show that, in his universe, they fail.

The other such source of hope is Cato, depicted by Lucan with messianic characteristics as well as those of a Stoic *sapiens*. Many characters in the *Bellum Civile* attempt forms of self-sacrifice, whether through the traditional Roman practice of *devotio* or in more metaphorical ways, such as Pompey's wish that he alone could bear the burdens of the war. Cato, with his echoes of Moses and David, takes *devotio* to new heights in his defense of the Republic, with Jewish thought contributing an emphasis on the moral redemption of the people that traditional Roman *devotio* never showed. Still, in the end, Cato's sacrifice is ineffectual; in history he died proud but defeated, even though Lucan himself died—like his character, a suicide against despotism—before writing Cato's death. All the potential for hope in Lucan is wrapped up in Cato, the Stoic, the republican, the would-be redeemer, but even Cato is not enough.

Necessarily limited in scope, this thesis has not been able to address all the possible ramifications of a reading of the *Bellum Civile* in light of Lucan's Jewish

influences. It has focused primarily on the scenes dominated by Erictho and Cato, two of Lucan's most powerful characters but certainly not the only potentially relevant figures. Further work could examine the implications of Lucan's dialogue with Judaism for scenes such as Cato's early appearances in book 2, the suicidal Caesarian *devoti* in book 4, and the almost accidentally heroic death of Pompey in book 8. Also valuable would be an exploration of how exactly Vergil joins in the chain of influence, especially regarding messianic concepts that clearly had a significant influence on certain of his own works. The world of acrostics especially beckons investigation. Additionally, acknowledging the Jewish influence on Lucan—including early Christian elements—could help in further elucidating the societal context of the poem: specifically, the position of Jewish and Christian ideas, perhaps even of Jews and Christians themselves, among the Neronian intellectual elite.

Thus, the work presented here is only the crack in the shell of a much larger topic. However, to vary the metaphor a little, it is a crack that lets in a great deal of illumination. Our understanding of Lucan and of Roman literary history can only be the richer for having traced this additional strand in the web of influence. Lucan's ongoing, fascinated, defiant dialogue with Jewish religious thought, especially the concepts of resurrection and messianism, reminds us of the sometimes surprisingly close influence of Jewish and early Christian ideas on classical authors. It also gives us a fresh appreciation of the complexity of this passionate Stoic, this cynical idealist, whose medley of literary and philosophical influences dissolves into the chaos of civil war.

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