

The Muses' Playground 18

Rhetoric and genre enrichment in
Lucan

Lecture overview

- Rhetoric in the empire: Tacitus' *Dialogue on Oratory* and Lucan
- Rhetorical and stylistic tricks present in Lucan:
a few examples
 - *Sententiae*
- Rhetoric and narrative
 - The speeches before Pharsalus

The role of rhetoric in the empire

- The notion of the importance of rhetoric fading in the empire:
 - *You often ask me, Justus Fabius, how it is that while the genius and the fame of so many distinguished orators have shed a lustre on the past, our age is so forlorn and so destitute of the glory of eloquence that it scarce retains the very name of orator. That title indeed we apply only to the ancients, and the clever speakers of this day we call pleaders, advocates, counselors, anything rather than orators. (Tac. Dial. 1.1.)*
 - Rhetorical teaching texts: Seneca maior, Quintilian...
 - Sources on rhetorical training: Juvenal (1, cf. Lecture 16)
- Tacitus' *Dialogue on Oratory* closely links literary production with public speakers:
 - What sparks the dialogue is a public recital of a tragedy, Maternus' *Cato* (Tac. *Dial.* 1.2)

Recitation of literature in the empire

- Backgrounds:
 - The possibility of *carmina convivalia* present in early Rome; parallel to the oral performance culture in early Greek literature
 - Recitation of literature at banquets and private parties
 - Occasional poetry for patrons? The example of the *libellus* theory for the publication of Martial's epigrams
 - Recitation by *lectores* even for personal reading

Styles in fashion

- The styles of the two protagonists:
 - *As a fact, Secundus had a pure, terse, and a sufficiently fluent style, while Aper, who was imbued with learning of all kinds, pretended to despise the culture which he really possessed. He would have, so he must have thought, a greater reputation for industry and application, if it should appear that his genius did not depend on any supports from pursuits alien to his profession. (Tac. Dial. 1.2)*
- Reduction of references: rhetoric as self-contained
- This can be related to Lucan's starkness as well but works in tandem with a literary motivation

Fashion 2: Declamation Schools

- The practise speeches of the declamation schools a source of mockery by poets like Juvenal – the repetitiveness was clearly recognised
- Fire for effect: to sway the audience a speaker ‘under threat’ would need to be louder (in every sense!)
- ...this means heightened use of all rhetorical tricks at one’s disposal

Rhetorical features

- *Sententiae*
- Apostrophe
- Rhetorical questions
- Antitheses
- Alliteration
- Repetition (geminatio)
- Anaphora (starting with the same word)
- Chiasms
- Hyperbole
- Hyperbata
- Climactic structures, e.g. tricolon
- Metaphors
- Metonymies
- ...but note that handbooks will describe these same features more generally as well – as stylistic features!
- ...and that we have already seen several well-used in epic

Sententiae in Lucan

- Particularly relevant are *sententiae* that apply in the first instance to a particular person and situation, but can be seen as more widely relevant as well
 - Quintilian mentions as an example a *sententia* by Cicero's: *habeo quem fugiam, quem sequar non habeo* (Cic. Att. 8.7.2)
 - Antithetical word play
 - This is picked up in Lucan 2.575 (Pompey's exhortation):
 - *What delusion! It is not you they flee but I they follow!*
- *Sententiae* frequently used to close off a narrative section or lead into a new:
 - Flight from Brundisium
 - Word play on Magnus

The anchors stir no voices as its hook is dragged up from the stubborn sands; while the mast's yard-arm is bent and while the lofty pine-mast is erected, the fearful masters of the fleet were silent, and sailors hanging from the ropes pull down the sails furled and do not shake the stout rigging in case the breeze should whistle. [...] with roar immense the sea resounded as it was struck by prows, the water seethes, stirred up by criss-crossing wakes of so many ships. [...] the enemy [...] head for the mouth and are annoyed that the fleet enjoys the open sea. What shame, that Magnus fleeing is a victory too small! (2.692-708)

Other rhetorical features in Lucan

- A fondness for paradox:
 - Practising public speakers often used paradox for effect:
 - On Alexander the Great: *orbem, quem non novi, quaero, quem vici relinquo* (*Suas.* 1.3; I seek a world that I don't know, while I leave behind the one I conquered)
 - Cf. Lucan 3.79: *What a triumph he lost by conquering more!* (On the Gauls following Caesar into Italy)

Speeches in Lucan

- Key suspects!
- Long condemned by modern critics:
 - ‘their general characteristic is formality: they are set harangues, without individuality or spontaneousness.’ (Heitland, cited in Goebel, 1991, 79)
- *Sententiae* often close off a section in Lucan’s text, particularly in speeches:
 - E.g. 3.152; 8.37f; 8.452f

Cohortation speeches

- Reflect an actual practise and a task of the commander
- A set piece of historical writing too, from where we recognise several *topoi* in Lucan
 - Typical examples in Thucydides and Livy
- Lucan plays with these *topoi*, however, in that an allusion is sufficient
 - The reader expected to be familiar with historiography and to be able to appreciate a tweaking of the genre
 - Cf. Ovid, epic and elegy
- Interestingly, this was not a type of speech practised in declamation schools: all Lucan's rhetoric not merely undigested practise

Rhetoric and character

Rhetoric and narrative

- Antithetical structures and the concept of speech and response speech
- The commanders' speeches before the battle of Pharsalus show that rhetorical elements are integrated for literary effect and in support of the arc of the narrative
 - Caesar: 7.250-329
 - Pompey: 7.342-382
- Both commanders are hesitant to start the battle:

Caesar in 7.235-249:

It happened on that day that Caesar left his station, on the point of moving troops to plunder crops, when suddenly / he sees the enemy descending to the level plains; the moment he had prayed for a thousand times is presented, when he can throw everything into the final hazard. For he, sick of delay and blazing with desire for power, had begun to condemn a civil war of brief extent / as a crime prolonged. When he saw the final battle and the test between the leaders drawing near and felt the destined downfall start to totter, even his frenzy, so ready for the sword, for a short time / flagged and his mind so bold to guarantee success stopped in doubt: his own destiny does not permit him fear; Magnus' destiny does not permit him hope. He suppressed his dread, and confidence springs forth, better for encouraging the host:

- Aside: Metre underlines mentions of time passing here
- Plundering crops a maintenance activity
- His base line status as always ready for action and risking a gamble is clearly established before his hesitation is mentioned
 - NB: not necessarily a sympathetic description!
 - 'for a short time'
 - 'so bold to guarantee success' – we are given the outcome before the hesitation even sets in
- Neatly closed off with a sententia

Pompey in 7.337-342

*When Pompey **saw** the enemy's squadrons march out **straight** ahead, allowing battle no delay – the day appointed by the gods – he **stood still with frozen** heart, stunned; and for a general so great to dread the fight like that was ominous. Then he stifles his fears and, riding on a lofty horse **all along the line**, he says:*

- Cf. 7.28-37: Pompey expresses his doubts to Cicero urging him on
- Two speeches linked
- Saw vs sees: the tense makes Pompey less active
- Straight: the enemy moves with determination: Pompey is not even on a supply run
- Frozen: the Caesar passage is full of back-and-forth reflective of Caesar's energy: Pompey is still and follows a pre-set line

The two speeches

Caesar

- 78 lines
- Opens with immediacy and emotion:
O Soldiers
- The wished-for day
 - The battle itself; cf. intro
- Statement of the importance of the battle
 - Connected to threats to Rome

Pompey

- 40 lines
- Opens with an abstract
The valour
- The wished-for day
 - Traditionally wrought
- Statement of the importance of the battle
 - Connected to family values and to the past glories of Rome

Outcomes

- Hardly had Caesar finished / speaking , when each is drawn to his own task and hurriedly the men took up their weapons and ate their bread. (7.329-331)
- At their general's words so gloomy, their spirits blaze and Roman valour is excited and they resolved to die in case his fears were true. (7.382-384)

Rhetoric and narrative

- Rhetorical, historiographical and epical elements are effectively combined
- The characters' use of rhetoric (and Lucan's manipulation thereof) neatly underlines the trajectory of the narrative and the judgement it expresses