



Madness Triumphant: A Reading of Lucan's Pharsalia

By Lee Fratantuono

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Madness Triumphant: A Reading of Lucan's Pharsalia offers the most detailed and comprehensive analysis of Lucan's epic poem of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey to have appeared in English. In the manner of his previous books on Virgil and Ovid, Professor Fratantuono considers the *Pharsalia* as an epic investigation of the nature of fury and madness in Rome, this time during the increasing insanity of Nero's reign. The volume proceeds chapter by chapter, book by book through Lucan's poem, as it unfolds the thesis that the poet Lucan crafted an epic response to both Virgil and Ovid, the closing movement in a three act tragedy of madness. In response to the *Aeneid*, Lucan raises the idea that the final ethnographic settlement of Trojans and Italians may not have been for the best, while in response to the *Metamorphoses*, he explores the idea that the immortality achieved by the poet may not, after all, prove to be a blessing. An introduction and bibliography provide additional direction for the study of this greatest surviving work of literature from the so-called Silver Age of Neronian literature, while the individual chapters offer in-depth bibliographical citations and extensive annotation as a guide to further study of the poem. Lucan's poem is revealed to be the consummate hymn to fury, as the poet offers a return to the opening of Homer's *Iliad* and the wrath of Achilles, which is now viewed as part of an unending cycle of madness that will end only in the flames of a global conflagration that will consume all things. The pervasive intertext of Lucan's epic poem with his predecessor Manilius' *Astronomica* is also investigated, as the nature of Lucan's response to both Stoic and Epicurean antecedents is explored. Manilius' stars are virtually sprinkled through the *Pharsalia*, as the heavens offer a celestial canvas for the poet of fury to illustrate the beautiful lies that may ultimately be shown to conceal even more seductive truths.

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Editorial Review

Review

Though immensely popular in late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, Lucan's *Pharsalia* has languished in semi-obscure for centuries. With the availability of Fratantuono's excellent commentary, this grand Silver Age epic, with its stories of witches, ghosts, a headless Pompey, wild animals feasting on fallen soldiers, and a Rome poised to lose its cherished *libertas*, stands a good chance of making a long overdue comeback. It is the third in a series of commentaries Fratantuono has written in the last five years, and it may well be his best, which is saying a lot, since his earlier commentaries on the *Aeneid* and *Ovid's Metamorphoses* get more use than most other books in my personal Latin library. Lucan's intent in the *Pharsalia* was clearly to fashion an epic that would elicit *comparanda* with the works of his predecessors, and Fratantuono is the perfect guide to help us understand these many points of comparison. As in his books on Vergil and Ovid, Fratantuono shows an amazingly comprehensive knowledge of his poem and comes up with insights that are born of many years of a productive engagement with it. *Madness Triumphant* is surely a *victrix causa* for both the young Neronian poet and his 21st century interpreter.

(Blaise Nagy, College of the Holy Cross)

Fratantuono gives a masterful reading of Lucan through close textual analysis. With great sensitivity to the poetics of tradition he leads the reader step by step through the minefields of Lucan's poetry, uncovering a whole (and dark) philosophy of Roman imperial government. To experienced and non-experienced readers of Lucan alike this book is an interpretive gift; an erudite but friendly companion on the perilous journey Lucan enjoins. (Holly Haynes, The College of New Jersey)

Every turn of the page of *Madness Triumphant* fills the reader with anticipation and delight as Lee Fratantuono masterfully demystifies Lucan's enigmatic allusions to his poetic predecessors and illuminates the *Pharsalia's* haunting yet beautifully dark vision of Rome. (Caroline Stark, Temple University)

About the Author

Lee Fratantuono is associate professor of Classics and William Francis Whitlock Professor of Latin at Ohio Wesleyan University, where he also serves as advisor to the Delta Upsilon chapter of the Delta Delta Delta sorority and the college equestrians. He is the author of (inter alia) *Madness Unchained: A Reading of Virgil's Aeneid* (Lexington Books, 2007), *Madness Transformed: A Reading of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Lexington Books, 2011).

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