

The Muses' Playground 17

Lucan: Characters in the *Civil War*

Lecture overview

- The juxtaposition of Pompey and Caesar in Book 1
 - Opposition
 - Intertexts
- Pompey
 - Pompey and Aeneas
- Caesar implied
 - Caesar's descriptions of Pompey: what do they say about Caesar himself?
- Pompey and Cornelia
 - Hector and Andromache
- Cato the Stoic

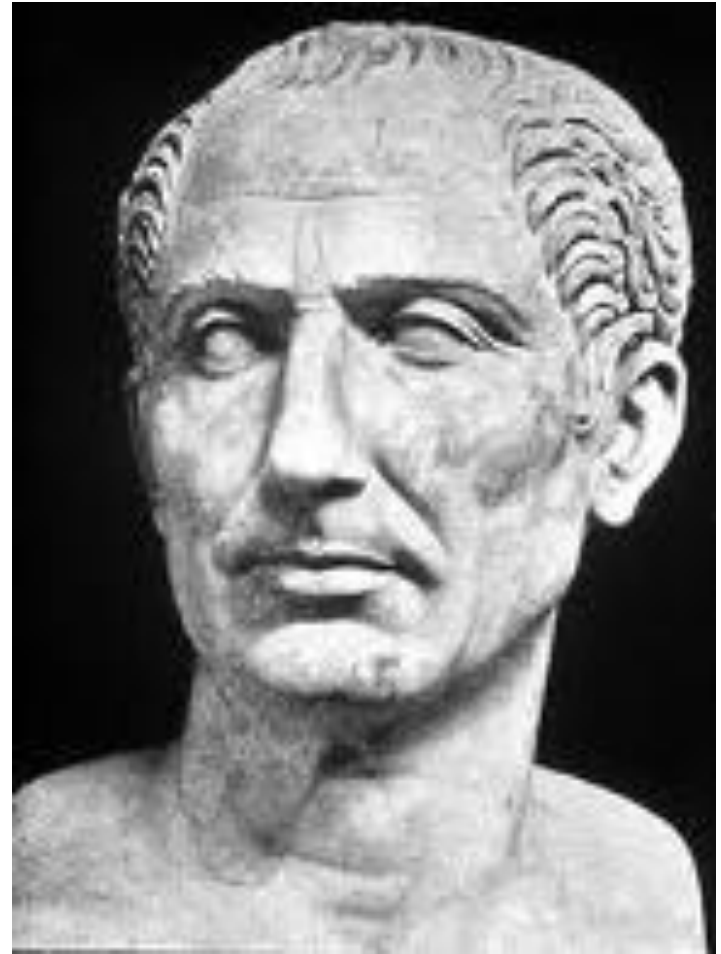
Pompey and Caesar:

They met not equally matched

One with years declining towards old age and grown milder through long experience of civil life had now in peace unlearned the general's part, and, seeking fame, was generous to the crowd, wholly driven by the popular winds, rejoicing in applause in the theatre he had built, and without restoring his strength afresh, he relied chiefly on his former fortune. He stands, the shadow of a great name; like in a fruitfield a lofty oak, bearing the people's spoils of old and generals' hallowed dedications; clinging with roots no longer strong, by its own weight it stands firm, and spreading naked branches through the air, it makes shade with trunk, not foliage; and though it totters, ready to fall beneath the first Eurus, though all around so many trees upraise themselves with sturdy trunks, yet it alone is venerated. (1.129-143)

Contrast Caesar: he had not only a general's name and reputation, but never-resting energy; his only shame was conquering without war; fierce, indomitable, wherever hope and indignation called he moved to action, never shrank from defiling his sword, he followed up his own successes, pressed hard upon the deity's favour, driving back all obstacles to his high ambitions and rejoicing to create his path by destruction. Just so flashes out the thunderbolt shot forth by the winds through clouds, accompanied by the crashing of the heavens and sound of shattered ether; it splits the sky and terrifies the panicked people, searing eyes with slanting flame; against its own precincts it rages, and, with nothing solid stopping its course, both as it falls and then returns great is the devastation dealt far and wide before it gathers again its scattered fires. (1.143-157)

Not just a literary background...



Styles in Lucan's times



Society old and new

- Underscores that Pompey is rooted in old Republican society
 - The role of the general as dependent on the people, *generous to the crowd, the theatre he built*
- Caesar relies only on himself
 - no regard for the views of others: *general's name and reputation, but never-resting, [the lightning] terrifies the people*
- ...but note how the originally oral feature of the simile has become a key place to interact with literary forerunners:

Epic intertexts: the oak

Such are the prayers she made, and such are those her unhappy sister carried and re-carried. But he was not moved by tears, and listened to no words receptively: Fate barred the way, and a god sealed the hero's gentle hearing. As when northerly blasts from the Alps blowing here and there vie together to uproot an oak tree, tough with the strength of years: there's a creak, and the trunk quivers and the topmost leaves strew the ground: but it clings to the rocks, and its roots stretch as far down to Tartarus as its crown does towards the heavens: so the hero was buffeted by endless pleas from this side and that, and felt the pain in his noble heart. His purpose remained fixed: tears fell uselessly. (Verg. Aen. 4.437-449)

- The comparison of Pompey with an oak in a field clearly alludes to this passage
- Pompey is linked to a hero of old
- ...but note the difference in location
 - Peaceful fruit field vs. threatened rocky outcrop
 - ...however, location of the oak also related to Aeneas' and Pompey's position in the story:
 - ...the difference underlines that Pompey has a choice not to take up Caesar's challenge
- ...and the comparison to the Aeneas of Book 4 also hints at hesitation in Pompey's character

Caesar's Pompey

Shall Pompey never yield the privileges he once usurped? [...] Now too, afraid that obscure age will confine him in his weariness, impious battles he plans, accustomed to civil war, - Sulla's pupil, he surpasses his instructor in crime. And as the wild tigers in the Hyrcanian forest traversing their mothers' haunts, fed deep on blood of cattle slain, never cease from slaughter, so too, Magnus, grown accustomed to licking Sulla's sword, your thirst endures. (1.318-331)

Deceiver, your mother was no goddess, nor was Dardanus the father of your race: harsh Caucasus engendered you on the rough crags, and Hyrcanian tigers nursed you. (Verg. Aen. 4.363-376)

- Focalisation:
 - Caesar's speech: the passage focalised through Caesar only
 - Rhetoric might make us suspicious as to its veracity
- The narrative as reinforcing Caesar's claim:
 - *Yet such great panic we must pardon, we must pardon: they fear since Pompey flees. (1.520f)*
 - Brutus and Cato brought in as heroes in 2.243-325
 - Sulla? The dictator's 'crimes' expanded on in 2.139-222)
 - Pompey himself does not reappear until 2.392, following extensive descriptions of panic in Rome:
 - *Meanwhile Magnus left with his fearful throng and occupied the Campanian walls of the Dardanian settler (2.392f)*

Caesar's Pompey

Reflecting Caesar

- The comparison of Pompey to Aeneas of Book 4 impacts also on our reading of Caesar
 - Emphasised juxtaposition of Pompey and Caesar in Book 1
 - Caesar the mouthpiece of the tigers simile
- ...we are invited to fit Caesar against the pattern of Dido
 - Caesar driven by ambition as Dido is by the gods
 - In the speech, Caesar has been incited by Curio even as Dido by Anna
 - The ghost of madness: *'What madness is this, o citizens?'*
 - Caesar defiling his sword?
- Confirmation?
 - Pompey's first exhortation speech links Caesar with Catiline whom Cicero and Sallust both describe rhetorically as frenzied and mentally unstable; repeated by Lucan in 2.541
 - Pompey in 2.544: 'O the pitiable frenzy of Caesar!'
- Even the invitation to try this will ask the reader to question Caesar's motives throughout
 - ...of course, the 'Caesar is Dido' reading breaks down with the introduction of Cleopatra in Book 10

Pompey, Aeneas and Cornelia

Already, Magnus, you held the open sea, but not with the luck you had when chasing the pirates over water through all the sea: exhausted by your triumphs, Fortune deserted you. You go, driven out with wife and sons and taking all your household-gods to war, accompanied by nations, an exile but still great. (2.525-730)

- Cf. Aeneas leaving Troy
- Pompey: endings instead of beginnings
 - From his first exploits against the pirates...
 - Evoking his '*navigare necesse est, vivere non*' of 56 BC
 - ...to envisioning his death
 - Exiled with that which Aeneas leaves behind and which forms the basis of Aeneas' success in Italy: Cornelia his wife
- (The narrative moves the wrong way:
 - Dream apparition of Julia to Pompey 3.12-34 alluding to Creusa)

Pompey's Cornelia in Book 5

- Does Cornelia reveal the softer side of Pompey, one that holds him back?
 - Cf. Braund's preface; '*I fear to entrust Pompey to civil warfare saddened by no loss*' (5.752f)
- The setting of the farewell scene (Pompey's tent ≈ bedchamber) means that Lucan places Magnus in a sphere where he should not be in charge, where he should not delay?
- The farewell scene itself places him in a wholly different context: Hector and Andromache on the walls above Troy (Hom. *Il.* 6)
- This relates Pompey to Hector, heroic in defeat?

So speaking Hector of the shining helm departed and in speed made his way to his own well-established dwelling, but failed to find in the house Andromache of the white arms; for she, with the child, and followed by one fair-robed attendant, had taken her place on the tower in lamentation and tearful. When he saw no sign of his perfect wife within the house, Hector stopped in his way on the threshold and spoke among the handmaidens: 'Come then, tell me truthfully as you may, handmaidens: where has Andromache of the white arms gone? Is she with any of the sisters of her lord or the wives of his brothers? Or has she gone to the house of Athena, where all other lovely-haired women of Troy propitiate the grim goddess?' Then in turn the hard-working housekeeper gave him an answer: 'Hector, since you have urged me to tell you the truth, she is not with any of the sisters of her lord or the wives of her brothers, nor has she gone to the house of Athena, where all the other lovely-haired women of Troy propitiate the grim goddess, but she has gone to the great bastion of Ilion, because she heard that the Trojans were losing, and great grew the strength of the Achaians. Therefore she has gone in speed to the wall, like a woman gone mad, and a nurse attending carries the baby.'

A Temporary reversal: Andromache

- First, note how different Hector's house is described 'well-established dwelling' – no frills – as compared to Paris' 'splendid palace'
- Secondly, note that the home is where Hector expects to find Andromache: 'failed to find', and that the 'perfect wife' should normally be 'within the house', 'Andromache of the white arms' – no tan, normally inside, that she keeps a '*hard-working* housekeeper'
- Thirdly, if she's out, Andromache would normally be at the house of another wife, or in the temple
- When she deviates from this, she is described as 'a woman gone mad'

Hector and Andromache

[...] and Hector hastened from his home [...]. So as he had come to the gates on his way through the great city, the Skaian gates, whereby he would issue into the plain, there at last his own generous wife came running to meet him, Andromache. [...] She came to him there, and beside her went an attendant carrying the boy [...] a little child only, a baby. [...] Hector smiled in silence as he looked on his son, but she, Andromache, stood close beside him, letting her tears fall. [...] Hector, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother, you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband. Please take pity on me, stay here on the rampart, that you may not leave your child an orphan, your wife a widow, but draw your people up by the fig tree, there where the city is openest to attack, and where the wall may be mounted.

Hector and Andromache

- Hector's silence
 - On the one hand, a subtle expression of emotion
 - On the other, implying that in this sphere, still within the city, the man's role is less prominent
- Andromache's family
 - She describes her world wholly in terms of her family
 - 'do not leave [...] your wife a widow – implies that to a husband, a wife is important first and foremost in that capacity
 - Hector picks up on this later, foretelling how Andromache will be described as 'the wife of Hector, who was ever the bravest fighter of the Trojans, breakers of horses, in the days when they fought about Ilion.'

Andromache out of Place?

- Offering suggestions on how to plan the battle: 'draw your people up by the fig tree' etc
- Overstepping the boundary? Is Andromache turning into a 'bad' wife?
- The build-up: her behaviour in this scene is clearly highlighted as being out of the ordinary, and caused by extreme circumstances

Andromache In (Her Own) Place

So speaking he set his child again in the arms of his beloved wife, who took him back again to her fragrant bosom smiling in her tears. [...]

Hector comforts her: 'Go therefore back to our house, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff, and see to it that your handmaidens ply their work also; but the men must see to the fighting, all men who are the people of Ilion, but I beyond others.' So glorious Hector spoke and again took up the helmet with its crest of horse hair, while his beloved wife went homeward, turning to look back on the way, letting the live tears fall.

Andromache The Wife

- In this last section, the audience is made to envision Andromache in a home setting, working her wool among her maids
- That means that while the gender norms, boundaries between male and female spheres, have temporarily been stretched, the result is 'back to normal'
- ...and the result has been reached with mutual understanding and affection: this passage is unique in ancient literature

Inversions

- In Hom. *Il.* 6, Andromache is the character out of place
- In Hom. *Il.* 6, Andromache speaks first; here, it is Pompey
- In Hom. *Il.* 6, Andromache only leaves on Hector's orders, and returns to her home – recovered now from her fit of madness; here:
 - *This said, demented, up she jumped, abandoning the bed and wishing to postpone her agony by no delay. [...] she collapses, the unfortunate, and caught by her attendants' hands is carried to the sea's sands, prostrates herself and grabs the shore itself and finally is taken on board ship. (5.790-801)*
- Lucan thus indicates that this is not an epic couple meant to be (or, rather, meant to be upheld as an example)
 - Relates to Cornelia's depiction in later books (one of the topics for our workshop after Easter)

Cato the stoic

But great-hearted Brutus' breast was not struck by terror nor was he among the people mourning in great alarm at frightening commotion; but in drowsy night, as Parrhasian Helice turned her chariot aslant, he knocked at the modest house of his kinsman Cato. (2.234-238)

- Even before he appears on stage, Cato is represented as a point of refuge and a source of calm
- He is also associated with key Roman values
 - Unlike Caesar and Pompey?
 - 'Modest house': *atria non ampla Catonis*
 - Is Cato *too* austere?
 - 'Kinsman': someone on whose sense of duty to family can be counted on
 - Cf. the conflict between Pompey and Caesar as described in terms of family

Cato the hero?

- *He found the hero in sleepless worry pondering the nation's fate, the plight of Rome, alarmed for all without thought of himself, and with these words began to speak: (2.239-241)*
- *[...] all the fortune of war will fling itself at you. Who will not wish to die upon your sword, though sinking from another's wound, and be your crime? (2.263-265)*
- The word 'vir' has less clear associations than 'hero': Cato can go either way
- Nevertheless, the stoic's worry here is for the state, not himself: Aeneas as he should have been?
- Yet we are reminded what Cato will be and what suffering his continued resistance in Utica will cause
 - Humour in Lucan?

Plutarch on Cato's death

- *Cato did not immediately die of the wound; but struggling, fell off the bed, and throwing down a little mathematical table that stood by, made such a noise that the servants, hearing it, cried out. And immediately his son and all his friends came into the chamber, where, seeing him lie weltering in his own blood, great part of his bowels out of his body, but himself still alive and able to look at them, they all stood in horror. The physician went to him, and would have put in his bowels, which were not pierced, and sewed up the wound; but Cato, recovering himself, and understanding the intention, thrust away the physician, plucked out his own bowels, and tearing open the wound, immediately expired. Plut. Cat. Mi. 70.5*

Complicated Cato

- Following Brutus' speech:
- [...] *in reply Cato utters sacred words from his inmost breast: 'That civil warfare is the greatest crime, I admit, Brutus, but where the Fates lead, confident Virtue will follow. To make guilty even me will be the gods' reproach. Who would wish to watch the stars and universe collapsing, free from fear himself? To fold his arms and keep them still when ether rushes from on high and earth shudders beneath the weight of the condensing universe? [...] Keep far away this shame, o gods, that Rome should fall and by her fall rouse up the Dahae and the Getae – and I remain unmoved. (2.284-297)*
- Cato associated with virtue and the ability to make difficult decisions
- His loyalty is to Rome – note that he does not choose immediately between the two camps that Brutus' speech has just outlined to him
- Still...
- Cato was a known Stoic and this philosophical school presupposed detachment from the hustle and bustle of the world
 - Something is breaking now that even this character gets involved and angered
- Contrasts: what has Cato just been doing?