Advanced Latin Verse

Domitius in Lucan

Looking beyond Book 2

Lucan and Vergil

- Lucan as a perceptive reader of conflict points in Vergil
- Lucan picks up and enlarges episodes of interpretive volatility in Vergil
  - Cf. Aeneas leaving Creusa behind as reflected in the scenes of Pompey and Cornelia leaving Brundisium;
  - Cf. Ovid's *Little Aeneid* (*Met.* 13-14)
- Post-Vergilian epic needs to engage with the Vergilian text
  - Not copying, but interacting!

Death of Domitius

Book 7 (battle of Pharsalia itself: 599-616):

Yet in the slaughter of famous men stood out the death of battling Domitius, a man led by Fate through every calamity; nowhere did Magnus' fortune collapse without him. So often defeated by Caesar, he died with his liberty intact: now happily he falls beneath a thousand wounds, rejoicing not to have a second pardon. Caesar saw him thrashing around in thick blood and, taunting, said:

'Now, Domitius, my successor, you abandon Magnus' army; the war is waged without you now.' But the breath hammering at Domitius' breast was strong enough for speech and he unlocked his dying lips: 'Caesar, because I see you not the master of the deadly wage of wickedness but uncertain of your fate and lesser than your son-in-law, I go free and peaceful to the Stygian shades with Pompey still my leader: though I die, I can hope that you will be subdued in savage war and pay a heavy penalty to Pompey and to me.' No more said he; life left him and thick darkness closed his eyes.

Domitius and Nero

- Domitius Ahenobarbus an ancestor of Nero's
- Historically involved in
  - Mutiny of Pompeian troops at Corfinium
  - Resistance against Caesar at Massalia
  - Battle of Pharsalus
- All episodes featuring Domitius are tweaked for literary effect
  - Caesar on Corfinium: Domitius intimately involved in the mutiny
  - Not complimentary enough?
  - What does the 'tweak' mean for our appreciation of Domitius here?

And now he erects towers which will move their mighty stones, the siege-shed creeps beneath the centre of the walls: look – o crime of war! – the gates unbarred, the troops dragged out their general, a captive. He halted at the feet of his proud fellow citizen, and yet, with threatening face and neck unbowed, his high nobility demanded death by the sword. [Domitius pardoned by Caesar]' (2.505-515)

Massalia: Caes. *Bciv*. 1.34-36

On his arrival there, he was informed that Vibullius Rufus, whom he had taken a few days before at Corfinium, and set at liberty, was sent by Pompey into Spain; and that Domitius also was gone to seize Massilia with seven row-galleys, which were fitted up by some private persons at Igilium and Cosa, and which he had manned with his own slaves, freedmen, and colonists: and that some young noble men of Massilia had been sent before him; whom Pompey, when leaving Rome had exhorted, that the late services of Caesar should not erase from their minds the memory of his former favours. On receiving this message, the Massilians had shut their gates against Caesar, and invited over to them the Albici, who had formerly been in alliance with them, and who inhabited the mountains that overhung Massilia: they had likewise conveyed the corn from the surrounding country, and from all the forts into the city; had opened armouries in the city; and were repairing the walls, the fleet, and the gates. Caesar sent for fifteen of the principal persons of Massilia to attend him. […] While this treaty was going forward, Domitius arrived at Massilia with his fleet, and was received into the city, and made governor of it. The chief management of the war was entrusted to him. At his command they send the fleet to all parts; they seize all the merchantmen they could meet with, and carry them into the harbor; they apply the nails, timber, and rigging, with which they were furnished to rig and refit their other vessels. They lay up in the public stores, all the corn that was found in the ships, and reserve the rest of their lading and convoy for the siege of the town, should such an event take place. Provoked at such ill treatment, Caesar led three legions against Massilia, and resolved to provide turrets, and vineae to assault the town, and to build twelve ships at Arelas, which being completed and rigged in thirty days (from the time the timber was cut down), and being brought to Massilia, he put under the command of Decimus Brutus; and left Caius Trebonius his lieutenant, to invest the city.

Lucan's silence

- If Lucan had wanted to pay Nero a compliment by means of his ancestor, this would have been a good place?
- Balance: Domitius has just been given a major heroic part in the mutiny at Corfinium:
  - 'another heroic but unsuccessful action by Domitius would be repetitive so soon after the Corfinium episode' (Ahl, 1976, 53)
- Invention: Lucan's text instead stresses the communal valour of the troops
  - Is desperation glorious?
  - Cf. the stoic slant of Lucan's text: calculation and consideration valued

And now, though all the soldiers were weapon-less, their steel cast, frenzy finds them weapons: one whirled an oar at his enemy, these with their strong arms an entire stern-post, and they drive away the rowers to swing their torn-up benches. For the fight they broke the ships. They catch slain bodies as they sink to the bottom and rob the corpses of their weapons. Many who lacked a weapon pulled and tore out the fatal javelin from their wounds and with their left hand pressed their entrails until the blood could deal a sturdy thrust and flow again only after hurling the enemy's spear. […] But Brutus was victorious on the water and first conferred on Caesar's warfare glory at sea. (2.670-679; 761f)

Domitius at Pharsalus

- Domitius' death the only individual death recorded in the description of the battle
  - Historical reason? Unlike the other battles (Thapsus, Munda, e.g.) very few notables died here
    - Cf. the passage on Brutus not managing to kill Caesar on this occasion: 7.592-596
    - Our historical sources do not, however, agree on who killed Domitius

- On *aristeiai* in epic: '[F]rom Homer onward the essential moment of the *aristeia* is the killing of a named warrior by another named warrior: the act of naming the participants – victim as well as victor – is integral to the poetic act of epic itself, for only in this way is the accumulated *arete* of the victim transferred gloriously to the victor and the *kleos* of both made immortal in epic tradition.' (Gorman, 2001, 266)
- Lucan's battles cannot bestow glory on their participants:
  - 'wars which would bring no triumphs' (1.12)

Battle descriptions in Lucan

- As a consequence, Lucan's texts contains very few scenes that can be construed as *aristeiai*
- The attention is instead concentrated, as in the sea battle of Massalia, on the mass conflicts of the battle
  - The mess of it all
  - Individual heroes replaced by anonymous weapons and wounds:
    - De-personified killing Book 3.652-661 (right)
- NB: the detail of Lucan's descriptions both hammer home the brutality of the war **and** play on the epic tradition of giving a blow-by-blow account of death

That day a unique form of hideous death was seen, when a young man in the water by chance was transfixed *by the beaks of converging vessels*. The middle of his chest was split apart by such tremendous blows, the bones were ground away, his limbs could not prevent the bronze of the beaks resounding; from his crushed belly the blood mixed with entrails spouted gore through his mouth. When the ships back water and withdraw their beaks, the body with its breast stabbed through dropped into the sea and took water in its wounds.

Emerging themes

- The Domitius' episodes problematise Caesar's *clementia* towards his opponents and its motivations
- Historical background in pardons of participants in the civil war both by Caesar and later Octavian
- Here it is given a more sinister reading…
  - Cf. pardon of Domitius in Book 2
- …and the resentment of the pardoned is emphasised

Domitius at Pharsalus again

- Compare the Domitius passage to the most famous passage on *clementia* on the battlefield – the end of the *Aeneid*
  - *Contra: Aeneas, of course, does kill Turnus: Caesar does not do so himself (Domitius has already sustained his wound)*
- Turnus given a voice => Lucan directly engages with one of the most problematic passages in the *Aeneid*, and takes it one step further

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