Madness Unburied
The Use of Condere in Lucan’s Pharsalia

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Scholars have long struggled to make sense of the conflicting messages in Lucan’s Pharsalia. An analysis of the verb condere, however, can provide a cohesive storyline for the seemingly schizophrenic narrative. The story that condere reveals begins with Virgil’s Aeneid and is carried on through Lucan. The twenty forms of the verb condere in the Pharsalia, I argue, can roughly be divided into three categories: before, during, and after Pharsalia VII. These divisions follow the movement of madness as it pushes nature into an unnatural hiding, desecrates her on the Thessalian field, and destroys the ritual of burial leading to a world of chaos. Without the full honors of burial, burning shades ceaselessly envelop Lucan’s Rome, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of madness.

Our understanding of condere, and thus Lucan’s message, must begin with its use in Virgil’s Aeneid. The Aeneid is a story of foundation, cataloguing Aeneas’ efforts to found a second Troy. It is no surprise then, that the word condere, the traditional Latin word for founding, should anchor the Aeneid at its beginning and end. When Virgil announces that he will sing of the man “until he founds the city” (dum conderet urbem, 1.5 Aen), the word conderet is used in its traditional sense. Its final use, however, dramatically subverts the standard use. Three lines before the end of Book XII, Aeneas “establishes his sword in his opponent’s breast” (ferrum aduerso sub pectore condit, 12.950 Aen). To the Roman reader of 14 B.C.E., this use of condere with ferrum would have been startling. It is an inversion of condere’s meaning; what is normally employed to indicate beginning or establishment is now utilized to denote a death. Even more stunningly, it is though this death that Rome is born. According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary, besides meaning “to establish” or “to found”, the verb can also signify “to hide” and “to bury”. “Establishing,” then, seems an inadequate translation in the previous quotation; rather, the sense here is to “hide” the sword in the breast, or better yet, “bury” it. Even taken poetically, this sense surprises the Latin reader. In fact, the use of condere with ferrum was attested for the first time in all of extant Latin literature only three Books before, in Aeneid 9.347-8.

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the surprisingly subversive nature of condere’s final use and its
meaning in the larger context of the *Aeneid*. Sharon James, among others, argues that the last use of the verb, indeed every use in the last three books, signifies a definitive shift in sense from its traditional use describing “slow, time-consuming acts” to its final use indicating “swift, violent acts of war.” Lee Fratantuono has taken this one step further, arguing that Aeneas has released madness in this founding act. Virgil, then, concludes his epic not with a foundation of peace, but with fury, in a manner appropriate to Romulus and Remus. It is this fury that Lucan attempted to harness some eighty or so years later in his epic *Pharsalia*.

There is no doubt that Lucan had Virgil’s work in mind when he was inspired to compose the *Pharsalia*. Fratantuono goes as far as to say that Lucan’s poem is a direct “commentary on the *Aeneid*.” If we are to accept Fratantuono’s statement, our analysis of *condere* in Lucan is surely justified. Indeed, Lucan not only employs the same verb, but pairs it with *ferrum*, a rare feat in Latin Literature, one which begins with Virgil. There is only one example of such a usage in Lucan, and at first, it seems surprisingly understated. It occurs in Book I, in a speech by Laelius, a minor character and officer of Caesar (1.377). Nevertheless, the unusual pairing tells us one thing for sure: Lucan is responding to Virgil. The question now becomes, according to Richard F. Thomas, whether Lucan is subverting or affirming the *Aeneid*.

**Before Pharsalia VII**

Lucan, like Virgil, wastes no time implementing the verb *condere*. It first appears on line 15 of Book I. Based on Lucan’s close connection with the *Aeneid*, one would hypothesize that the first use would either be “establishing”, as it was initially in Virgil, or that Lucan would pick up with the fury that Virgil ends with. Lucan, however, chooses to set an entirely new tone. He laments that, had it not been for waste of Roman blood and fury, Rome would have extended “to where the Sun comes and where the night hides the stars” (*unde venit Titan et nox ubi sidera condit*, 1.15). This is a poetic way of referring to cardinal directions: when the sun rises in the East, the stars vanish into the West. Rome could have, as Lucan predicts it, expanded from the farthest point East to the farthest point West. Wistfulness lingers in these lines, but so does fury. It is because of fury that the expansion failed to be accomplished, and thus Lucan does continue Virgil’s theme. But Lucan does not simply pick up where Virgil left off, instead he introduces a causal formula:
there is a hiding because of fury. It is crucial, moreover, to notice that in line 15, Lucan differentiates between the realm of Nature (Titan, nox) and the realm of Rome. By personifying night with the use of the transitive verb condere, Lucan hints that nature actively “hides” from Roman fury. When one considers that the Sun and the night are opposite each other yet constantly in motion, one begins to grasp the power of the image, namely that nature ceaselessly hides, or flees, from Rome. This image, indeed, becomes a literary trope for Lucan throughout the first five books of the Pharsalia.

Significantly, of the twenty instances of the verb condere in the entire poem, eight instances include the connotation of hiding. These instances, moreover, all occur in the first five books of the Pharsalia. At least five of these eight instances are directly related to Nature. Titan appears in connection with condere once more in Book I, when he “hid his burning chariots in black darkness” (condidit ardentes atra caligine currus, 1.541) as a result of rumors of coming war. The inclusion of the chariots invokes not only the Roman belief that the sun was driven in a circular motion by Titan, but also the sentiment that the sun is actively and ceaselessly retreating from the Roman world. This particular line is situated in the middle of a passage describing how nature retreats from an approaching Caesar, who has just crossed the Rubicon. It is Caesarian fury that drives nature into hiding.

Nature is seen as hiding with the verb condere again in Pharsalia II. In Pompey’s speech to his troops, he boasts of many accomplishments, including his victory over pirates, a feat which he accomplished “before Cynthia hid her circle twice filled out” (ante bis exactum quam Cynthia conderet orbem, 2.577). Cynthia is a name for the moon, and the poetic language is another way of saying that the moon waned twice. Before the reader judges that it is simply convention to use the verb condere to indicate a waning of the moon, let us first contextualize the line. Two line before the word conderet appears, in response to the opinion that Caesar’s fury causes his enemies to flee, Pompey directly addresses an absent Caesar: “Oh foolish one! They do not flee you, they all follow me” (heu demens! non te fugiunt, me cuncta secuntur, 2.575). Thus, again the idea of fury causing flight appears just before the use of condere, and thereby colors it. This suggests more intention on the part of Lucan than mere conventionality.

In Book V, the verb condere is used twice. Although both usages carry the connotation of “hiding”, neither directly
applies to nature. Instead, they apply to the divine. Lucan first employs the verb when he gives a history, so to speak, of the Delphic Oracle. After Apollo defeated the monster Python at Mount Parnassus, Lucan says that he “hid himself in the sacred caves” (sacris se condidit antris, 5.84). The force of the verb condere is unmistakable here: it signifies “hiding”. Lucan seems to ask, where are the gods? This would explain why only two lines later, Lucan asks a seemingly obvious question (given the fact that he told us Apollo hid in the caves): “What higher power lurks here?” (quis latet hic superum?, 5.86). Thus, the verb condere is once more employed to denote “hiding”.

The second usage of condere in Book V occurs shortly thereafter, when Lucan compares the inspiration entering into the oracle with the heat of “Typhoeus having been hidden under eternal mass of Ischia” (conditus Inarimes aeterna mole Typhoeus, 5.101). The giant Typhoeus was defeated by Zeus, and then imprisoned underground for punishment. There is, therefore, the sense of “bury”, but one cannot escape the fact that he was hidden underground for negative purposes by Zeus. Thus, this usage remains in keeping with the overall negative undertones with the verb condere. There is one final employment of condere that has the sense of “hiding” before Pharsalia VII. During the sea battle of Massilia in Book III, Lucan displays the valor of a Massilian brother who, although maimed, “does not hide in the bottom of the ship” (non conditus ima / puppe, 3.618-9) but instead fights. Here too, the sense of condere is not only “hide” but also negative. It is important to note, however, that this is the only example of the negation of hiding in the Pharsalia. This supports the idea that it is nature who is hiding, and the men who are fighting.

Now that we have exhausted the situations in which condere denotes “hiding”, it is important to note one outlier. One of the significant uses of condere in the first five Books, which does not indicate nature hiding, occurs just after Titan hides in Book 1. Arruns, the seer of the town Luca, performs an extispicy on a bull (1.605-37). But before he begins, Arruns gathers all the embers of an ominous lightning bolt and “buries them in the earth with a sorrowful murmur, and he gives sanctity to the place” (terrae maesto cum murmure condit / datque locis numen, 1.607-8). The translation “buries” for condere does not indicate formal internment so much as a temporary hiding place for religious reasons; the burying of the embers sanctifies the spot, or so Arruns thinks. The word condit here does carry with it Virgil’s sense of fury. Given the lightning bolt’s association with Caesar,
the burying of the embers beneath the sacrifice do not sanctify the land as Arruns believes but desecrates the land; not surprisingly, the extispicy fails to please the gods and goes awry. Although this use of condere does not conform to its pattern of denoting natural in hiding, this use with “bury” hints at the connotation to come following Pharsalia VII.

Pharsalia VII

Although there is only one usage of condere in Book VII, the usage undoubtedly deserves its own section. Book VII is clearly the climactic turning point of the Pharsalia, and likewise, it marks the watershed moment for the verb condere. Before the battle lines of Caesar and Pompey converge, Lucan declares: “It was clear to all that the day had come, which would establish the fate of human affairs into eternity, and that in that day’s war it would be decided what Rome was (advenisse diem, qui fatum rebus in aevum / condaret humanis, et quari, Roma quid esset, / illo marte palam est, 7.131-3). For Lucan, this declaration is not a looming question; it is a thesis statement. Although he uses the subjunctive mood to indicate uncertainty, Lucan and every other Roman would have undoubtedly known what took place at Pharsalia in 48 B.C.E. Additionally, Lucan had already foreshadowed the outcome of the battle, and he previously acknowledged that Caesar was victorious. It would even seem, as Lucan tells it, that the soldiers present at Pharsalia know what the outcome will be (7.137-8). Why go to these lengths to repeat the obvious? The word choice sends a clear message. As Fratantuono notes, the implementation of the word condaret alludes to Aeneas’ plunge of fury into Turnus at the conclusion of the Aeneid. While Aeneas’ fury is certainly encompassed in this usage of condere, this statement is perhaps Lucan’s challenge of Virgil’s usage: that Rome, as Lucan and Virgil knew it, was not founded when mythical Aeneas plunged his sword into Turnus, but on the historic and hateful day of Pharsalia.

If the verb condere often denoted nature hiding in the Books preceding Pharsalia VII, it is certainly not used that way in Book VII. Nature, in fact, seems to come out of hiding before the battle in an effort to delay war, but ultimately fails to halt the conflict (7.151-213). The verb condere also does not mean “to bury” anywhere in Book VII, despite being the Book that accounts for most of the killing. Significantly, there is no proper burial in Book VII for the dead at Pharsalia. Instead, the bodies litter the field to such an extent that the earth is unable to be seen and the decaying bodies rot on the Thessalian plain (7.786-
Caesar leaves the dead unburied. For Lucan and the everyday Roman, this would have been unspeakable (*nefas*). Indeed, Pompey’s wife will later lament: “Without any honor of funeral, the grave burns” (*sine funeris ullo/ ardet honore rogus*, 9.62-63). Proper burial was important for Romans. Yet, Lucan’s paradoxical voice intervenes in the text, and he claims that “nature receives all in her calm bosom” (*placido natura receptat / cuncta sinu*, 7.810-11). Fratantuono interprets this as a way for Lucan to deny “Caesar’s hopes” of adding more torment to the already dead. On the contrary, at least for now, nature is hidden. Lucan, moreover, calls the Thessalian plain “unhappy” (*infelix*, 7.847) because of the crime perpetrated against it.

It is this crime of unburial which in turn perpetuates the fury into eternity. How does Pharsalia establish (*condere*) the state of human affairs? The borders between the underworld and the living world become mixed, and restless shades begin to haunt the living (7.772-6). The shades are restless precisely because they were denied a full burial. One now begins to understand the self-perpetuating nature of fury. Caesar scares nature into hiding, as indicated by the verb *condere*. When it came time for the dead to be buried, out of fury Caesar forbid the honor. In doing so, Caesar desecrated nature with rotten bodies. Nature and the spirits of the unburied dead act supernatural out of revenge: nature allowed for spirits to remain above ground, to haunt the living and maintain the madness. The battle of Pharsalia established a new order of nature for man, in which the division between hell and earth is confused. It is, in effect, madness unburied.

### After Pharsalia VII

After Book VII of the *Pharsalia*, the verb *condere* is used to mean neither “to hide” nor “to establish.” On the contrary, it is implemented solely in connection with the meaning “to bury.” To make matters more interesting, the verb is only used in reference to either the burial of Pompey or the lack of his burial. It is this new order which now draws our attention to the furious shade of Pompey.

Although it is not an unprecedented or even unusual usage, it is significant to note that the sense of *condere* following *Pharsalia VII* is always “to bury.” Previously, “to bury” was used as only an exception. In Book II, it is used to refer to the husband whom Marcia, Cato’s previous wife, had buried (2.333). The verb also appears with the same sense in connection to the prophesied tomb of Appius in Book V (5.231). Other than these
two instances, the verb *condere* does not mean “to bury” in any other use in the first seven books, despite the verb being used twelve other times during that period. In contrast, the uses of the verb *condere* after *Pharsilia VII* are all in connection with burial. Thus, there is a striking unity of use in the last three books of the poem.

After Book VII, the first time the reader encounters the verb *condere* occurs when the quaestor Cordus is hastily burning Pompey’s headless body. The poet’s voice adds sarcastic, yet prophetic, words: “the impious father-in-law will praise the buried bones of Magnus” (*condita laudabit Magni socer inpius ossa*, 8.783). It is a capital point that Lucan applies “buried” (*condita*) to bones (*ossa*) and not to Pompey. The bones may be buried, but Pompey certainly is not. Caesar does indeed promise a full burial for Pompey, but as Lucan notes, this promise is feigned at best (9.1038-93). Caesar is likely not aware that Pompey’s headless body was even half-buried by Cordus. One has to wonder what Lucan intends: whether Caesar will falsely praise the lackluster and blasphemous burial, or whether he will praise the impiety of the burial? The adjective “impious” (*inpius*) applied to Caesar is thus appropriate. To call Caesar the father-in-law (*socer*) exacerbates Caesar’s crimes; this is civil war down to the familial roots. Family should at least bury family. Cordus, however, was unable to give Pompey a full burial, in part because the body was headless and in part because the bones were only half-burned (*semusta… / ossa*, 8.786-7). Thus the burial was incomplete, and the consequences will be disastrous for Caesar.

Only a few lines later, The poet’s voice interjects employing the verb *condere* to mean “bury” once more:

> Is it pleasing to you, Fortune, to say that this grave is Pompey’s, to which place his father-in-law preferred that man be buried rather than be deprived from the earth? Reckless right hand, why do you impose a tomb on Magnus and imprison his wandering spirit? (*Placet bic, Fortuna, sepulcrum / dicere Pompei, quo condi maluit illum / quam terra caruisse socer? Temeraria dextra / Cur obiciés Magno tumulum manesque vagentes / Includís?* (8.793-797)

Again, Lucan seems to be paradoxical. It is as if *condere* invokes a near-sighted fury here; Lucan cannot seem to make up his mind on whether the grave is fitting for Pompey. He thinks it humble enough for Pompey, while at the same time criticizing Caesar for
the impiety of the situation. Nevertheless, the above quotation demonstrates the connection between the burial (condi) and the shade (manesque). This relationship is critical. At the beginning of Book IX, the shade of Pompey leaps up from its half-burned corpse and flies directly into the breast of Brutus, the man who will eventually assassinate Caesar (9.1-18). As a result of Pompey’s incomplete burial, his shade never entered into the underworld. It remains above ground to enact retribution and to perpetuate the madness. In this way, fury never dies.

There are three more uses of condere in the Pharsalia, and all of them serve to preserve the fury in Book IX. The first usage appears when Cornelia says that Pompey has left a message for her sons in her “buried thought” (condita cura, 9.86). As the message is one of violence, Pompey’s fury lives on through memory. It is used a second time when one of Pompey’s sons declares that he will fight “to bury the unburied shade” (inbuhatos condere manes, 9.151) of his father. Again, the sense of condere is “to bury”. This usage, moreover, perpetuates violence because his son is going to war “to bury” (condere). Finally, the previous usage demonstrates that Pompey is indeed not buried according to Roman standards. The final usage of condere in the Pharsalia is iconic. It occurs during the false promise of Caesar to bury Pompey. The reader, however, never knows with certainty if Pompey is buried. The burial of Pompey, like that of the defeated Turnus, is never told in the poem. Instead, Caesar commands: “You all bury” (Vos condite, 9.1089) his head. Could there be a more appropriate last use of condere? Who is the “you” in Caesar’s question? For Lucan, it means the Roman people in the present; they still haven’t buried the shades haunting, nor the madness swirling, or the hereditary Caesarian fury.

Conclusions

Madness is unfinished at the conclusion of Lucan’s epic. For all the dystopia in Pharsalia, it’s readers can be certain that all that infinite madness provides the unity. Just as the verb condere anchors the Aeneid with its interlocking ring, it anchors the Pharsalia in permanent unrest. At the beginning of Lucan’s epic, the verb condere was implemented in order to demonstrate the retreat of nature from Caesarian fury: this highlighted the role of men in the war and their consequential culpability. Yet, on the day of Pharsalia in 48 B.C.E., nature could escape Caesar’s wrath no longer. Unburied bodies, decaying in open air, desecrated the Thessalian fields. This impious crime turned the
world upside down and abolished the natural laws of the universe, as the unburied remained, haunting the lands as shades and perpetuating violence. This new state of affairs was indicated by the verb *condere*. Following the battle, *condere* was used solely in reference to the unburied and vengeful shade of Pompey. From nature’s retreat to Pharsalia and beyond, an analysis of the verb *condere* reveals surprising structure in the *Pharsalia*. In the end, time seems to stop in the epic, and one gets the sense that it never will begin again until Pharsalia is redeemed. Perhaps amid the madness, one can hear Lucan’s last furious command to the Roman people: *Vos condite!*
Bibliography


