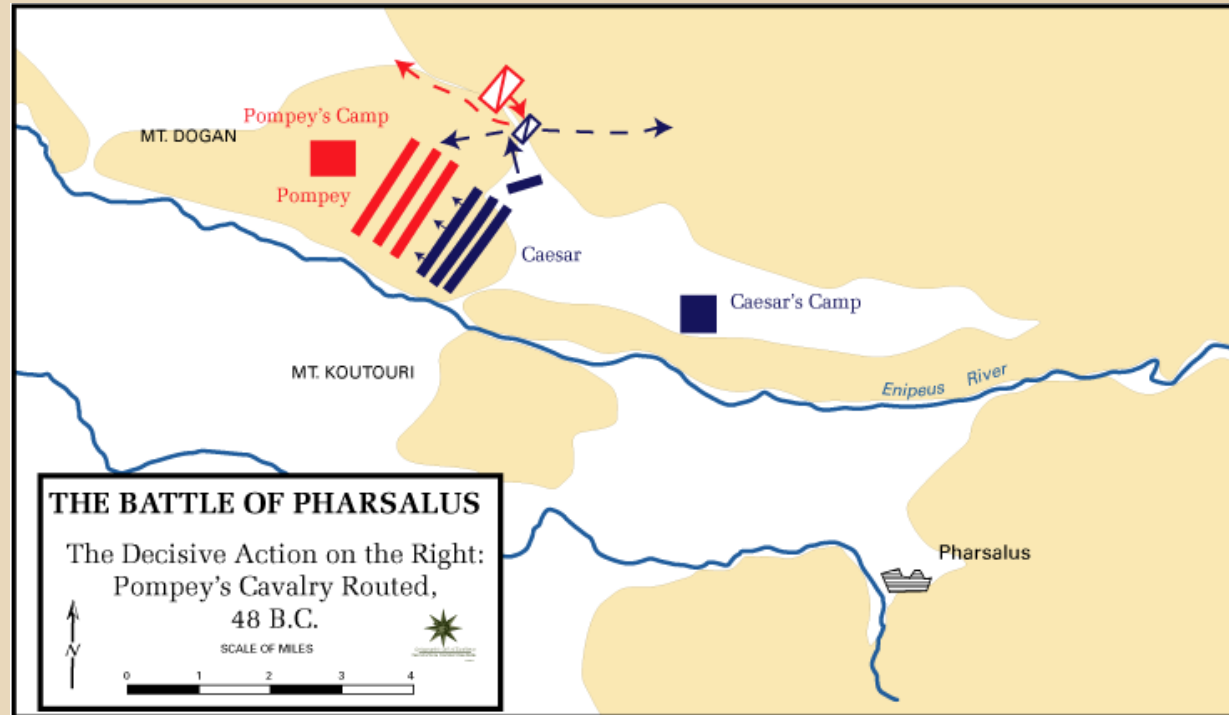


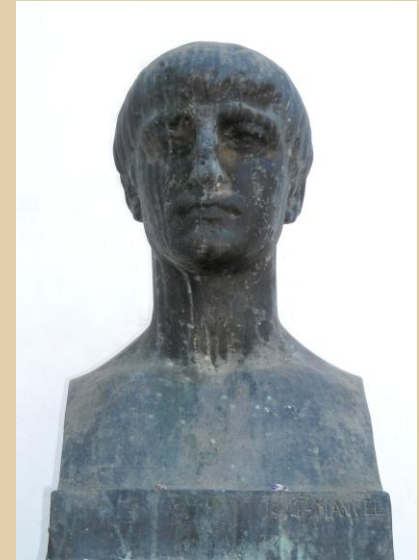
Lucan's *Civil War*



Background

Marcus Annaeus Lucanus

- born Corduba in 39 CE
- joins Nero's imperial retinue, 60 CE
- literary triumph awarded for his Praises of Nero (*Laudes Neronis*) at the Neronia festival (60 CE)



Background to Lucan and his poem

- starts work on his epic *Civil War* (*Bellum Civile*) aka *Pharsalia* (after the battle of Pharsalus, 48 BCE)
 - published 3 books by 63 CE; 7 more books (unfinished)
 - part of failed Pisonian conspiracy of 65 CE
- => suicide (*Civil war* unfinished: 8000 lines, 10 books)



Civil War



- on conflict in 49 BC between Julius Caesar (energetic, dynamic, destructive) and Pompey (pictured as ageing, though in fact only 6 years older, basking in reputation, weak)
- “The mere shadow of a mighty name he stood” (Luc. 1.135: Pompey the **Great**; then given oak tree simile)
- “A thunderbolt, without noise or any clouds, gathered fire from the North and smote the capital of Latium” (Luc. 1.534, a portent of civil war, hinting at destruction Caesar will bring; speed, which Caesar was known for, is a characteristic in Lucan. See Leigh 2009: 241)



Fate of Pompey

Pompey ends up as a decapitated Priam at the edge of the Roman world (Egypt). In Book 1 a matron prophesies his death:

“him I recognize, that headless corpse lying on the river sands” (matron prophesying Pompey's death, Luc. 1.685: cf. Priam)

> echoes Vergil's description of a decapitated Priam lying on the shore:

“His tall body was lying headless on the shore, and by it the head hacked from his shoulders: a corpse without a name” (Vergil *Aeneid* 2.557-8, of Priam)

Grove of Massilia

- Caesar chops down grove of Massilia in order to supply materials for his siege of the city (deforestation in sources). Lucan claims that it has never been touched before

“A grove there was, untouched by men’s hands from ancient times” (Luc. 3.399)

The soldiers are reluctant so Caesar steps in: “he was the first to snatch an axe and swing it, and dared to cleave a towering oak with the steel” (Luc. 3.433-4)

- what does this suggest about Lucan’s characterisation of Caesar?

Grove of Massilia

Nb Pompey as oak/Caesar as lightning bolt that will finally destroy the Massilian grove

“no wind ever bore down upon that wood, nor thunderbolt hurled from black clouds” (Luc. 3.408-10 > destroyed by lightning-like Caesar)



attitude to Nero?

- Nero invoked and praised in Book 1

(circulated when he was in favour with emperor)

- Veiled criticism in Book 1 (as some critics argue)?

“Still, if Fate could find no other way for the advent of Nero; if an everlasting kingdom costs the gods dear and heaven could not be ruled by its sovran, the Thunderer, before the battle of the Giants, - then we complain no more against the gods (Luc. 1.33-6)



attitude to Nero?

- Certainly, emperors denounced in later books

“And yet, for this disaster, we have all the revenge that Gods can rightly grant to Earth: civil wars will make deified men equal to deities; with thunderbolts, haloes, and stars, Rome will bedizen her dead and, in the Gods’ own temples, swear her oaths by their shades!” (Luc. 7.455-9)

- deliberate ambiguity in order to get away with criticism? (Stephen Hinds’ “hermeneutic alibi”?)

Development of epic in Lucan

- Critical of principate (contrary to normal epic practice)
- Horrors of civil war:

internal destruction not external expansion

“I tell of how an imperial people turned their victorious right hands against their own vitals” (Luc. 1.2-3: suicide/self-cannibalism)



Development of epic



Soldiers shown engaged in civil war so that no further Roman conquest of the empire is possible

“The soldiers also set to keep the long-haired Cayci away from the Belgae, left the savage banks of the Rhine and **made for Rome; and the empire was left bare to foreign nations**” (Luc. 1.463-5, Caesar’s catalogue)

“That Caesar, favoured by Fortune, might win all at a single cost, Pharsalia presented him the whole world to conquer at once.” (Luc. 3.296-7, Pompey’s catalogue, includes men from Ganges and Africa)



Glory and heroism

- no glory (killing citizens)

where are the heroes?

warping of heroism (e.g. the soldier Scaeva who defends single-handedly at great personal cost)

“Ready for any wickedness, he knew not that valour in civil war is a heinous crime” (Luc. 6.147-8, Scaeva, soldier of Caesar)



Glory and heroism



“the might of the sword will confound all right by main force, unspeakable crimes will go by the name ‘courage’ and this madness will last for years” (Luc. 1.666-9 Nigidius Figulus’ prophecy)

- paradoxically civil war better than what will come after (i.e. principate)

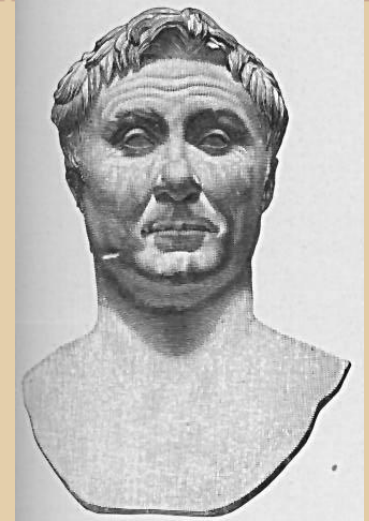
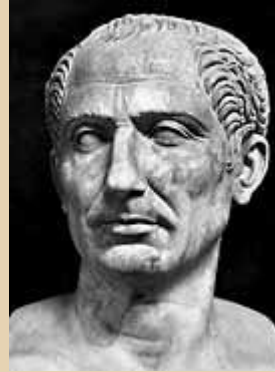
“and it is useless to pray Heaven that it [civil war] may end: when peace comes, a tyrant will come with it” (Luc. 1.669-70, Nigidius Figulus)



Moral chaos and disorder

- “Of wars I sing, **wars worse than civil**” (Luc. 1.1)

Why? Note this is civil *and* kin strife (Pompey= Caesar's son-in-law)



Moral chaos and disorder

- cosmic order upset (>images of chaos)
 - General lack of the decorum and order which is normally typical of epic
- “Even so, when the framework of the world is dissolved and the final hour, closing so many ages, reverts to primeval chaos..” (Luc. 1.72-4, collapse of Rome like chaos)

Divine machinery

- despite mentions of gods, fate, fortune etc, there is a lack of active divine machinery and gods appear to favour the forces of wickedness (the witch Erictho, Julius Caesar)
- “if the victor had the gods on his side, the vanquished had Cato” (Luc.1.128, Caesar favoured by gods)
- “Which of the immortals is hidden here?” (Luc. 5.86, unclear which of gods is at Delphi)

Divine machinery



=> bleak, lack of reassurance

- Ignorance and uncertainty from narrator

(link to Nero as “Muse”?)

“if my breast receives you [Nero] to inspire my verse, I would not care to trouble the god who rules mysterious Delphi ...” (Luc. 1.63-5: no superhuman knowledge from Muse)

