

'Pharsalia's hero': to what extent is this an accurate description of Lucan's Cato?

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Abstract:

This dissertation examines the extent to which Cato can be regarded as *Pharsalia*'s hero by analysing his character against Roman conceptions of heroism centred on *virtus*. Beginning with Virgil's *Aeneid*, it establishes that Roman heroism requires not only courage but also a morally and politically oriented commitment to the state and to *libertas*. Against this standard, the competing heroic paradigms of Caesar and Pompey are shown to fail. Caesar's relentless energy and military prowess are undermined by his destructive ambition and role in civil war, while Pompey's weakness, vanity, and political self-interest similarly disqualify him from heroic status.

The dissertation argues that Cato uniquely preserves both the ethical and courageous dimensions of *virtus*, presenting himself as a defender of republican liberty and a model of principled resistance to autocracy. At the same time, Lucan complicates any straightforwardly heroic reading through Cato's association with *furor*, his opposition to a hostile cosmic order, and the futility of his struggle. Ultimately, however, Cato emerges as *Pharsalia*'s hero because his value lies not in military success but in exemplarity. Through his steadfast commitment to *libertas*, he becomes a transcendent symbol of republican ideals whose significance survives the collapse of both the Republic and the moral order it embodied.

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Chapter 1: *Virtus* and Heroism

If any judgement is to be made about the hero of Lucan's *Pharsalia* the parameters of Roman heroism must first be established, and perhaps the most useful evidence for sketching the boundaries of what it meant for a Roman to be considered heroic is to be found in Rome's national epic, predating Lucan's poem by little under a century, Virgil's *Aeneid*. In the afterword to his translation of *Aeneid* 6, the poet Seamus Heaney notes the ambivalent response common to many of its modern readers, who find themselves bewitched by the poetic mastery in passages of Virgil's *katabasis* but also bored or revolted by "its imperial certitude, its celebration of Rome's manifest destiny and the catalogue of Roman heroes" (Heaney, 2016, p.51). The validity of such literary assessments must remain a moot point, but the "stirring vision of the future heroes of Rome" (Braund, 1997, p.218) deployed by Anchises as inspirational exempla to restore the flagging morale of his dispirited son, are undoubtedly of enormous value in clarifying the defining traits of Roman heroism at the creation of the principate.

Virgil assumes the efficacy of his underworld figures as heroic exempla, both for Aeneas and the *Aeneid*'s contemporary Roman audience, as each of them instantiates the quality fundamental to the Roman conception of heroism: *virtus*. Despite its potentially misleading similarity to the English 'virtue', it is important to note that the quality of *virtus* "does not necessarily carry ethical connotations" (Parkes, 2012, p.53), and that its derivation from the concrete noun *vir* "a true man" (*OLD* s.v. *vir* 3) means that to possess the abstract *virtus* is in essence no more than to display "the qualities typical of a true man, manly spirit" (*OLD* s.v. *virtus* 1). 'Manly spirit' is however, an unhelpfully vague foundation on which to build a discussion of Roman heroism, not least because it may appear in such starkly different forms, as Sallust neatly points out when he observes that the two preeminent examples of *virtus* in

the late republic, Cato and Caesar, ‘were two men with great manly spirit and opposite characters’ (*ingenti virtute divorsis moribus fuere viri duo M. Cato et C. Caesar, Cat. 53.6*).

If we are to try and establish a more secure footing by defining *virtus* as narrowly as possible, “the word means courage” (Syme, 1960, p.57), and as “an individual quality [...] which bestowed glory on the man who attained it” (Tempest, 2017, p.227), it should be considered the defining attribute of any Roman hero.

1.1: *Virtus* in the Aeneid

However, Anchises’ use of the underworld heroes as inspirational didactic models for a floundering son who has been ‘hesitating to extend courage by deeds’ (*dubitamus adhuc virtutem extendere factis, Aen. 6.806*) makes it clear that despite its primary meaning of ‘courage’, *virtus* is also strongly associated with ethical notions of “moral excellence, virtue, goodness” (*OLD* s.v. *virtus* 3) and that there is a degree of “conceptual overlap between courageous and ethical *virtus*” (McDonnell, 2006, p.110). Considering that *virtus* was most fully and obviously “demonstrated in the process of winning personal *gloria* by committing great deeds in the service of the Roman state” (Gorman, 2001, p.264), the ethical dimensions of the property are made clear, and the courage necessary for Roman heroism is revealed not only to be definitively masculine, but also definitively patriotic.

Heroism of this sort was however, moribund at the time of Lucan’s writing, as the acquisition of personal *gloria* was more freely achieved in a republic whose “principle of peer group competition in the political sphere” (Beard and Crawford, 2005, p.53) actively encouraged its pursuit, than under a principate whose creator could boast about ‘having taken possession of all things by universal agreement’ (*per consensum universorum potitus rerum omnium, Aug. Anc. 34.1*) – a bald declaration of a domination so comprehensive as to encompass even the *gloria* and *virtus* produced by the great deeds of others. Lucan’s decision

to base his epic on the events of the war which “had been the origin of the imperial regime” (Charles-Picard, 1962, p.122) he wrote under suggests a poet deeply interested in the transformation of normative values wrought by the formation of the principate, and therefore a work in which heroism will be a central concern.

The conception of *virtus* as courage motivated by patriotism and expressed in terms of the domination of the enemies of Rome, is so consistent a feature of Virgil’s heroic exempla as to form a paradigm of republican heroism. Anchises provides his son with various instances of this paradigm, and although each stresses the blend of courage and patriotism required for heroic status, Virgil emphasises slight differences between the exempla which makes it clear that this standard can manifest itself in different forms. So, heroism at its most obvious comes on the battlefield with the prowess of the ‘Scipios, Africa’s scourge, two thunderbolts of war’ (*duo fulmina belli/Scipiadas, cladem Libyae, Aen.* 6.842-843) who each display a *virtus* potent enough to subjugate an entire continent, and with the ‘distinguished victor Marcellus marching and standing above all men in enemy spoils’ (*insignis spoliis Marcellus opimis/ingreditur victorque viros supereminet omnis, Aen.* 6.855-856), the victorious general’s name bracketed with the *spolia opima*, effectively draping Marcellus in the trophy of the defeated foe’s armour which his exemplary *virtus* has secured.

The courageous patriotism which prompts the Scipios’ annihilation of Carthage and Marcellus’ crushing of the Gauls demonstrates another requirement of republican heroism: strict adherence to Anchises’ instruction that a Roman must ‘remember to control nations with power’ (*tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento, Aen.* 6.851), an explicit command to dominate foreign peoples which in turn implicitly endorses a refusal to tolerate any rival to an identity which Virgil takes to be specifically Roman. Just as Virgil’s Olympians ‘will cherish the Roman masters of the world and the toga-wearing race’ (*fovebit/Romanos rerum dominos gentemque togatam, Aen.* 1.282), Anchises’ underworld

exempla demonstrate that Roman heroes should hold their roles as divinely appointed world-rulers equally dear.

Defending the integrity of a specifically Roman identity is a feature of heroism which Anchises also highlights when ordering Aeneas to observe Camillus ‘carrying back the standards’ (*referentem signa Camillum, Aen. 6.825*) so shamefully lost in the Gallic sack of Rome in 387/6 BC, and ‘to see the reclaimed fasces of Brutus the avenger’ (*ultoris Bruti fascisque videre receptos, Aen. 6.818*), the hero brandishing the republican symbols wrested back from the oppressive Tarquin monarchy and representative of the restoration of *libertas* and properly Roman “constitutional government” (Fletcher, 1972, p.92). Virgil also stresses the self-sacrifice required to display the courageous patriotism of *virtus* via Brutus’ filicide, ‘the father who will summon his sons fomenting new wars to punishment in the name of beautiful liberty’ (*natosque pater nova bella moventis/ad poenam pulchra pro libertate vocabit, Aen. 6.820-821*) celebrated by the alliterative expression of the republican principle for which he is prepared to sacrifice his sons, and this same idea is reinforced when Aeneas is instructed to look at another figure stern enough to order his son’s execution, this time for engaging the enemy (and so attempting to display *virtus* in its narrow sense of battlefield courage) in defiance of his father’s consular command, ‘fierce Torquatus with the axe’ (*saevumque securi/aspice Torquatium, Aen. 6.825*), the reference to the weapon indicating it is Torquatus’ filicide, rather than his cognomen-defining battlefield prowess, that Aeneas ought to be paying attention to.

The heroic exempla of *Aeneid* 6 all demonstrate the link between the abstract *virtus* and the concrete *vir* as through their battlefield exploits, defence of Roman identity, and self-sacrifice, each of them shows that “to be a Roman *vir*, a ‘real man’, was to be hard in every sense – physically to be impervious to pain or fatigue, mentally to be stern and unyielding” (Skinner, 2014, p.280), but in addition, the ‘hardness’ which marks each example conveys the

idea that *virtus* as courage is not in itself sufficient to bestow heroic status, and that to qualify as a heroic exemplar one must also possess a moral *virtus* serving patriotic ends. Virgil's underworld therefore makes a clear distinction between *virtus* in a way that Sallust's description of Cato and Caesar does not; and although Cato's cameo in Virgil's *katabasis* is ambiguous in the sense that it can refer both to Cato the Censor and/or Cato Uticensis, he is unequivocally 'noble Cato' (*magne Cato, Aen.* 6.841), and therefore an appropriate model of heroism in contrast to (the pointedly unnamed) Caesar's compromised *virtus* which is criticised in the admonishment that he 'not turn powerful troops against the fatherland's flesh' (*neu patriae validas in viscera vertite viris, Aen.* 6.833) in a line whose alliteration functions as an expression of Virgil's "intensity of feeling" (Fletcher, 1972, p.94) concerning the heroic standard Caesar's actions will violate.

Chapter 2: Caesar and Pompey

The towering influence of Virgil's "supreme poetic example of a foundation text" (Roche, 2009, p.20) condemns every subsequent epicist to working in the *Aeneid's* long shadow, and although the *Pharsalia* can be broadly characterised as "working [...] against the predominant features of Virgilian outline" (Hardie, 1993, p.12), it is nonetheless striking that the Caesar and Pompey of *Pharsalia* 1 are clearly condemned for lacking the form of *virtus* so notable in Anchises' Virgilian examples, an alignment with the moral scheme outlined in Virgil's *katabasis* which ensures that we should exercise a degree of caution in agreeing with any assertion that would insist Lucan's poem is focused on "[...] rejecting whatever the epic tradition has told him that *virtus* should mean' (Sklenar, 2003, p.23).

Pharsalia's first few lines describe the horrors unleashed by the outbreak of civil war, with Lucan's repetition of the conjunction *-que* (Luc. 1.2; 1.2; 1.4) underscoring its ghastly effects; the conflict "leads to an inversion of law and order, which also encompasses an inversion of

fundamental moral concepts” (Dinter, 2012, p.104), with ‘justice given over to crime’, (*iusque datum sceleri*, Luc. 1.1); it is a deranged act of self-mutilation in which ‘a powerful people directed their victorious right hands into their own flesh’ (*populumque potentem/in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, Luc. 1.2-3), the perverse means chosen to achieve this senseless end ‘related armies’ (*cognatasque acies*, Luc. 1.4) as citizen fights citizen under the rival banners of father and son-in-law. In Pompey, Caesar and Cato, the *Pharsalia* presents us with “three paradigms of heroism” (Ahl, 1976, p.156), yet it is telling that Lucan chooses to introduce only the first two of these heroic models into the bleak world described in the first book of *Pharsalia*, a decision which immediately establishes a distance between the three paradigms of heroism. Throughout book 1 Lucan uses this distance to problematise the first two heroic models to the benefit of the third’s heroic standing, and although *Pharsalia* depicts ‘a struggle with forces of the whole shaken earth in universal wickedness’ (*certatum totis concussi viribus orbis/in commune nefas*, Luc. 1.5-6), Cato’s absence from book 1 ensures that he is not initially contaminated by either the struggle or the wickedness. Before turning to an analysis of Cato to see whether he “unites both epic and moral *virtus*” (Gorman, 2001, p.288) required to meet the standards of Roman heroism, the failures of Caesar and Pompey as heroic models will be considered, ruling them out of contention for the title of poem’s hero.

2.1: Caesar’s Courageous *Virtus*

Lucan is careful to compromise Caesar’s *virtus* in both senses; he possesses neither the courageous ‘qualities typical of a true man’ (*OLD* s.v. *virtus* 1) nor ‘moral excellence, virtue, goodness’ (*OLD* s.v. *virtus* 3). In courageous terms, Caesar represents the heroic paradigm of *virtus* predicated on the relentless application of pure power, he is “energy incarnate” (Ahl, 1976, p.198), with ‘courage unable to stand in place’ (*nescia virtus/stare loco*, Luc. 1.144-

145). However awesome such power may be, the fact that the *virtus* which fuels it must exert itself perpetually as it does ‘not know how’ (*OLD* s.v. *nescius* 3) to remain static points to a fundamental lack of agency on Caesar’s part; “Caesar is in truth not really so autonomous as he seems” (Hardie, 1993, p.62), and this compromised autonomy presents him as a *vir* who conspicuously fails to meet the basic standard of Roman masculinity “as being embodied in restraint and control, over others and oneself” (Williams, 1999, p.145).

The denigration of Caesar’s masculine credentials continues in the simile comparing his implacable *virtus* to a bolt of lightning so potent that ‘no substance can stop its course’ (*nullaque exire vetante/materia*, Luc. 1.155-156). The lightning’s power is clearly formidable, but the carefully balanced participles in the phrase which Lucan uses to describe it, ‘falling and returning it causes great havoc’ (*magnamque cadens magnamque revertens/dat stragem*, Luc. 1.156-157), underscores the fact that its potency is indiscriminate, an attribute which is again incompatible with the control demanded of a Roman *vir*. In addition, the description of the lightning’s return to the heavens, where it ‘rages towards its own quarters’ (*in sua templa furit*, Luc. 1.155), presents Caesar’s heroic paradigm as precursor to the self-slaughtering Roman people who have willingly ‘directed their victorious right hands into their own flesh’ (*in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, Luc. 1.3). This association of the celestial lightning with the corporeal imagery of citizens’ wounds assumes an added significance when we consider that “human bodies are not straightforwardly personal or private but rather are [...] markers of status” (Vout, 2022, p.253); in unleashing its formidable power against itself, Caesar as lightning violates “the inviolable body of the elite Roman man [...] the external projection of his resolute and indomitable spirit” (Skinner, 2014, p.280), effectively destroying his own masculine identity in a self-inflicted wound which signals the failure of his courageous *virtus*.

2.2: Caesar's Ethical *Virtus*

The leonine simile which Lucan uses to describe Caesar as he crosses the Rubicon to initiate civil war (Luc. 1.205-212) continues to emphasise the warlord as the self-destructive antithesis of a true *vir*; gravely wounded by 'hunting spears plunging into breast or flank' (*latum subeant venabula pectus*, Luc. 1.211), the lion roars defiance at his opponents and then 'untroubled by so great a wound it escapes through the sword' (*per ferrum tanti securus volneris exit*, Luc. 1.212), the "strange expression" (Braund, 2009, p.51) which concludes the simile indicating that Lucan's lion "[...] inasmuch as he runs himself through by leaping at the hunters' spears, is pointing up Caesar's *suicide*" (Masters, 1992, p.2). Moreover, to mark the violation of the Rubicon's sacred boundary, the poem's narrative fulcrum and an "an act of monstrous presumption [...] against Rome and its empire" (Meier, 1996, p.11), Lucan also uses the lion simile to highlight the failure of Caesar's patriotic moral *virtus*.

The parallels between Lucan's lion simile and the image Virgil uses to describe Turnus at *Aeneid* 12. 4-9 are so prominent as to suggest a pointed intertextual reference; both animals share a similar location, Lucan's 'in the parched fields of heat-bringing Africa' (*squalentibus arvis/aestiferae Libyes*, Luc. 1.205-206) and Virgil's 'in the fields of Carthage' (*Poenorum qualis in arvis*, *Aen.* 12.4); the poets deploy cognate verbs to describe the lions' savage power, 'a deep rumbling growls from the vast maw' (*vasto grave murmur hiatus/infremuit*, Luc. 1.209-210) of Lucan's and Virgil's 'roars from bloody mouth' (*fremit ore cumento*, *Aen.* 12.8); both lions are unperturbed by their injuries, Virgil's 'undaunted' (*impavidus*, *Aen.* 12.8), and Lucan's 'unconcerned by so great a wound' (*tanti securus volneris*, Luc. 1.212). Caesar's association with Turnus, antagonist to Virgil's Aeneas and defined by relentless opposition to the Trojan presence in Italy (and so by extension equally opposed to the Trojans' Roman descendants and their world-governing mandate) shows Caesar not just as

deficient in, but actively opposed to, the patriotic moral *virtus* which is the prerequisite of Roman heroism.

Caesar's moral *virtus* is problematised further by the similes' North African locales which suggest "[...] that Caesar is being identified with Rome's archenemy, Carthage" (Ahl, 1976, p.106), an association Caesar himself compounds when attempting to stoke his men's outrage at the senate's machinations against him. Caesar's statement that the senators are already on a war-footing and that 'Rome is no less shaken by the huge commotion of war than if Punic Hannibal was crossing the Alps' (*non secus ingenti bellorum Roma tumult/concuditur, quam si Poenus transcenderet Alpes*, Luc. 1.303-305), in conjunction with the fact Caesar 'had already surmounted the frozen Alps with rapidity' (*iam gelidas Caesar cursu superaverat Alpes*, Luc. 1.183) by this point in the narrative, establishes a clear parallel between Caesar's bellicose actions and those of Rome's greatest foreign adversary, a blurring of Roman and Carthaginian which hints at the corruption of Caesar's *virtus* and the presentation of his model of heroism as a "villainous antitype against which the 'Roman' virtues of faithfulness, piety and duty could be applauded" (Miles, 2010, p.373).

However, there are further implications to this conflation of Roman and Carthaginian which undermine Caesar's heroic standing even more profoundly. Carthage may have been Rome's most formidable enemy, but by the time of Lucan's writing it had also been more than two hundred years since its destruction, a turning point in history which Sallust is not unusual among Roman historians in identifying as the exact moment when 'fortune began to rage and confuse all things' (*saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia coepit*, *Cat.* 10.1) as Rome turned on itself for want of a foreign enemy. Lucan adopts the historian's perspective in portraying Caesar as a reincarnation of Hannibalic aggression, adding specificity to it by casting the Roman as the instrument chosen by a malignant Fortune to achieve its chaotic ends, a specificity Caesar himself confirms in the apostrophic declaration that 'I follow you,

Fortune' (*te, Fortuna, sequor*; Luc. 1.226). Lucan's Caesar is therefore "less a representation of a historical figure than a symbol for certain inscrutable forces that operate behind and beneath what is called history" (Johnson, 1987, p.103), forces which dictate that Roman civilisation, and the *virtus*-driven value system which facilitated its rise, are among the 'great things collapsing in on themselves' (*in se magna ruunt*, Luc. 1.81).

2.3: Pompey's Courageous *Virtus*

Almost immediately prior to Caesar's depiction as lightning, Pompey is compared via extended simile to an 'eminent oak' (*quercus sublimis*, Luc. 1.136), a deliberate positioning of images we would do well to take note of as "[...] always in Lucan, there is meaning in juxtaposition" (Sklenar, 2003, p.26). The poet's meaning here seems obvious, with the placement of similes inviting a direct comparison of the two leaders, a comparison which proves quite literally devastating to Pompey's status as *vir* and hero. If "the ideal of Roman manliness was belligerent and aggressive" (Williams, 1999, p.71) the venerable, enervated oak of the simile, 'clinging with roots no longer strong' (*nec iam validis radicibus haerens*, Luc. 1.138), only standing as it is 'fixed by its own weight' (*pondere fixa suo est*, Luc. 1.139) and so infirm that it 'totters about to fall under the first East wind' (*primo nutet casura sub Euro*, Luc. 1.141), leaves no doubt that Pompey no longer possesses the vigour it demands, and he will inevitably be obliterated by the "splendid demonic energy" (Johnson, 1987, p.72) of Caesar's lightning.

Lucan develops "Pompey's nonheroic status" (Bartsch, 1997, p.91) in his description of the general as 'a seeker of reputation, entirely driven by popular winds he gave many things to the rabble' (*famaeque petitor/multa dare in volgus, totus popularibus auris/inpelli*, Luc. 1.131-133). Of course, Roman statesmen seeking to enhance their reputation is nothing extraordinary, but Lucan's use of the passive historical infinitive in this description, in

tandem with the adverbial use of the adjective *totus*, serves to strip Pompey of the agency demanded of the true *vir*: this yearning for approval compromises his manly status as “a man who fails to control his own desires [...] is less than fully masculine” (Williams, 1999, p.151). It is revealing that Lucan uses the word *vulgus* to describe the people Pompey is so desperate to curry favour with, as the word carries a ‘derogatory implication’ (*OLD* s.v. *vulgus* 2) and so facilitates Pompey’s characterisation as a “fame-addict” (Dinter, 2012, p.52) prepared to abase himself to his social inferiors in order to secure the adulation he craves. If “a Roman man is ideally ready, willing, and able to express his dominion over others” (Williams, 1999, p.18), Pompey’s fawning ensures that he fails to meet the criteria of Roman manhood. Indeed, in describing Pompey as ‘rejoicing in the applause of his theatre’ (*plausuque sui gaudere theatri*, Luc. 1.133), Lucan adds a touch of the thespian to his portrait of the general, tacitly encouraging the reader to associate him with figures conceptually opposed to Roman norms of masculinity, *infames* despised for “[...] exhibiting their bodies for public entertainment” (Vout, 2022, p.107). Therefore, despite the near total contrast between Lucan’s portraits of a decrepit self-demeaning Pompey and a potent self-destructive Caesar, the denigration of their status as *viri* ensures that they are one and the same in terms of their inadequacies as models of courageous *virtus*.

2.4: Pompey’s Ethical *Virtus*

Although Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon ultimately marks him as the aggressor in the civil war, it does not follow from this that Pompey’s heroic status is augmented by any boost in moral *virtus* due to the role his rival forces on him as defender of the homeland. Indeed, Lucan takes pains to depict Pompey as being just as bereft of moral *virtus* as his adversary, and in contrast to the different ways in which the warlords fail in terms of courageous *virtus*, the failure of their ethical *virtus* is conveyed by stressing the similarity of their motives,

motives which “invert the ideal of the *dux*” (Bartsch, 1997 p.5) in focusing on personal pre-eminence at the expense of the state.

So, prior to the outbreak of war, the surviving triumvirs’ jostling egotism ensures that ‘there was peace not by the leaders’ free will’ (*paxque fuit non sponte ducum*, Luc. 1.100), the genitive plural indicating that civil war is the shared preference of Rome’s surviving ‘joint masters’ (*dominis communis*, Luc. 1.85). Tellingly, the poem’s first simile outlines a similar commonality; ironically, given his cognomen’s meaning of ‘thick’ (*OLD* s.v. *crassus* 1), Crassus’ stabilising influence on Pompey and Caesar’s enmity prevents his peers from clashing ‘just as the slender isthmus divides the waves and separates the twin seas’ (*qualiter undas/qui secat et geminum gracilis mare separat Isthmos*, Luc. 1.100-101). Here, Pompey and Caesar as the Ionian and Aegean Seas are ‘identical’ (*OLD* s.v. *geminus* 3), their differences elided by the isthmus’ withdrawal ‘churning up the Ionian Sea with the Aegean’ (*Ionium Aegaeo frangat mare*, Luc. 1.103) and their equivalence emphasised by the position of the two proper nouns next to each other at the beginning of the line: “Lucan does not differentiate in his simile between Caesar and Pompey” (Fratantuono, 2012, p.16) and thereby encourages the reader to do the same, compromising Pompey’s ethical *virtus* by collapsing the distinction between the competing warlords.

Crassus’ death removes a natural geographic barrier separating the rivals, and with his apostrophe to Julia lamenting her untimely death as ‘only you had been able to restrain raging husband and parent and join armed hands with swords discarded’ (*tu sola furentem/inde virum poteras atque hinc retinere parentem/armatasque manus excusso iungere ferro*, Luc. 1.115-117), the poet mourns the loss of another natural bulwark which could potentially have averted civil war, that of family bonds. This apostrophe again works to blur any distinction between the two men; the participle *furens*, ‘raging with hatred’ (*OLD* s.v. *furo* 3) is applied to both Pompey the husband and Caesar the father, and the parity of their emotional volatility

ensures that they are both accusative objects of the infinitive *retinere*. Complimenting this sense that it is not possible to separate the figures' motivation, the line's chiasmic structure of objects and verbs (*virum poterat [...] retinere parentem*, Luc. 1.116) achieves a strong sense of balance to amplify the impression that the men are equally culpable.

If we were minded to try and resist this repeated conflation of Pompey and Caesar, Lucan's observation that 'Caesar could no longer endure a superior nor Pompey an equal' (*nec quemquam iam ferre potest Caesarve priorem/Pompeius parem*, Luc.1.125-126) could perhaps be used to suggest that Pompey's moral *virtus* is even more thoroughly compromised than his opponent's, in that the statement implies it was within Pompey's gift to avoid war as "Caesar was prepared to share the top position but that Pompey was not" (Braund, 2009, p.43). However, to seek to establish whether one of the triumvirs is slightly less bad than the other is to miss Lucan's point; irrespective of the positions each would be prepared to settle for, the warlords' motivations are identical in that 'rivalry in excellence spurred them on' (*stimulos dedit aemula virtus*, Luc. 1.120), and this *virtus*, solely focused on personal prestige to the extent that it is prepared to plunge Rome into civil war to realise its narrow aims, is fundamentally at odds with the patriotic moral *virtus* required of Roman heroism.

It is revealing that this description of such problematic *aemula virtus* echoes Horace's reflection on the fall of the republic from a century earlier, an intertextual reference which sheds further light on the depiction of Pompey and Caesar as non-heroic and shows how "Lucan refers to Horace in order to strengthen his statements about the causes of civil strife" (Milić and Nelis, 2021, p.26). Where Horace ruefully observes that despite their best efforts 'neither Capua's rival courage nor fierce Spartacus' (*aemula nec virtus Capuae nec Spartacus acer*, Hor. *Epod.* 16.5) had been able to overwhelm Rome, Lucan's parallel phrasing condemns Pompey and Caesar by associating them with a city so thoroughly opposed to Roman interests that it "deserted the Roman cause and admitted a Carthaginian garrison"

(McEvedy, 2019, p.81) after the disaster of Cannae in 216 BC. In addition, where Horace decries the bitter irony that having bested all external enemies ‘Rome herself has fallen by her own strength’ (*suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit*, Hor. *Epod.* 16.2) by engaging in civil war, Lucan’s explanation of Rome’s downfall as an instance of the universal law that ‘great things fall in on themselves’ (*in se magna ruunt*, Luc. 1.81), using the same verb and substituting the possessive adjective with its cognate reflexive pronoun, also seems to acknowledge Horace’s poem, and in doing so clarifies what Horace’s self-destructive Roman strength is – the debased *virtus* of Pompey and Caesar.

So, although Pompey and Caesar are motivated by *virtus*, civil war has warped the concept to such an extent that it has lost all meaning, as the exercise of courage in any conflict between Roman citizens, even in defence of the homeland, “cannot produce a hero in the conventional sense of the word because it pollutes both parties” (Gorman, 2001, p.263). The first book of *Pharsalia* therefore shows the collapse of the framework “that gave meaning to ethical terms such as virtue and evil, heroism and cowardice” (Bartsch, 1997, p.14), and to use another Horatian reference, the heroic paradigms of Pompey and Caesar embody the moment ‘when virtue shattered’ (*cum fracta virtus*, Hor. *Carm.* 2.7.11) and ‘atrocious crime shall be called heroism’ (*scelerique nefando/nomen erit virtus*, Luc. 1.667-668).

Chapter 3: Cato’s *Virtus*

Before turning to the ambivalence with which Lucan ensures the reader’s “ability to judge this most slippery of characters is intentionally frustrated” (Catherine, 2015, p.340), factors supporting the view that Cato could be seen as “the perfect Roman” (Ahl, 1976, p.247) and the hero of *Pharsalia* will first be considered. From his first appearance at 2.239 it is made unequivocally clear that Cato is defined by the possession of *virtus* in both its courageous and

ethical senses. Brutus' nocturnal visit 'finds the man in sleepless anxiety reflecting on the public misfortunes and the fall of the city, fearing for all and unconcerned for himself' (*invenit insomni volventem publica cura/fata virum casusque urbis cunctisque timentem/securum sui* (Luc. 2.239-241), with Lucan underscoring Cato's status as 'one possessing manly virtues' (*OLD* s.v. *vir* 3) via the hyperbaton which separates the object *vir* from its verb by five words. Moreover, the position of *vir* as the seventh word in a thirteen-word clause not only reinforces the centrality of Cato's masculine status but also stresses his steady, patriotic presence in that this particular *vir* serves to connect the "normally coincident" (Fantham, 1992, p.125) concepts of *publica* and *urbis*, so pointedly separated from one another in Lucan's line to reflect the disruption of civil war and the people's flight from Rome in the face of Caesar's advance.

The fractured value system the poet has been so careful to articulate prior to Cato's introduction may well have produced an environment where "what a *bonus vir* is has been terminally put into question" (Bartsch, 1997, p.116) but Brutus' statement that his uncle is 'now the only guarantee of virtue' (*virtutis iam sola fides*, Luc. 2.243) in a world maddened by war seems to indicate that Cato is exempt from such relativism, as does the younger man's wondering 'what was the benefit of enduring so many years free from the morals of a corrupt age?' (*quid tot durare per annos/profuit immunem corrupti moribus aevi?* Luc. 2. 256-257), which tellingly uses a verb cognate to the *duritia* demanded of the Roman *vir* to describe Cato's life up to this point and then explicitly associates this hardness with an impeccably high moral standard.

3.1: Cato's Exceptionalism

Cato's heroic exceptionalism is augmented further via a series of implied contrasts with his rival heroic paradigms. When Brutus asks his uncle for guidance, that 'you steady me

who is doubtful with sure strength' (*derige me, dubium certo tu robore firma*, Luc. 2.245), Lucan conveys Cato's 'firmness, strength, solidity' (*OLD* s.v. *robur* 4) with the word for 'oak tree' (*OLD* s.v. *robur* 1) and so generates a vigorous arboreal image to stress Cato's masculine *virtus* while simultaneously recalling the doddering infirmity of Pompey's oak simile at 1. 236. Similarly, in warning Cato that participation in the 'wars will make you guilty' (*facient te bella nocentem*, Luc. 2.259), Brutus' use of the same participle and verb echoes the diction of Caesar's cynical insistence to Tiber that blame for the civil war lies elsewhere as 'that man will be guilty, who made me your enemy' (*ille erit, ille nocens, qui me tibi fecerit hostem*, Luc. 1.203), the parallel phrasing emphasising the gulf in moral *virtus* which separates Cato from the warlord.

Moreover, the flaw shared by both triumvirs, an overweening ambition which renders them so 'blind with excessive greed' (*nimisque cupidine caeci*, Luc. 1.87) that they are prepared to overturn the state to ensure it is satisfied, is thrown into stark relief by Lucan's "timeless evaluation" (Fantham, 1992, p.149) of Cato's principles, adherence to which have produced a man determined 'to observe due measure and hold fast to the limit' (*servare modum finemque tenere*, Luc. 2.381). Here, the chiasmus of infinitive verbs and their accusative objects, with the verbs enacting their meaning in serving 'to guard' (*OLD* s.v. *servo* 1) and 'to contain' (*OLD* s.v. *teneo* 4) the constitution-preserving balance Cato holds so dear, not only defines him in opposition to the triumvirs' crazed designs, but also presents him as a heroic anomaly in Lucan's "depiction of a world in which every ethical limit has been surpassed" (Hill, 2004, p.214). The following line reverses this chiasmus, with accusative objects flanking infinitive verbs, in the description of Cato's desire 'to follow nature and to devote life to the country' (*naturamque sequi patriaeque inpendere vitam*, Luc. 2.382), an arrangement which again presents Cato as opposed to the immorality of the triumvirs by placing *patria* centrally to underscore his patriotic motivation.

Fittingly for a poem which marks the moment when “the crowd enters literature in earnest as a major character” (Johnson, 1987, p.112), Cato’s moral and masculine exceptionalism is also highlighted in relation to the wider Roman citizenry, who, in contrast to the grandiose aims of the triumvirs, are motivated by the earthier concerns of food, shelter, and clothing. Three perfect infinitives at 2. 384-387 emphasise Cato’s frugality and fortitude regarding these same prerequisites of human survival, and each presents Cato as unaffected by the moral contagion which has corrupted the citizens surrounding him. So, where Cato’s disciplined austerity makes it seem ‘a banquet to have conquered hunger’ (*epulae, vicisse famem*, Luc. 2.384), the people have become so decadent that ‘greed disdains former meals’ (*mensasque priores/aspernata fames*, Luc. 1.163-164); where Cato’s asceticism considers it ‘a great home to have banished winter with a roof’ (*magnique penates/summovisse hiemem tecto*, Luc. 2.384-385), the citizens’ voracious materialism acknowledges ‘no limit in gold or in dwellings’ (*non auro tectisve modus*, Luc. 1.163); similarly, Cato’s idea of appropriate clothing, ‘a rough toga to cover over the limbs in the custom of a Roman citizen’ (*hirtam membra super Romani more Quiritis/induxisse togam*, Luc. 2.386-387), forms a silent rebuke to a citizen body degenerate enough to have cast aside both national identity and gender norms in tolerating an environment where, abandoning their togas, ‘men have snatched up attire scarcely becoming for young women to wear’ (*cultus gestare decoros/vix nuribus rapuere mares*, Luc. 1.164-165).

3.2: Cosmological Complications

However, this series of contrasts is not quite sufficient to secure Cato’s “status as an aristocratic culture hero” (Hill, 2004, p.225). When Lucan explains the conflict’s ultimate cause and elaborates on ‘what drove the raging people into arms, what banished peace from the world’ (*quid in arma furem/inpulerit populum, quid pacem excusserit*, Luc. 1.68-69),

he also introduces an “inherent interpretive instability” (O’Hara, 2007, p.20) to his portrait of Cato, which serves to undermine any claim too strident in its assertion that he is the poem’s unequivocally heroic figure.

The poem’s cosmology is predicated on a “malevolent providence [...] envious of human prosperity” (Easton, 2011, p.348), a ‘hostile system of the fates’ (*invida fatorum series*, Luc. 1.70) which condemns any entity grown too large to suffer ‘massive collapse under too much weight’ (*nimioque graves sub pondere lapsus*, Luc. 1.71). These fates enjoy a universal purview, and so the ‘discordant machine’ (*discors/machina*, Luc. 1.79-80) of the universe is itself subject to their law and also doomed to buckle under its own mass in accordance with ‘this limit the gods have set on growth for prosperous states’ (*laetis hunc numina rebus/crescendo posuere modum*, Luc. 1.81-82). There is a clear implication all such collapses are terminal as well as inevitable, as in presenting the conflagration of the world (*ekpyrosis*) but rejecting the comfort of Stoic orthodoxy in omitting any reference to its subsequent regeneration (*palingeneis*), the poem’s cosmology offers only an “irreversible descent into cosmic anarchy” (Sklenar, 2003, p.6).

The anaphora Lucan uses to emphasise the enormity of Rome’s success, ‘which possesses the sea, the lands, the whole earth’ (*quae mare, quae terras, quae totum possidet orbem*, Luc. 1.110), leaves no doubt that the republic has met the fates’ criterion for collapse. Similarly, Lucan’s description of the civil war as evidence of Rome ‘not bearing itself’ (*nec se Roma ferens*, Luc. 1.72) under too huge a burden, and his insistence that this should be understood ‘in the same way as’ (Luc. 1.72; *OLD* s.v. *sic* 7) a disintegrating universe intent on ‘going back again to ancient chaos’ (*antiquum repetens iterum chaos*, Luc. 1.74) shows the poet fixed on “linking the fate of the cosmos with that of Rome” (Dinter, 2012, p.125) in presenting both as progressing to the same end for the same reason.

With Lucan making “little or no distinction between *Fortuna* and the gods on one hand, and *Fatum* on the other” (Ahl, 1976, p.297), the poet’s statement that ‘the conquering cause pleased the gods, but the conquered pleased Cato’ (*victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni*, Luc. 1.128) therefore casts Cato’s heroism in a somewhat troubling light, as he is portrayed as defying what is, to all intents and purposes, a divine edict. Granted, the poet is not quite so forceful as to paint Cato as a villainous “arch hybrist and theomach” (Gorain, 2018, p.133) on the lines of Statius’ Capaneus, transgressive enough to goad Jupiter into ‘struggling against me with all your fires’ (*nunc totis in me conitere flammis*, *Theb.* 10.904); nonetheless, although the famous *sententia* of 1.128 gives us a Cato who “rejects bland acquiescence in the outcome” (Griffin, 1984, p.159) of the fall of his beloved republic, the opposition to the poem’s divine machinery it entails ensures that his heroism is marked by futility just as much as it is patriotism and courage.

Of course, futility need not preclude heroism and may even enhance it. Just as Juno’s statement that ‘now I see a warrior contending with the unequal fates’ (*nunc iuvenem imparibus video concurrere fatis*, *Aen.* 12.149) highlights the defiant courage of Virgil’s Turnus which can support readings that the Rutulian is the *Aeneid*’s “final tragic hero” (Mackie, 1988, p.70), perhaps in Cato’s opposition to the forces of a hostile fate we should discern “something of the better and more admirable qualities of Virgil’s Turnus” (Fratantuono, 2012, p.70) which could justify him in similarly heroic terms. We must, however, be cautious; to adopt such a view too eagerly would be “to simplify a complex poem” (O’Hara, 2007, p.139) and overlook the way Lucan thwarts any easy assessments of heroism through the “tissue of illusions and intertextual links” (Fratantuono, 2012, p.102) permeating his work.

3.3: Intertextual and Intratextual Complications

The depiction of Laelius provides a good example of how Lucan utilises intertextual and intratextual links to complicate assessments of Cato's heroism. When Caesar's army baulks at the prospect of marching deeper into Italy, the veteran Laelius dismisses their reservations with 'is it so wretched to win in civil war?' (*usque adeo miserum est civili vincere bello?* Luc. 1.366), a line clearly modelled on the 'is it so wretched to die?' (*usque adeone mori miserum est?* Aen. 12.646), uttered by Turnus to dismiss his divine sister's attempts to help prolong his life. However, where Turnus' question conveys the nobility of a defiant warrior determined to face death with an unsullied reputation, Laelius' adoption of the Virgilian phrase is striking for its degeneracy. Lucan alliteratively emphasises the 'love of country and household gods' (*pietas patriique penates*, Luc. 1.353) unnerving Caesar's army, but in what amounts to a systematic dismantling of the "the respect for duty and authority denoted by the term *pietas*" (Tarrant, 1997, p.179), Laelius insists the men's loyalty must be to Caesar only. To prove his own allegiance to Caesar's cause, Laelius declares himself prepared to violate any familial bond, and willing to comply with his commander even 'if you order me to plunge a sword in a brother's breast and a parent's neck, and in the womb of a wife full with child' (*pectore si fratris gladium iuguloque parentis/condere me iubeas pleneaque in viscera partu/coniugis*, Luc. 1.376-378); he also pledges himself willing to transgress religious norms, 'to plunder the gods and throw fire in temples' (*spoliare deos ignemque inmittere templis*, Luc. 1.379) and swears to hold the state so cheaply in comparison to his beloved leader that he will destroy any settlement he is instructed to attack, even if 'that city you order to be utterly razed is Rome' (*penitus tolli quam iusseris urbem/Roma sit*, Luc. 1.385-386).

If this intertextual reference removes any positives from Turnus, and "the effect of intertextuality on the reader can be guided, but it can never be controlled" (Cowan, 2021, p.205) we would do well to wonder what remains of the Virgilian figure, and the point Lucan wishes to make by inviting the comparison. What remains of a Turnus shorn of honour is rage

and ‘violent madness’ (*OLD* s.v. *furor* 1), ‘love of the sword and wicked madness of war, anger above all’ (*amor ferri et scelerata insania belli/ira super*, *Aen.* 7.461-462), and if Lucan’s network of intertextuality suggests that in their different ways Laelius and Cato bear a resemblance to Turnus, it also tacitly encourages the thought that in some meaningful sense they must resemble one another. That there is indeed such a resemblance is borne out by other intertextual parallels connecting Laelius and Cato, with the former described as ‘bringing back the garland of oak leaves, the reward for saving a citizen’s life (*servati civis referentem praemia quercum*, *Luc.* 1.358), an honour which ensures that prior to the war’s outbreak at least, he, just like ‘noble Cato’ (*magne Cato*, *Aen.* 6.841), would be perfectly at home among the model Romans of Virgil’s Elysium and their ‘foreheads shaded with civic oak’ (*umbrata gerunt civili tempora quercu*, *Aen.* 6.771-772).

Chapter 4: Cato and *Furor*

If the Turnus nexus and its blurring of the distinctions between Laelius and Cato hints at the association of Cato’s heroic model with an abhorrent *furor*, the poem’s wider conflation of Caesarian and Republican factions confirms it. Lucan depicts this conflation from the poem’s start via the polyptoton defining the opposing sides in terms of the same nouns, with ‘standards exposed to aggressive standards’ (*infestisque obvia signis/signa*, *Luc.* 1.6-7) and ‘javelins threatening javelins’ (*pila minantia pilis*, *Luc.* 1.7) bracketing the ‘equal standards’ (*pares aquilas*, *Luc.* 1.7) of the rival forces to underscore their single identity. However, it is the vocative plural of the narrator’s inquiry as to ‘what madness, fellow citizens, what great wantonness of the sword’ (*quis furor, o cives, quae tanta licentia ferri?* *Luc.* 1.8) can explain the war which is most significant; its implication that the madness of *furor* is the universal force governing all combatants ensures that for all Cato’s exceptionalism, in entering the war he becomes no different from anybody else.

4.1: Roman *Furor*

Indeed, the poet's description of Crassus' death as the moment when 'Parthian losses released Roman madness' (*Parthica Romanos solverunt damna furores*, Luc. 1.106), with the adjective identifying *furor* as something latently and definitively Roman, indicates that Cato's similarity to the poem's wider cast of debased characters predates his decision to join Pompey's army. Through several contrasts with the introduction to Virgil's epic, Lucan "makes it clear that he is unwriting the *Aeneid*" (Dinter, 2012, p.100) as he elaborates on this portrayal of *furor*. So, where the *Aeneid*'s proem presents a singular 'hero distinguished in piety' (*insignem pietate virum*, *Aen.* 1.10), the *Pharsalia*'s introductory lines depict the opposite, both in the "collective identity of Lucan's central hero" (Joseph, 2022, p.42) as a 'powerful people' (*populum potentem*, Luc. 1.2) and in the fact that this collective is in the grip of "*furor* [...] the diametric opposite of *pietas*" (Ahl, 1976, p.275). In addition, where Virgil's narrative framework introduces a hero unjustly tormented by divine caprice, prompting the author's plaintive query as to how there can be 'such great anger in heavenly minds' (*tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* *Aen.* 1.11), Lucan's reworking insists that "it is the wrath of the citizens, not of any divine powers, that spurs on the poem" (Bartsch, 1997, p.109), and therefore rejects the premise of his predecessor's question in presenting the origin of human suffering as terrestrial rather than celestial.

Moreover, in repeating the claim that the *furor* – inspired disasters afflicting Rome are 'not due to any foreign peoples' (*nec gentibus ullius*, Luc. 1.82; 1.93), Lucan makes clear that no matter how ardently the citizens may wish for the gods to 'give anger to the foreign peoples' (*date gentibus iras*, Luc. 2.47) and provide Rome with alien adversaries, the origin of violent madness ought not be looked for in 'the rest of the world apart from the Romans or Italians' (*OLD* s.v. *gens* 2). This presentation of *furor* as a particularly Roman characteristic is

developed in the poet's following reference to Romulus' foundational fratricide; considering that "kin-killing is a key metaphor [...] for the killing of brother-citizens in civil war" (Cowan, 2021, p.197), the narrator's description of Rome's 'first walls drenched with a brother's blood' (*fraterno primi maduerunt sanguine muri*, Luc. 1.95) not only serves as an explanatory antecedent of Caesar and Pompey's conflict but also presents the defining trait of violent madness as a "congenital malady" (Fratantuono, 2012, p.xxiv) innate to Roman culture.

4.2: Cato as *Furia*

So, although Cato's characterisation as 'the upholder of justice, observer of hardy virtue' (*iustitiae cultor, rigidi servator honesti*, Luc. 2.389) ensures that his *pietas* can hardly be doubted, in refusing to set him entirely apart from *furor*, its conceptual opposite, Lucan seems to offer a portrait of Cato which is "simultaneously both undercut and recommended" (O'Hara, 2007, p.138). That Lucan is keen to subvert Cato's good standing with just as much force as he had praised it is evident in the shocking effect the older man has on his nephew. Brutus arrives at his uncle's house in a relatively tranquil state, with the poet noting that contrary to the citizens' emotional agitation, 'terror did not strike noble Brutus' thoughts' (*non magnanimi percussit pectora Bruti/terror*, Luc. 2.234-235). However, in fewer than one hundred lines, Cato's baleful influence has 'provoked the sharp stings of anger and rouses the young man's passion to excessive desire for civil war' (*acres/irarum movit stimulos iuvenisque calorem/excitat in nimios belli civilis amores*, Luc. 2.323-325), a transformation which "uncomfortably resembles an Allecto-like 'possession'" (Mira Seo, 2012, p.202) of the younger man in replacing his reflection with rage and reducing him to the madness of a population corrupted by 'so great a love of civil war' (*tantus amor belli*, Luc. 1.21).

With Cato quite literally fulfilling the promise of Virgil's Fury that she 'will inflame minds with love of insane war' (*accendam animos insani Martis amore, Aen. 7.550*), Lucan sees to it that his heroic model is "incriminated by comparison with impious characters of the *Aeneid*" (Roche, 2019, p.13), a muddying of Cato's positive attributes which highlights the paradox at the heart of his characterisation: the figure in the poem whose "moral status is unassailable" (Gorman, 2001, p.285) is also shown as reminiscent of Virgil's pestilential Fury, a being who thrives on moral transgression and cherishes 'dismal wars, rage and plots and criminal guilt' (*tristia bella/iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia, Aen. 7.325-326*). If we interpret Cato's rage in terms of a 'passionate desire' to resist domination and a 'furious longing' (*OLD* s.v. *furor* 3) for a lost republic which guaranteed freedom from tyranny, Cato can be distanced from Allecto's monstrousness as "the [...] conception of the '*Furiae*' as '*ultrices scelerum*' is rationalised into the concept of conscience" (Thome, 1992, p.83); nevertheless, difficulties in seeing him as the poem's heroic figure remain.

Rather than standing as the poem's moral beacon, "the epitome of virtue and fortitude" (George, 1991, p.244) in a world ravaged by war, by embodying the opposed concepts of *pietas* and *furor*, Lucan uses Cato to signify that "amid the paradoxes of civil war [...] neat dualities lose their conceptual coherence" (Mebane, 2024, p.184), and this incoherence taints even the most upstanding characters. The war's destruction of epistemological frameworks results in a world where *cives* are *hostes*, where Rome's success is Rome's failure, and where Cato can solemnly intone that 'Brutus, I admit civil war is the greatest sacrilege' (*summum, Brute, nefas civilia bella fatemur, Luc. 2.286*) while simultaneously viewing abstaining from war, failing to commit an 'offence against divine law' (*OLD* s.v. *nefas* 1), as a crazed decision he begs the Olympians to prevent him from making, pleading that the 'gods keep this madness far away' (*procul hunc arcete furorem/o superi, Luc. 2.295-296*).

4.3: Scaevola as Exemplum

The invocation of figures from the distant republican past with which Lucan peppers Cato's inflammatory speech continue to present his heroic model in ambivalent terms. Brutus urges Cato not to besmirch his *virtus* by engaging in war, begging the gods not 'to have also set these hands in motion with deadly arms' (*feralibus armis/has etiam movisse manus*, Luc. 2.260-261); Cato's response, that it is impossible for him to sit inactive 'to have held folded hands' (*compressas tenuisse manus*, Luc. 2.292) during the current crisis, and that he will instead act like the bereaved father who 'it pleases to insert hands into the black fires' (*iuvat ignibus atris/inseruisse manus*, Luc. 2.292) of his offspring's funeral pyre, adopts imagery strongly suggestive of "the Stoics' favourite exemplum" (Leigh, 1997, p.280) of civic virtue, Gaius Mucius Scaevola.

Livy's Scaevola, threatened with torture after his botched assassination of the Etruscan king seeking to reimpose monarchy on the fledgling Roman republic, responds with a display of *virtus* corresponding almost exactly to the type celebrated in Virgil's underworld. Holding his right hand over flames to demonstrate indifference to physical pain, Scaevola becomes a symbol of defiance to autocratic power that even his would-be victim cannot help but admire, with Porsenna gasping that 'I would order this courage honoured if such courage was on my country's side' (*iuberem macte virtute esse, si pro mea patria ista virtus staret*, Liv, 2.12.14). Recognising that Livy's history is more a "process of romance-making rather than of reconstruction" (Adcock, 1966, p.24) does not negate the potency of Scaevola's statement to his astonished captor that 'it is Roman both to do and endure mighty things' (*et facere et pati fortia Romanum est*, Liv. 2.12.10), and Cato gains lustre from his adoption of Scaevola's autocrat-defying gesture to fashion himself as a "larger than life defender of Roman freedom [...] a comforting and inspiring hero" (Frost, 1997, p.16).

However, Lucan ensures that Cato's association with Scaevola is not without its complications. Not only does the self-mutilation defining Scaevola's example share obvious parallels with the problematic self-wounding so prominent in the poet's treatment of the citizen body (Luc. 1.3) and the simile comparing Caesar to lightning (Luc. 1.155), but in the same vein as these examples, as both active agent and passive recipient of the same action, the Scaevola reference also functions as another "expression of the paradox of civil war, in which to distinguish between subject and object of any act of aggression makes little sense" (Bartsch, 1997, p.24). Therefore, in Lucan's hands a didactic exemplum of civic virtue is also made to bear the hallmark of its antithesis, becoming an embodiment of civil war's deleterious effects, a treatment of the Scaevola model which amounts to a "deformation of the traditional exemplary narrative" (Leigh, 1997, p.184) that paradoxically tarnishes Cato's heroic standing even as it augments it.

4.4: Decii as Exempla

With his reference to when 'enemy troops pressed against devoted Decius' (*devotum hostiles Decium pressere catervae*, Luc. 2. 308) Cato's self-identification with republican heroic figures becomes more explicit. In recalling the Decii, venerated by the Romans (including Anchises in the *katabasis* at *Aen.* 6.824) for their performances of *devotio* in the Samnite wars of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, Cato co-opts their association with the ritual which could be undertaken by a military leader facing imminent defeat "whereby he vowed to sacrifice himself and the enemy army to the gods of the underworld in exchange for Roman victory" (McDonnell, 2006, p.200). The anaphora of personal and demonstrative pronouns Cato uses to articulate this urge to 'let the twin armies pierce me, let the Rhine's savage crowd attack me with missiles' (*me geminae figant acies, me barbara telis/Rheni turba petat*, Luc. 2.309-310), to 'attack only me with the sword, me protecting the laws and

empty justice in vain' (*me solum invadite ferro/me frustra leges et inania iura tuentem*, Luc. 2.315-316), and to hope that in doing so 'this throat, this will give peace and an end of evils for the western clans' (*hic dabit, hic pacem iugulus finemque malorum/gentibus Hesperiiis*, Luc. 2.317-318), conveys the fervour with which Cato "idealistically imagines his death in battle to become the ultimate self-sacrifice that will save Rome" (Ambühl, 2021, p.42).

However, once again Lucan complicates his character's emulation of a heroic republican figure. Cato's exclamation that 'if only it was permitted by the gods of heaven and Erebus' (*utinam caelique deis Erebiue liceret*, Luc. 2.307) for him to perform the same ritual as the Decii shows his awareness that *devotio* is not possible: he knows there can be no victory for Rome in a war fought between *cives* as there are no *hostes* for him to dedicate himself to death alongside. Cato's familiarity with the terms of his narrator's analogy between state and cosmos renders his urge to replicate the Decii even more problematic. In describing the fall of the state as analogous to 'when lofty heaven falls down, earth collapsing with the mixed weight of the contracting universe' (*cum ruat arduus aether/terra labet mixto coeuntis pondere mundi*, Luc. 2.290-291), Cato shows an understanding of the poem's apocalyptic cosmology; cognisant of the cosmology, Cato is also aware that even if the performance of *devotio* were possible, it would still be futile according to the inexorable laws of fate which govern the poem. The invocation of the Decii therefore reveals something more than frustration about how civil war has rendered it impossible for a "general to show personal *virtus* in the line of battle" (Leigh, 1997, p.108); in acknowledging both the impossibility and futility of his aspirations for *devotio* but being desperate to perform the ritual all the same, Lucan again shows us a Cato whose positive attributes, patriotism and courage, cannot be separated from his more problematic 'delirium' and 'violent madness' (*OLD* s.v. *furor* 1). If Cato is the poem's hero, he is one who embodies "the tragic and paradoxical triumph of a

virtus that [...] leads to voluntary self-destruction and acts as an accomplice to an uncontrollable [...] *furor*” (Esposito, 2021, p.77).

Chapter 5: Cato as Exemplum

Although there is very clearly “something megalomaniac” (Hardie, 1993, p.11) in a character grandiose enough to respond to the total collapse of the state and universe with the assertion of an otiose ritual defending the republic and its ethos, Lucan’s artful juxtaposition of Cato’s cosmological knowledge with his ignorance of the war’s outcome sees the poet utilise the “dramatic irony of hindsight” (Fantham, 1992, p.135) to great effect. For an audience all too aware that the conflict will end with Cato’s suicide, and among whom “the cult of Cato of Utica had developed very rapidly” (Dilke, 1972, p.63), Cato’s yearning for *devotio* is perhaps not quite as fruitless as it seems; through the vivid example of his resistance to autocracy, in terms of leading the republican forces after Pompey’s death and his eventual suicide, Cato finds a way “to preserve the memory of what *Roma et Libertas* really meant in the past.” (Thorne, 2011, p.379).

Seneca suggests Cato’s decision to enter the war was a popular topic for *suasoriae*, the rhetorical exercises used to hone declamatory skills by demanding the budding orator extemporise on a “precise historical situation and compose advice to the great man facing a decision” (Fantham, 1996, p.91). Seneca recalls several *suasoria*-type arguments for abstention which state the pointlessness of entering a war that for Cato, can have no cause; the triumvirate’s domination had destroyed *libertas* well before the war’s outbreak, and so the conflict ‘is not now being waged about freedom: that was lost long ago’ (*iam non agitur libertate: olim pessum data est*, Sen, *Ep.* 14.13); entering the fray amounts to choosing a master, something that republican Cato as one of ‘freedom’s champions’ (Johnson, 1987, p.69) ought to reject outright: if ‘the question is whether Caesar or Pompey possesses the

state: what have you to do with that dispute?’ (*quaeritur utrum Caesar an Pompeius possideat rem publicam: quid tibi cum ista contentione?*, Sen, *Ep.* 14.13). Lucan’s portrait of Cato picks up the opposing side of the *suasoria* debate, not only presenting Cato’s decision to enter the war as correct but also insisting that he was heroic to do so; with the poet knowing that “the historical Cato became an exemplum of pre-Caesarian *Libertas* [...] he sets up his own Cato to become a memory-preserving exemplum of the very same thing” (Thorne, 2011, p.377).

5.1: Cato and *Libertas*

With Cato’s presentation of his reasons for entering the war as an obligation analogous to a parent’s duty to perform funeral rites for a dead child, Lucan offers his contemporary audience glimpses of exactly what his desire for *devotio* will achieve. Cato’s statement that he must join the conflict as he ‘will not be removed before I embrace you, lifeless Rome’ (*non ante revellar/exanimem quam te complectar; Roma*, Luc. 2.301-302) as he is duty bound to ‘follow your name, Liberty, and empty ghost’ (*tuumque/nomen, Libertas, et inanem prosequar umbram*, Luc. 2. 302-303) to its tomb clearly shows he understands “the death of the republic and of *libertas* as something that has already happened” (Bexley, 2010, p.141). However, despite this admission that the cause which he fights for has been lost, Lucan’s careful choice of Cato’s words at 2.303, where he uses *nomen*, *inanis*, and *umbra* in quick succession, point to two intratextual references, the poet’s earlier description of Pompey as a ‘shadow of a great name’ (*magni nominis umbra*, Luc. 1.135) and Caesar’s sneering jibe that resistance to his army only amounts to ‘empty names’ (*nomina vana*, Luc. 1.313) such as Cato, and these intratextual references highlight the nature of the victory the *devotio* will secure.

In using *umbra* (Luc. 1.135; 2.303) and *nomen* (Luc. 1.135; 2.303) to differentiate the cause he fights for from the general he fights under, Cato cements the idea “that not Pompey but *libertas* is the issue” (George, 1991, p.253) in his decision to enter the war. This highlighting of *libertas*, understood by senators of the republic as the “preservation of collective rule by the elite without domination by any one individual” (Oakley, 2009, p.185) works to diminish the importance of both rival warlords more generally by reframing the conflict as being fought not between the individuals of Pompey and Caesar but between the principles of republican freedom and autocratic subjection. Abstracting the war in this way allows Cato to identify the other force at play in the reduction of *libertas* to no more than an *inanis umbra*: the citizen body. Cato is adamant here that the citizens are just as culpable as their would-be overlords, as in abandoning the monarchy-defying models of their cultural heritage, icons such as Scaevola and the Decii that he himself has been so careful to evoke, the populace is now ‘willing to endure cruel despotism’ (*saeva volentes/regna pati*, Luc. 2.315) of autocratic rule. For Cato, the chaos of civil war the people are now engulfed by is exactly what ‘Roman morals have deserved to pay’ (*Romani meruerunt pendere mores*, Luc. 2.313) for their abject failure to maintain the standards of their distinguished forebears.

Cato’s wish that in death his ‘blood may rescue the people’ (*redimat sanguis populos*, Luc. 2.312), particularly with the connotations this has of being rescued ‘from slavery’ (*OLD* s.v. *redimo* 5b), shows that he wishes his sacrifice to be a demonstration of *libertas* and a method of illuminating exactly what it means to be a true Roman to his fellow citizens. In death Cato therefore hopes to resuscitate the spirit of *libertas* in as much as in living on as a symbol of the refusal to be subjugated to another’s domination his example will serve to bring “the ideal into tangible, living dimensions” (Ahl, 1976, p.251). The fact that as a symbol this ideal will be imperishable, with nothing to stop it living on into the age of monarchical rule, shows not just that Cato has “made the idealistic fight between liberty and tyranny possible”

(Bartsch, 1997, p.129), but also that his *devotio* will secure Roman victory along the lines of the Decii, as paradoxically, “victim is victor” (Henderson, 2010, p.437).

In being prepared to sacrifice his life to reanimate the idea of freedom, Cato displays a “philosophical understanding of *virtus* that is distinct from the social/military sense employed by Lucan’s other protagonists” (Catherine, 2015, p.346), and in his willingness to die ‘protecting laws and empty justice in vain’ (*frustra leges et inania iura tuentem*, Luc. 2.316), an understanding of the symbolic power this will achieve. Cato therefore reveals the true value of these ‘empty names’ (*nomina vana*, Luc. 1.313), and that Caesar, who had been so quick to ridicule them, “does not grasp the importance of the ideal and abstract as Cato does” (Ahl, 1976, p.252). So, Lucan gives us a courageous patriot defiant in defence of a distinctly Roman ideal which not only chimes with Horace’s sentiment from the previous century describing ‘everything in all the world subdued except the unyielding spirit Cato’ (*cuncta terrarum subacta/praeter atrocem animum Cato*, Hor. *Carm.* 2.1.23-24) but also testifies to the enduring power of the example in his own Neronian age.

So, although *Pharsalia*’s vision of societal and cosmic destruction indicates a poem which “seems to preach a philosophy of [...] nihilism” (Bartsch, 1997, p.91) and a work intent on allowing that “nihilism [...] to appear without qualification” (Sklenar, 2003, p.8), Cato’s desire for exemplarity counters such a despairing analysis of the text. Indeed, in seeking to become an eternal and immutable symbol of *libertas*, even as the republic which enshrined it is crushed forever, Lucan’s Cato imbues the idea of *libertas* with the status of a Platonic Form, allowing it to find a home among the other “absolute entities with an existence independent of our minds and out of reach of time or change” (Guthrie, 1967, p.90). This interpretation does not accuse Lucan of “sloppy philosophy” (O’Hara, 2007, p.21); we may admit that “Lucan’s poem is not a philosophical textbook or even a particularly rigorous analysis of different philosophical outlooks” (Fratantuono, 2012, p.158), yet this analysis

seems to fit nicely with Cicero's contemporary view that Cato's obdurate idealism prompted him to 'speak as if in Plato's republic not among the dregs of Romulus' (*dicit enim tamquam in Platonis πολιτεία, non tamquam in Romuli faece, Att. 2.1.8*).

5.2: Vulteius as Exemplum

Cato is not alone in his desire for exemplary status, as other characters in the poem show themselves just as eager "to provide an encapsulated memory [...] for the purpose of encouraging or discouraging similar behaviour in the future" (Thorne, 2012, p.369). Vastly outnumbered by the 'many thousand' (*tot milia*, Luc. 4.470; 513) Pompeians surrounding his trapped raft, Vulteius "then stages an exemplum" (Dinter, 2012, p.128) of courageous *virtus* in refusing to be cowed by insuperable odds. Initially, Vulteius' reaction to the Pompeian horde confronting him mirrors Cato's response to the fall of the republic; just like Cato, the Gaul reacts to a lost cause by 'demanding battles with no hope' (*poscit spe proelia nulla*, Luc. 4.467) of victory, and as he had with Cato, Lucan stresses the *virtus* of Vulteius and his comrades' conduct in this hopeless battle, as before night falls to interrupt the fighting 'courage caught off guard accomplished as much as it was able to' (*quantum deprensa valebat/effecit virtus*, Luc. 4.469-470).

However, in contrast to Cato's exemplum, Lucan makes it clear that Vulteius' attempt at exemplarity is a "paradigm of misdirected virtue" (Ahl, 1976, p.119) and so worthy of disdain rather than emulation. Vulteius' exemplarity is that of an uncompromising 'duty to military service' (*militiae pietas*, Luc. 4.499), and as such, it is marked by a fanatical devotion to his commander Caesar. The strength of this devotion is shown in Vulteius' acknowledgement that the *virtus* he demands will be displayed purely to gain Caesar's esteem, as 'great courage must be earned so that Caesar calls this a loss and ruin, with a few men lost among so many thousand' (*magna virtute merendum est/Caesar ut amissis inter tot*

milia paucis/hoc damnum clademque vocet, Luc. 4.512-514). So, for all the Gaul's battle prowess, his masculine *virtus* is corrupt; Vulteius' virility in serving Caesar is also his servility to one man rule, and his exemplum is therefore indicative of a fallen republic in which 'Caesar was everything' (*omnia Caesar erat*, Luc. 3.108), populated by an enervated Roman people who "[...] have no political voice any more, but then they do not need one, because everything is the same, one man rules everything, and choices are no longer a possibility" (Bartsch, 1997, p.61).

The power of Cato's exemplum is in large part derived from his cognisance; his dedication to and demonstration of *libertas* is made with the knowledge not only of the symbol he will provide for future generations, but also of the hostile universe his symbolic form will live on into, hence his contentment to 'let the heartless gods take Roman atonements in full' (*inmites Romana piacular divi plena/ferant*, Luc. 2. 304-305) by presiding over Rome tearing itself apart in civil war. Vulteius initially seems to have a similar degree of knowledge to enhance the didactic credentials of his exemplum; referring to the troops under his command as 'youth' (Luc. 4.476; 499; 533) or 'young man' (Luc. 4.521; 542; 557) rather than *miles* suggests his superior experience; in similar vein, Vulteius' use of Stoic maxims as he argues his men ought to commit suicide rather than surrender, that they should recall that 'a short life is left to nobody who has time to seek death for themselves' (*vita brevis nulli superest, qui tempus in illa/quaerendae sibi mortis habet*, Luc. 4.478-479), and 'should desire whatever is necessary' (*cupias quodcumque necesse est*, Luc. 4.487) show him "adept in appropriating the terms of conventional philosophical moralising" (Hill, 2004, p.220) which ostensibly enhances the intellectual authority underpinning the example he urges.

However, in contrast to Cato, Vulteius' example is defined by a lack of knowledge. Lucan's placement of *nescio* as the first word in the line of Vulteius' admission that 'I do not know, Fortune, what great and memorable example you are preparing with our deaths'

(*nescio quod nostris magnum et memorabile fatis/exemplum, Fortuna, paras*, Luc. 4.496-497) highlights the Gaul's uncertainty of what exactly his own exemplarity represents, and so his ignorance about any lesson it could impart. Worse, the immortality Vulteius insists his men's exemplary suicides can secure, which will ensure they take their rightful place among 'whatever records loyalty has preserved through the ages and duty with the sword to military service' (*quaecumque per aevum/exhibuit monimenta fides servataque ferro/militiae pietas*, Luc. 4.497-499) is shown by Lucan to be false. With the poet studiously avoiding mentioning any of Vulteius' companions by name, "if they are to stand as a monument, it can only commemorate the faceless, nameless dead" (Gorman, 2001, p.282) of the internecine war.

Cato's exemplum, with its demonstration that "freedom, if unattainable in life, is attainable in death" (Ahl, 1976, p.278), is no stranger to paradox. However, where the paradox inherent in Cato's example is made to preserve the Roman norm of *libertas*, even if only in conceptual form, Vulteius' exemplarity represents the precise opposite: the visceral embodiment of corrupted normative value. So, were Cato offers a transcendent example immune from the depredations of war, the 'the brothers attacking brothers and son father' (*fratribus incurrunt fratres natusque parenti*, Luc. 4.563) on Vulteius' raft produces only a "micro-image of the larger conflict in whose context this passage is set" (Dinter, 2012, p.128); a scene so corrosive to ethical norms that in their familial concern 'the one love was not to have attacked again with a strike' (*pietas ferientibus una/non repetisse fuit*, Luc. 4.565-566), a desperate tableau where "[...] *pietas* has been reduced [...] to mean you do not have to stab your father or son twice" (Fratantuono, 2012, p.162).

5.3: Scaeva as Exemplum

Lucan's description of Scaeva's desperate one-man resistance to the Pompeian army attempting to break the siege of Dyrrachium as 'a war and a man' (*bellum/atque virum*, Luc.

6.191-192) contending in battle is obviously hyperbolic. The statistics Caesar uses in his narrative of these same events also warrant scepticism; the four centurions who lost an eye and the 30,000 arrows shot into the Caesarian encampment might seem plausible enough, but the blows endured by the Scaeva of Caesar's account, so numerous that 'when the shield of the centurion Scaeva was brought back to him, 230 holes were found on it' (*scutoque ad eum relato Scaevae centurionis inventa sunt in eo foramina CCXXX*, Caes. BC. 3.53) suggests exaggeration. Notwithstanding such distortions, for his exploits at Dyrrachium "Scaeva was quickly established as a standard exemplum in Roman literature of military valour" (Hill, 2004, p.215).

The reference to 'surprised courage' (*depressa virtus*, Luc. 4.469-470; 6.168-169) to describe both Vulteius and Scaeva indicates that once again, Lucan seeks to problematise his character's attempt at exemplarity through contrasts with Cato's portrayal in book 2. So, although "the real or invented exemplum [...] teaches without explanation" (Walde, 2011, p.287), the word order in the description of Scaeva as a man 'who did not know how courage might be a great crime in civil war' (*qui nesciret, in armis/quam magnum virtus crimen civilibus esset*, Luc. 6.146-147) negates the positives of Scaeva's *virtus* by enclosing it in 'great crime', conveying his confusion regarding the attribute he thinks his example will provide and so his uselessness as a didactic paradigm. Moreover, just as with Vulteius, the ultimate source of this confused *virtus* and misguided exemplarity is Caesar.

So, where Cato exercises courageous and ethical *virtus* to prolong resistance to the incipient autocracy, Scaeva's courageous *virtus* is ultimately craven, displayed only to gain the autocrat's approval. Scaeva admits as much when stating that to buckle in terror at the Pompeians' overwhelming numbers would amount to letting Caesar down, as fearing the enemy is 'disloyal and unknown to all Caesar's troops' (*inpius et cunctis ignotus Caesaris armis*, Luc. 6.150). This same dependence on the autocrat is seen in Scaeva's statement that

he would prefer to be killed in the triumvir's presence as 'I would seek the shadows happier with Caesar watching' (*peterem felicior umbras/Caesaris in voltu*, Luc. 6.156-157) with his master having verified the *virtus* displayed by his creature. No matter how closely Scaeva's vow that 'I will fall with Pompey praising' (*Pompeio, laudante cadam*, Luc. 6.154) recalls Scaevola in displaying a *virtus* that even his enemy is forced to applaud, or how closely his opposition to overwhelming force echoes Horatius, "the great Roman model of lone resistance, and one of the fundamental figures of exemplary *virtus*" (Leigh, 1997, p.175), the Caesarian's defiance paradoxically testifies to his submission and shows a "perverted type of *virtus* expressed in Scaeva" (George, 1991, p.257). So, irrespective of how Scaeva's gruesome wounds, so extensive that it appears 'he alone meets so many wounds of the war' (*tot volnera belli/solus obit*, Luc. 6.204-205), quite literally illustrate Cato's wish that 'may I, intervening, receive the wounds of all the war' (*excipiam medius totius volnera belli*, Luc. 2.311), his debased exemplarity, in tandem with Vulteius', serve to enhance the nobility of Cato's principled stance.

5.4: Reception of Exempla

The problematic exempla of Vulteius and Scaeva also serve to condemn the 'degenerate people' (*degener populus*, Luc. 2.116) of Rome who respond to them so positively. Vulteius' insistence to his cornered raft-mates that 'it is blessed to die' (*felix esse mori*, Luc. 4.520) is met with the enthusiasm not just of the Caesarian troops under his command; the Gaul's unhinged resolve ensures that 'passion elevated all the excitable warriors' feelings' (*cunctas sustulit ardor/mobilium mentes iuvenum*, Luc. 4.520-521), but it is also approved of by the enemies their suicide aims to defy, with the Pompeian 'leaders admiring that a leader is worth so much to any man' (*ducibus mirantibus, ulli/esse ducem tanti*, Luc. 4.572-573). Scaeva's comrades are similarly 'admiring' (*mirantes*, Luc. 6.167) of his stance before he marches into

battle and effusively praise his grotesquely mutilated body when it returns, ‘and as if a god was enclosed in the pierced breast, they revere the living form of great courage’ (*ac velut inclusum perfosso in pectore numen/et vivam magnae speciem virtutis adorant*, Luc. 6.253-254).

These positive responses to the corrupted models of Scaeva and Vulteius show Lucan demonstrating that “societies [...] get the exempla they deserve” (Hill, 2004, p.232). The determination of Scaeva and Vulteius to face death rather than surrender to an enemy show both illustrate ‘how it is not difficult courage to escape slavery by the hand’ (*quam sit non ardua virtus/servitium fugisse manu*, Luc. 4. 576-577); however, in their slavish devotion to Caesar and his dictatorial ambition, both exempla are also emblematic of ‘freedom oppressed under cruel arms’ (*saevius libertas uritur armis*, Luc. 4.578) produced by figures who ‘do not know they have been given swords so that anyone might not be a slave’ (*ignorantque datos, ne quisquam serviat, enses*, Luc. 4.579). Their devotion to their cause gives them the power to defy overwhelming odds, but also “reflect a version of Cato’s most paradigmatic act: his suicide at Utica” (Mira Seo, 2011, p.200). Lucan therefore uses Scaeva and Vulteius as a way of “anticipating the one truly heroic moment of his epic, the scene that was never written but is always remembered, the suicide of Cato” (Gorman, 2001, p.284).

Chapter 6: Cato in Africa

The Pompeians’ reaction to the murder of their leader sees Lucan continuing to highlight the pitiful depths to which the Roman character has sunk, with Pompey’s supporters deserting their cause almost immediately after Cato finishes delivering his eulogy. The troops initially frame their reluctance to keep fighting in moral terms, alliteratively appealing to Cato’s *pietas* that he sanctions their surrender to Caesar to ‘allow us to revisit native gods and abandoned home and sweet children’ (*patrios permitte penates/desertam domum dulcesque revisere*

natos, Luc. 9.230-231) and pleading with him to ‘let our old age seek out just flames for itself’ (*iustas sibi nostra senectus/prospiciat flammās*, Luc. 9.234-235) through securing proper funerary rites which could only be guaranteed with the return to normality following the end of the war.

Considering Caesar ‘begrudges the fire of a funeral pyre’ (*invidet igne rogi*, Luc. 7.798) to the dead after Pharsalus, the reader may initially feel sympathetic to such requests. However, even if one acknowledges that “to a patriotic Roman of republican sentiments [...] submission to absolute rule was a lesser evil than war between citizens” (Syme, 1960, p.2), Lucan depicts the Pompeians’ attempts at justifying their surrender so negatively that there is little doubt that he intends their willingness to submit to be taken as “condemnation of slavish acquiescence to one-man rule” (O’Hara, 2007, p.133) rather than resignation to political necessity. The striking lack of republican sentiment among the Pompeians is evident in the cynicism with which they appeal to the constitutional norms of a “political system founded upon principles fundamentally opposed to monarchy” (Beard and Crawford, 2005, p.1) to legitimise the exact opposite: acceptance of Caesar’s nascent monarchical rule. The army’s casuistry represents the desire to yield to an autocrat as being granted permission to ‘seek the standards which the Roman consul possesses’ (*signa petamus/Romanus quae consul habet*, Luc. 9.250-251) and sees no irony in arguing that a republican as diehard as Cato should obey constitutional protocol and yield to the authority of Caesar’s magistracy.

The Pompeians’ attempts to console themselves with the fact that in surrendering to Caesar they will at least be capitulating to a fellow Roman is equally damning to their good standing. The men’s relief that ‘no foreign kingships await the conquered’ (*non barbara victos/regna manent*, Luc. 9.236-237) and ‘no Armenian or Scythian yoke threatens me with a cruel fate’ (*non Armenium mihi saeva minatur/aut Scythicum fortuna iugum*, Luc. 9.237-239) not only rejects the “abhorrence of monarchical government that epitomised Roman

republican ideology” (Spencer, 2002, p.xvi), but also relies on a chauvinism that is refuted by their very willingness to submit, a contradiction with which the poet conveys the fall of the republic as being “quite as much the result of a spiritual and moral breakdown in the Roman world as it is of military defeat at the hands of Caesar” (Ahl, 1974, p.568). Living ‘under the laws of a toga-clad citizen’ (*sub iura togati civis*, Luc. 9.239) may be consoling, but it does nothing to diminish the force of the narrator’s description of them as ‘desiring servitude’ (*indiga servitii*, Luc. 9.254), nor does it dilute Cato’s accusation that they are ‘unworthy men’ (*degeneres*, Luc. 9.268), ‘base servants’ (*famuli turpes*, Luc. 9.274) – slaves who are glad of their chains.

6.1: Mutinies

In reprimanding the mutinous troops Cato proves himself more than just “a magnetic leader of men” (Nutting, 1932, p.43) capable of bending others to his will. With Pompey’s exhortation to the republican army (2. 531-595), Caesar’s confrontation with his rebellious troops (5. 319-364), and Cato’s rebuke of the mutineers, the poet provides scenes in which the work’s three heroic paradigms are each faced with having to motivate recalcitrant subordinates; Lucan uses the implied comparison created by this parallelism to ensure that “it remains hard to reject fully the notion that Cato should be viewed positively as the hero of the epic” (Mira Seo, 2011, p.199).

Pompey’s speech aims to motivate the troops by focusing on the honour of their motive: *virtus* in its patriotic ethical sense. So, the general reminds his force that they are ‘a truly Roman company, not private citizens, to whom the senate has given arms’ (*vere Romana manus, quibus arma senatus/non privata dedit*, Luc. 2.532-533) and describes their fight in defence of the republic as an appropriately patriotic response to the fact that ‘Rome demands penalty and punishment’ (*Roma/supplicium poenamque petat*, Luc. 2.538-539) for Caesar’s

invasion of Italy. However, the men seem aware that Pompey's posturing is illusory, that he is in the words of Bartsch, "an easel holding up the pretty picture of liberty" (Bartsch, 1997, p.115), and his ineffective speech is met only with deafening silence: 'the leader's words are followed by no shout, no sides demand early trumpets for the promised fight' (*verba ducis nullo partes clamore secuntur/nec matura petunt promissae classica pugnae*, Luc. 2.596-597).

In contrast to his rival warlord, Caesar's oration is effective, his words cowing the unruly men to such an extent that when the general finishes speaking 'the sluggish rabble quaked under the cruel voice of the one threatening' (*tremuit saeva sub voce minantis/volgus iners*, Luc. 5.364-365) and the frightened troops immediately fall back into line. Caesar affects this change by rebuking the mutineers' lack of courageous *virtus*, a deficiency which entitles him to command them to 'leave the camp, hand over our standards to men, cowardly citizens' (*discedite castris/tradite nostra viris ignavi signa Quirites*, Luc. 5.357-358) and prophesy a near future when the mutineers will enviously witness the rewards obtained by the exercise of others' courageous *virtus*, a time when 'you will see our triumphs, Roman plebs, a despised crowd, old men by then, and with exhausted blood' (*vos despecta, senes, exhaustaque sanguine turba/cernetis nostros iam plebs Romana triumphos*, Luc. 5.333-334).

Cato's speech differs from the triumvirs' as it incorporates *virtus* in both its moral and courageous senses. In contrast to the uninspiringly descriptive appeal to republican forms with which Pompey limits his speech, Cato's address to the men exposes the real reasons they do not wish to fight and condemns these reasons as betrayals of ethical and courageous *virtus* – the qualities required of any republican hero. In emphasising the spirit rather than the letter of the republican constitution, and in lambasting his men for their cowardly failure to defend it, Cato's speech to the mutineers "delivers an allocution that converts them from Pompey's clientele to free men struggling to keep their *libertas*" (George, 1991, p.256). Moreover,

although Cato's speech is every bit as galvanising as Caesar's, the different ways they realise the same end proves itself fundamental to Cato's status as the poem's hero: "Cato draws men up to his own level; he invites them to emulate him; he ennobles them; Caesar reduces them to the level of minions" (Ahl, 1976, p.257).

Cato is not subtle in his criticism of the troops' betrayal of the courageous and ethical *virtus* which forms the bedrock of republican values, bluntly labelling it an inability 'to put up without a king' (*sine rege pati*, Luc. 9.262) and hammering home his premises with *quod* in anaphora. So, the army's slavishness is so total that it has come to resent its own independence and will not fight 'because you are not working towards monarchies' (*quod non in regna laboras*, Luc. 9.258); the force is so cravenly in thrall to a master that it withers under its new-found autonomy, seeking peace 'because you live and die for yourselves, not for the leaders' (*quod tibi, non ducibus, vivis morerisque*, Luc. 9.259); directionless automata without a master to dominate them, the men are reluctant to wage war 'because you obtain the world for nobody' (*quod orbem/adquiris nulli*, Luc. 9.259-260); pathetically and paradoxically, the republican troops are unnerved by security from danger and will not fight 'because it is now safe for you to conquer' (*quod iam tibi vincere tutum est*, Luc. 9.260). Cato's criticism sees the troops abandon their mutinous designs and accept that there are in fact 'greater things to be won than life and pardon' (*maiora mereri/quam vitam veniamque*, Luc. 9.275-276) – the *libertas* protected by the republic and its principles which they are now convinced to exercise courageous and ethical *virtus* in fighting for.

6.2: *Nefas* and Just War

Nefas "primarily [...] means anything that is not '*fas*', not right or not allowed, forbidden" (Thome, 1992, p.76) and regularly denotes offences against both divine and human law (*OLD* s.v. *nefas* 1, 2), hence the poet's descriptions of the civil war as a 'universal

wickedness’ (*commune nefas*, Luc. 1.6), the ‘greatest wickedness’ (*summum nefas*, Luc. 2.286) humans can have the misfortune to experience or be evil enough to instigate, and a conflict so inherently transgressive as to ensure that the only prize of victory can be that ‘every crime will be the victor’s’ (*omne nefas victoris erit*, Luc. 7.123). However, as a poet for whom “the notions of civil war and *nefas* appear to be closely related, almost synonymous” (Sanderson, 2021, p.101), Lucan is sure to describe the conflict in terms reflecting wider meanings of *nefas*. So, the beginning of the war is heralded by *nefas* in the sense of ‘unnatural event, portent, horror’ (*OLD* s.v. *nefas* 3), ‘births of creatures monstrous in number and size of limbs, infant terrified its own mother’ (*monstrosique hominum partus numeroque modoque/membrorum, matremque suos conterruit infans*, Luc. 1.562-563), Lucan articulating revulsion through the lines’ alliteration and deformity by the ungainly repetition of *que*; ‘civil horror is revealed’ (*deprensus est civile nefas*, Luc. 4.172) to the combatants at Ilerda as each side recognizes friends and family members among the enemy ranks, the battle itself represented as a ‘plague’ (*OLD* s.v. *nefas* 4b) resulting in ‘armies polluted with abominable slaughter’ (*polluta nefanda/agmina caede*, Luc. 4.259-260).

Cato’s transformative effect on this unwholesome environment is fundamental to his portrayal as the poem’s hero, as becomes clearer when we consider that “the ancient etymology of the word *nefas* from *fari* ‘to speak’ also conveys [...] the sense of ‘something that ought not to be spoken’” (Chaudhuri, 2012, p.223). The use of *nefas* in this sense is featured at the work’s outset, with the poet’s admission that attributing blame for the war’s outbreak to either of the triumvirs is not possible as it is ‘forbidden to know who put on arms more justly’ (*quis iustius induit arma/scire nefas*, Luc. 1.126-127). With his rebuke of the mutineers Cato alters the poem’s ethical landscape; ‘by Cato’s words endurance of a just war was impressed on the men’ (*voce Catonis/inculcata viris iusti patientia Martis*, Luc. 9.292-293) not only provides a “comment on the evil *patientia* of Caesar’s army” (Fantham, 1985,

p.126) whose ‘submissiveness surpassed the cruel leader’s hope’ (*vicit patientia saevi/spem ducis*, Luc. 5.369-370), but also paradoxically transforms a source of unspeakable moral horror into an action ‘performed in accordance with justice’ (*OLD* s.v. *iustus* 4). So, although Lucan’s work is “a poem in which the selection of any side in the civil war is regularly presented as *nefas*” (Bartsch, 1997, p.98), Cato’s quelling of the mutiny injects a moral dimension to the conflict, and in the penultimate book of the poem as we have it “the *bellum civile* is suddenly, shockingly, described as a ‘just war’” (Stover, 2008, p.576).

Cato begins his announcement to the troops that they will continue resistance and march through the Libyan desert by reasserting the honour of being motivated by the *libertas* that now unites and ennobles them; the preciousness of their new-found “freedom from the rule of a tyrant or faction” (Syme, 1960, p.155) put beyond doubt by his insistence that it is more valuable than life, as ‘one safety is pleasing to those following my standards – to die with an unconquered neck’ (*quibus una salus placuit mea signa secutis/indomita cervice mori*, Luc. 9.379-380). Cato’s use of *una salus* to express the paradox that death is safety echoes Aeneas’ words to the Trojans as their city falls: ‘let us die and run into the middle of the fighting; the one safety for the conquered is to hope for no safety’ (*moriatur et in media arma ruamus/una salus victis nullam sperare salutem*, *Aen.* 2.353-354). However, where Aeneas’ words constitute a “counsel of despair” (Tipping, 2011, p.230), Cato’s line replaces despondency with a bullish declaration of the republican standards of heroism his men are about to realise. So, for Cato the trek is a ‘hard route towards laws and love of falling country’ (*durum iter ad leges patriaeque ruentis amorem*, Luc. 9.385), and a patriotic display of ethical *virtus*, attempted by those with courageous *virtus*, men ‘thinking the severest things beautiful and Roman’ (*tristissima pulchrum/Romanumque putant*, Luc. 9.391-392).

6.3: Alexander

The spectacular conquests of Alexander the Great granted him an afterlife as “a rich source of excerpts and exempla” (Spencer, 2002, p.xix) for a Roman audience keen to analyse their own role as world-rulers through the prism of the Macedonian’s exploits; Lucan examines the poem’s three heroic paradigms in relation to Alexander, and in doing so clarifies Cato’s heroism. Lucan does not conceal his contempt for Alexander, labelling him a ‘lucky brigand’ (*felix praedo*, Luc. 10.21) and belittling his titanic status by presenting him as a troubled child ensconced by the protective patronymic which brackets his description as ‘the insane child of Pella’s Phillip’ (*Pellaei proles vaesana Philippi*, Luc. 10.20). The reason for the poet’s enmity is made explicit: the world-conqueror deserves scorn for producing a blueprint for successful autocracy, having ‘put forth an unprofitable example to the world – that so many lands could be under one man’ (*non utile mundo/editus exemplum, terras tot posse sub uno esse viro*, Luc. 10.25-28).

Lucan’s description of Alexander as ‘the world’s fatal evil and a thunderbolt which struck all peoples equally, and an unfavourable star to nations’ (*terrarum fatale malum fulmenque, quod omnes/percuteret pariter populos, et sidus iniquum/gentibus*, Luc. 10.34-36) strongly resembles the destructive celestial imagery given to Caesar at l. 151-157, but the poet’s criticisms of the Macedonian also incriminate Pompey, whose adoption of *Magnus* as cognomen so obviously sought to co-opt the conqueror’s aura and whose portraiture “deliberately cultivated an Alexander-style image, longish curling hair, and an upward tilt to the head” (Spencer, 2002, p.18). Therefore, in besting his rival for dominion Caesar is not more reprehensible than Pompey, only more successful, simply the most recent link in the chain of autocrats whose actions ensure “the human spirit and its need for reason and for freedom [...] suffer only a further fading, a constant, irreparable weakening that will at last issue in universal enslavement” (Johnson, 1987, p.132).

In making Cato's desert itinerary include the Libyan sanctuary of Ammon, Lucan echoes Alexander's exploits there (Arr. *Anab.* 3.3-5; Curt. 7.6-28) and so provides "an invitation for the reader to ponder the contrast between the two commanders-in-chief" (Maes, 2009, p.662), the broad "consensus in [...] favour" (Hamilton, 1988, p.447) of dating the *Historiae Alexandri Magni* to Claudius' reign suggesting Lucan would be familiar with Curtius' work. Curtius' Alexander, 'not content with the mortal eminence' (*haud contentus mortali fastigio*, Curt. 4.7.8) secured by his earthly dominance, consults the oracle seeking confirmation of his divine status; Lucan's Cato flatly refuses to engage with the prophetic shrine, scorning Labienus' urging that he 'ask what virtue is and demand a model of honesty' (*quare, quid est virtus, et posce exemplar honesti*, Luc. 9.563) and insisting that it is 'not oracles but certain death makes me sure' (*me non oracular certum/sed mors certa facit*, Luc. 9.582-583) that his behaviour is morally appropriate. Cato's repetition of *certus* as he rejects Ammon's oracular advice reveals more than his status as an "anti-Alexander, a virtuous leader who fights against monarchy on behalf of republican freedom" (Celotto, 2018, p.333), and contains more than an assertion of philosophical dogma from a practising Stoic convinced that "divinity [...] belongs to all the wise men who realise that they are part of the divine and universal *ratio*" (Celotto, 2018, p.348).

Unlike Alexander, Cato does not need external verification that he has transcended the limits of mortality, as he knows that death will make him sure in its sense of 'unambiguous, unmistakable, palpable, manifest' (*OLD* s.v. *certus* 9), and that in refusing to yield he will give life to an emblem so striking as to mark the "defeat of an attempt to destroy freedom as an ideal" (Ahl, 1976, p.324). This is the nature of Cato's heroism, the production of an example which will stand, not simply in opposition to Caesar as an individual autocrat, but to the very concept of autocracy itself, an eternal and immutable symbol which will serve to "condemn the very nature of the state Caesar has come to dominate" (Hill, 2004, p.226).

Conclusion:

Cato should therefore be considered *Pharsalia*'s hero, as in preserving *virtus* in its courageous and ethical senses within the poem's narrative and in his eternal afterlife as a symbol of *libertas*, he proves himself "the only character in the poem [...] who does not contribute to the annihilation of Rome, and of the entire world" (Celotto, 2022, p.100). However, as the poem's narrative and wider cosmology make abundantly clear, Rome and the world will inevitably be annihilated, identifying Cato as the work's hero is not quite to advocate a reading which "conveniently flattens the poem's ideology to a simple pro-Republican stance" (Walde, 2011, p.295). Rather, in providing a transcendent example immune to the disintegration which ravages all else, Cato's self-sacrifice to ensure the survival of the idea of *libertas* presents him as a martyr, "a kind of pagan Christ" (Thome, 1992, p.88), a stark reminder of what Roman civilisation once was, and without whose presence "the triumph of tyranny would already be complete and there would be no reason either to fight – or to write – the *bellum civile*" (Stover, 2008, p.576).

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