

Advanced Latin Verse

4th Week with Lucan

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 chose 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?