

“quis furor?”: Sympathetically Appraising the Reception of the *Aeneid*¹ in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*²

The history of Roman epic is a cycle of reception. Ennius first transmitted the hexameter of epic into Latin, dreaming that the soul of Homer had transmigrated into him³, yet it was Virgil who immortalised a half-*Odyssey*, half-*Iliad* exploring Roman national identity and the human condition – the *Aeneid*. In turn, Ovid produced an “anti-*Aeneid*”⁴ in the Callimachean mould – epic conceived as the amalgamation of individual, seemingly unconnected episodes. Yet, for the generation of “Silver” writers⁵ which followed them, commentary on Roman writers’ reception of their predecessors becomes far less charitable. The conventional explanation is that “Silver” writers, overburdened and deprived of inspiration by their superior “Golden” predecessors, were forced to turn to the absurd, grotesque, and hysterical to achieve innovative literary expression⁶. Or essentialist generalisations are sought: “Silver” writers simply wished to shock and entertain their audience in whatever cheap and macabre way they could, delighting in the rejection of their higher-minded “Golden” predecessors⁷. Yet such interpretations are both uncharitable and untrue. The purpose of this essay is therefore to take one work of the “Silver” Age of Latin Literature, the *Pharsalia*⁸ (an epic account of the civil war between Julius Caesar and the forces of the Senate in 49-45 BC) and show that its receptions of Virgil’s *Aeneid* are complex, engaged, and often ingenious. It goes without saying that the *Pharsalia*’s reception of the *Aeneid* is pervasive⁹: aside from belonging to epic, the genre which Virgil had re-defined and dominated¹⁰, the *Pharsalia* literalises the historical background which preceded Virgil’s age – the dissolution of the Republic and the beginnings of the Principate. In fact, if the *Aeneid* historicises the mythological – legitimizing Augustus and Rome by casting mythology as Roman protohistory – the *Pharsalia* mythologises the historical, imbuing historical events with the supernatural, absurd, and artificial. Thus, Lucan elevates Roman history into the fantastical and allegorical plane to which the *Aeneid* already belongs. Yet amidst Lucan’s homage to Virgil, the *Pharsalia* deconstructs, unravels contradictions, and probes the unexplored in the *Aeneid* – whilst simultaneously adapting to the new aesthetics of the Neronian age.

This becomes evident in Lucan’s choice of protagonists. That Lucan did not choose one hero for his narrative is not controversial by epic standards¹¹, but his protagonists (Caesar, Pompey, and Cato) are unusually one-dimensional and unsympathetic. Yet this is in fact a careful deconstruction and externalisation of Aeneas’ psyche in the *Aeneid*. In the *Pharsalia*, Pompey is a representation of all the emotional and *human* facets of Aeneas’ personality – for example, his ill-fated attachment and devotion to Dido and Creusa. In an amplification of this, Pompey is excessively weak and emotionally dependent – both on his glorious past and on the people around him, such as his wife, his foreign allies, and the Roman Senate. Hence Pompey is initially described as in I.135-143 as an aged oak

Throughout this essay, the translations [1] and [2] will be used, with one exception (*q.v.*):

1 David West, *Virgil: Aeneid*. London: Penguin, 1991

2 Susan H. Braund, *Civil War: A New Translation by Susan H. Braund*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

3 Peter Aicher, “Ennius’ Dream of Homer”, *The American Journal of Philology*, No.2 (Summer, 1989): pp. 227-232

4 Philip Hardie, “Ovid’s Theban History: The First ‘Anti- Aeneid’?” *Classical Quarterly* 40, No.1 (1990): pp. 224-235

5 Roughly 17 to 130 AD, see Nicholas G .L. Hammond and Howard H. Scullard, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970: p.5

6 See, for example, Eduard Fraenkel. “Lucan as the Transmitter of Ancient Pathos”, trans. Leofranc Holford-Stevens in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucan*, edited by Charles Tesoriero. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010: pp.15-45. This attitude is espoused even by those otherwise sympathetic to Lucan, such as Braund, *Civil War*: p. xvii

7 See, for example, Frederick M. Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1976: pp. 17-61; Roland Mayer, *Lucan: The Civil War VIII*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips: p. vii

8 See Braund, *Civil War*: p. xxxviii-xxxix on the naming of this epic. *Pharsalia*, *De Bello Ciuili*, and *bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos* are all plausible options. *Bellum Civile* is used by John G. W. Henderson, “Lucan/The Word at War”, in *The Imperial Muse: Ramus Essays on Roman Literature of the Empire* edited by Anthony J. Boyle. Bristol: Aureal Publications, 1988

9 For a detailed catalogue of the borrowings made by Lucan from Virgil, see Lynette Thompson and R. T. Bruère, “Lucan’s Use of Virgilian Reminiscence”, *Classical Philology* 63, No. 1 (Jan, 1968): pp. 1-21

10 Fraenkel. “Lucan as the Transmitter of Ancient Pathos”: pp. 19-20

11 Braund, *Civil War*: p. xx

“ready to fall beneath the first Eurus” – a subversion of Virgil’s metaphor (IV. 440-450) for Aeneas as an Alpine oak, “hardened over long years of life”, whilst he resists Dido’s pleas. Both metaphors allude to a hero facing potential emotional susceptibility – yet Pompey is weak enough to succumb. Meanwhile, Caesar’s savage bloodthirst and ambition in the *Pharsalia* is an extension of Aeneas’ military prowess and determined pursuit of destiny. Lucan therefore likens Caesar to a “thunderbolt, shot forth by the wind through the clouds” (I.151) – not only implying that he will strike Pompey’s “oak” down, but forming another careful allusion to the *Aeneid*. After all, in the *Aeneid*, Jupiter (the god of thunder) is the personification of unyielding Fate: it is he who sets out the future for Aeneas’ descendants, summons Mercury to call Aeneas away from Carthage, and finally convinces Juno to submit to destiny. But whereas the arc of Fate ordained by Jupiter in the *Aeneid* paves the glorious future of Rome, Lucan’s “thunderbolt” is unsympathetic in his cruelty. The reader and even Lucan himself are opposed to Caesar’s ascension, but it must happen anyway – highlighting the absoluteness of Fate in a stronger light. Finally, in the *Pharsalia* Aeneas’ self-denying *pietas* is twisted into the austere Stoic rigour of Cato. In the *Aeneid*, all of the above characteristics make up one complex heroic psyche – but, much as civil war is the fracturing of a whole nation, these characters are mere fragments of a complete personality. As a result, Cato, Caesar, and Pompey never resonate with the reader as genuine human beings. Instead, we are meant to watch the inner psychological conflict of Aeneas become externalized by Lucan – as these representations of heroic characteristics *physically* fight each other on the battlefield.

Such externalization of *internal* characteristics is part of Lucan’s preoccupation with the locus of inside and outside, a theme also evident in Virgil. In the *Aeneid*, the Trojans are outsiders yet somehow hold a greater claim for Italy as “home” than the Italians themselves. Similarly, the conquest of Troy makes every place both foreign land (“outside”) and potential home (“inside”) for the Trojans – as their brief settlement in Crete, Sicily, and even Carthage shows. Meanwhile, in the *Pharsalia*, the “conquest” of the city of Rome by Caesar takes the actual conflict – *between* Romans and *about* Rome – outside of Rome itself: to Egypt, to Thessaly, to Spain. Most powerful in this discourse on “inside” and “outside” in the *Pharsalia* is the fact that war is a phenomenon which is usually directed *outward*, at foreign enemies – not *within* the Roman state, like in the *Pharsalia*. Such subversiveness of civil war as a theme for Lucan’s epic should not be underestimated. In the *Pharsalia*, the Roman character has turned against itself – in its most chaotic, bloodthirsty, and illogical manifestation. It is an inversion of the very purpose of Roman epic – to celebrate Roman virtue and character (as opposed to Greek epic, which celebrates *human* virtue and character)¹² – a purpose exemplified through the *Aeneid*’s depiction of the founding saga of Rome. Lucan therefore relentlessly pursues a subversive dynamic of Rome in self-destruction: he is preoccupied with literary and semantic structures which imitate the process of civil war. Self-destruction and self-conflict occur within the body: for example, in Book V, the female priestess Phemonoe fiercely “frenzies” and “boils” against the divine male revelation seeking to use her as a passive oracular receptacle (V.120-236). This is a deliberate, violent contrast to Virgil’s unnamed Sibyl of Cumae in Book VI, whose own female identity is an enigmatic but irrelevant mix of mythological traditions¹³ – instantly erased by Apollo upon Aeneas’ arrival. Lucan also mimics the dynamics of civil war in language: Lucan’s repeated interest in paradox – such as “*legality* conferred upon *crime*” (I.2) or “the person who *denies* the warrior his due *surrenders everything*” (I.3506) – is an interest in meanings which dichotomously clash with one another. Even in the first line of the *Pharsalia*’s reference to “wars more than civil”, the “*super-superlative*” *more than civil* highlights the internal semantic conflict of describing “war” as “civil”: the Latin has the same connotations of “decorum” and “affability” as in English. Thus, the opening word of the *Pharsalia*

12 Fraenkel, “Lucan as the Transmitter of Ancient Pathos”: *passim*

13 Emily Gowers, “Virgil’s Sibyl and the ‘Many Mouths’ Cliché (Aen. 6.625-7)”, *Classical Quarterly* 55, No.1 (May, 2005): p. 170

(“wars”) is not simple homage to Virgil’s opening “arms”: it is an allusion meant to highlight Lucan’s radical re-interpretation of Virgil’s military theme.

But Lucan’s relentless obsession with violent inner conflict has often led to criticism for his monotony of tone and focus. The contrast between the openings of the Virgil and the *Aeneid* is a powerful example of this:

Bella per Emathios plus quam ciuilia campos
iusque datum sceleri canimus, populumque potentem
in sua uictrici conuersum uiscera dextra
cognatasque acies, et rupto foedere regni
certatum totis concussi uiribus orbis 5
in commune nefas, infestisque obuia signis
signa, pares aquilas et pila minantia pilis.

Pharsalia, I.1-7¹⁴

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram;
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem, 5
inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum,
Albanique patres, atque altae moenia Romae.

Aeneid, I. 1-7¹⁵

Virgil presents an array of clauses, all building up to the climax of *altae moenia Romae* (walls of high Rome), and each conjunction elegantly separates a different thematic concern: the destruction of Troy, arrival at Italy, the anger of Juno, etc. The “destination” of these opening sentences – the final line (“the Alban fathers, and the walls of high Rome”) – stretch out and allude to events which occur long after Book XII of the *Aeneid* has ended. Thus, in only seven lines, Virgil crafts a microcosm of the narrative of both the *Aeneid* and of broader Roman history. By contrast, the *Pharsalia*’s opening, also seven lines, consists of ten disjunct clauses, which Lucan simply uses to agitate the theme of civil war again and again. Furthermore, instead of Virgil’s “man” (which is also the first word of the

14 To accentuate elements of the original Latin (rather than emulate English idiom), here is my own translation of both excerpts:

Wars more than civil through Emathian plains
and legality given to wickedness I sing, and of a powerful people
who turned with its victorious right hand against its own entrails
and kindred battlelines, and, with the bond of rulership torn,
who struggled with all the might of the shaken world
towards common sin, and standards meeting hostile
standards, matched eagles and spears threatening spears.

15 Arms and the man I sing, who first from the shores of Troy
came to Italy, fated to be an exile, and to Lavinian
shores, he, hurled violently by land and sea
by the strength of the gods, by the unforgetting anger of savage Juno;
who also suffered many things and in war, until he founded his city,
brought his gods to Latium, from whence sprung the Latin race
and the Alban fathers, and the walls of high Rome.

Odyssey), we find “people”, and “city” in the *Aeneid* becomes “world” in the *Pharsalia*. The abstract individual concepts of “strength”, “anger”, and “suffered many things” become universal, shameful themes of “wickedness”, “bond of rulership torn” and “sin”. These magnifications of scale and reversal of tone are emblematic of Lucan’s desire to elevate Virgil’s subject matter to the pessimistically universal – but, as many critics have pointed out¹⁶, there are only so many ways one can express the universal disaster of civil war before it becomes tiringly violent and repetitive.

However, Lucan’s obsession with disorder is arguably a reception of the treatment of strife by poets such as Virgil. Virgil’s contemporaries were far more intimate with civil discord than their “Silver” successors: Virgil was twenty-six during the assassination of Julius Caesar, twenty-eight during the Battle of Philippi, and thirty-nine during the Battle of Actium. His *Eclogues* were written in at least a political background of land confiscations and proscriptions¹⁷. Fresh with this memory, Augustan works such as the *Aeneid* therefore frequently invoke, then brush aside the theme of strife in favour of a message of hope. In I. 294-296 of the *Aeneid*, Virgil spares some thought for *furor* (here meaning civil disorder) with his “murderous armour, roaring hideously from bloody mouth” – only for Jupiter to assert that it has been restrained “with a hundred bands of bronze”. Here, a “hundred” – a number overused throughout epic and mythology to denote “many”¹⁸ – is a reassuring cliché, asserting an end to future discord with platitudinal certainty. When Anchises marks out Pompey and Caesar in the Underworld, he vividly pictures “strong hands against the flesh of [one’s own] motherland” (VI.833) and then quickly rejects it, urging Aeneas (and his Roman audience) to be the “first to show clemency” (VI.834). Such optimistic avoidance (concealing a clear consciousness of civil discord) was reassuring for Augustan poets in the wake of strife, but became less relevant in the strength of the early Principate. With an altered literary context, the theme of Strife (*furor* – I.6 in the *Pharsalia*, also I.294 in the *Aeneid*) and a nation “attacking its own guts with victorious sword-hand” (I.3 in the *Pharsalia*, mirroring the metaphor of VI.834 of the *Aeneid* above) became a fascinating theme for “Silver” writers. Disorder was chronologically recent but emotionally unfamiliar; not fully expounded on by their predecessors; and therefore fertile ground for exploration. With the smug awareness that his age had progressed beyond what they were spectating, Lucan therefore examined disorder and widespread violence with such a consciously artificial purpose. He constantly re-iterates his violent themes in hysterical and exaggerated ways – since his purpose is only to add detachedly artificial entertainment and pathos to a novel literary theme. For example, deaths in the *Pharsalia* are consistently grotesque and absurd. In III.603-633, the hands of a Greek twin are cut off, he leaps in front of his brother’s shield to protect it with his bared chest, and then propels his mangled trunk under a Roman ship to sink it. Of course, deaths in the *Aeneid* are also saturated with artifice. The lengthy speeches in the battle scenes, and almost instantaneous death after a single blow, are realistically impossible – seeking to portray military heroism as dramatically and effectively as possible. But, as shown above, Lucan’s radical departure from Virgil’s use of artifice is a natural progression from the assumptions and omissions of the *Aeneid*, adapted to a new historical atmosphere.

A stylistic trait which has not been interpreted as a feature of “Silver” literary trends, however, is Lucan’s structure of the *Pharsalia*. The *Pharsalia*’s structure is highly fragmented, consisting of individual episodes, whirling between disjunct locations, characters and tone. This has

¹⁶ See [3] and [4]

¹⁷ Andrea Cucchiarelli, *A Commentary on Virgil's Eclogues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023

¹⁸ See, for example, *Aen* I.416, 634, 635, 705; II.501; III.106, 643, IV.199, 200; VI.43, 81, 287, 329, 625, 786; VII.93, 153, 170, 275, 539, 609, 658; IX.162; X.207, 565, 566; XI.331. For non-Virgilian uses, see Gowers, “Virgil’s Sibyl”

often been seen as a reception of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*¹⁹, but this is not a full explanation. The structure of the *Pharsalia* is meant to disorientate the reader; to jarringly contextualise each event against another; to cherry-pick the most dramatic ideas from each event. Therefore, Lucan disrupts his linear narrative of events to convey it as powerfully as possible. Meanwhile, Ovid has *no* direct linear narrative outside of the individual events of each episode in the *Metamorphoses*. Furthermore, Ovid's purpose for witty, tangential transitions between unconnected episodes is to add flamboyance and irreverence to his mock-epic – a completely different tonal purpose to Lucan's. Instead, far closer to Lucan's violent use of structure are the battle-scenes of the *Aeneid*, where Virgil recreates the chaos of war with dizzyingly rapid shifts of poetic focus. For example, in X. 605-688, Virgil vividly sketches five micro-scenes of varying *pathos* in only 83 lines. (On Olympus, magnanimous Jupiter attempts to placate Juno, while Juno petulantly rebuffs him; an uncanny apparition of Aeneas is sent down to earth; Turnus pursues it onto the riverbank with arrogant glee; back on the battlefield, Aeneas calls for Turnus' return; meanwhile, Turnus is trapped onto a ship, while his self-reproach and resistance prove vain. Afterwards, Virgil, pans back to Mezentius on the battlefield.) This violently frenetic pace for depicting military affairs was what Lucan was imitating, albeit on a greater scale. Book IV of the *Pharsalia*, for example, is composed of ten disjunct episodes²⁰ – spanning Europe and Africa, countless shifts in the fortunes of the Pompeians and Caesarians, as well as individual moments of *pathos* such as the mass suicide of Vulteius' men at sea. The *acceptability* of using the episodic structure on such a macro-scale may be Ovid's influence – but the disorientating *effect* which Lucan utilises this technique for arises from Virgil.

Equally nuanced is Lucan's treatment of the traditional epic pantheon of gods. In the *Aeneid*, the divine pantheon moulds the cosmos into a celestial family comedy, populated by recognisable archetypes such as the bitter stepmother Juno or the authoritative patriarch Jupiter. Thus, the immensity of the universe, its alternating cruelty and kindness – what West termed the “inscrutable splendour of the universe”²¹ – is explained and anthropomorphised in familiar terms. Lucan shuns such reassurance – preferring the concepts of cruel “fate” and fickle “fortune”. The former (Fate) is the immovable outcome of grand events, the latter (Fortune) consists of more minor incidents, which have no effect on the arc of history and are therefore subject to chance²². Both concepts are suitably impersonal for an epic pessimistically concerned with universal disorder and chaos. However, Lucan often does invoke the traditional Greco-Roman pantheon for functions which are less pertinent to Virgil. For example, deities play an implicit cultural role in the *Aeneid*: they create an orthodox cosmic order aligning with the Augustan programme of public morality and his reconstruction of national Roman identity²³. This role for the gods as *cultural anchors* is invoked by Lucan – if only to portray culture in *disorder* or other shocking contexts. For example, Lucan often establishes alien and unsettling exoticism by juxtaposing a familiar Greco-Roman god with a foreign environment. When the soldiers of Cato arrive in the hostile Libya, Lucan reinforces the sense of unfamiliarity by stating that, in the sandy deserts of the “Ethiopians and Arabs”, *their* Jupiter Ammon “never wields the lightning bolt”: this god is, strangely, a “pauper”. Similarly, the cult of “Diana of the Scythians” is repeatedly invoked for its reputed association with human sacrifice²⁴ – the archetypal emblem of perverse “barbarian” religion, except nestled uncomfortably alongside the name of a Greco-Roman

19 Berthe M. Marti, ‘La Structure de la Pharsale’, in *Lucain: sept exposés suivis de discussions* edited by Marcel Durry. Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1970: pp.1-50; Braund, *Civil War*: p. xxxix

20 Ibid. p.258-265

21 West, *Virgil: Aeneid*: p.xlii

22 Bernard F. Dick, “*Fatum* and *Fortuna* in Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*” *Classical Philology* 62, no.4 (October, 1967): pp. 235-42

23 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Roman Revolution and material culture”, in *La Révolution Romaine après Ronald Syme. Bilans et Perspectives* edited by A. Giovannini and B. Grange (Geneva: Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique): p. 295

24 Braund, *Civil War*: p. xxxi 232

god. Then, in VIII.831-834, Lucan denounces the degeneration of Roman people by alluding to their worship of “*your* [the Egyptian] Isis” and “half-divine gods”. This is (unintentionally) ironic when Lucan himself rejects the Romans gods’ existence – exclaiming “we lie when we say that Jupiter is King” during the Battle of Pharsalia (VII.446-447). Yet the gods now simply function as bywords for culture and morals – an extension of their implicit Virgilian function.

Apart from the Greco-Roman pantheon, the philosophy of Stoicism also pervades the *Pharsalia*. After all, Stoicism is the imposition of concerted human will over natural inclinations and external events – just as, in the literary realm, we have shown that Lucan often favours contrived artifice over the idealised naturalism of Homeric epic. Moreover, Lucan’s uncle was the Stoic Seneca the Younger, and the integration of Stoic philosophy allows Lucan to further dissect and subvert the norms of heroism as in the *Aeneid*. To state the obvious, heroic acts in epics such as the *Aeneid* strike us because they allude to a virtue and glory which rises above our own fears of death and suffering. The variously tragic, graphic, and desperate deaths of Camilla, Euryalus, and Turnus reinforce such mortal concerns in the *Aeneid*. As such, heroism in epic implicitly relies on the naturalistic idea that death is a source of distress and avoidance – to make the heroic *transcendence* of this fear powerful. However, in the *Pharsalia*, Lucan removes this existential assumption, and finds that this in fact amplifies heroism. As a textbook Stoic, Cato fears nothing which life or death can offer him, since he can take his death into his own hands at any moment²⁵. Therefore, he shows almost infinite capacity for courage, self-denial, and discipline – the *pietas* which falters occasionally even in Aeneas. For example, on the shores of Carthage Father Aeneas shares wine and his hunted deer equally with his comrades, with a “hero’s generosity” (I.184-197). In direct contrast, in Libya (V.500-510), Cato is so austere that he knocks away a helmet full of water offered to him when his men are also parched with thirst, so there was “enough for all” – in the wry sense that everyone is equal with nothing. Furthermore, if the *Pharsalia* was intended to end with the suicide of Cato at Utica, as Braund has convincingly posited²⁶, it would parallel the death of Turnus in the *Aeneid*. The crowning laurel of Aeneas’ military virtue – the slaughter of Turnus – would therefore be (subversively) amplified by Cato’s virtue in making the ultimate sacrifice of his own life. But the role of *sacrificee* is embodied more by Turnus, whose death provides closure for the Italo-Trojan war, whilst serving as a poignant closing reminder of the cost of war. Similarly, Cato’s suicide is presented by Lucan as the end of the Republican virtue and its opposition to dictatorship, whilst also serving as a final symbol for the burden of civil war. As Cato’s paradoxical parallel with *both* Aeneas and Turnus suggest, Lucan’s counter-intuitive Stoic formulations on mortality provide another avenue for him to challenge the *Aeneid*’s naturalistic paradigm of virtue, death, and self-sacrifice.

Contrasting Cato’s supreme masculine discipline and self-control, however, is the often-uncontrolled emotionality of women. In the *Aeneid*, women are used by Virgil as literary devices to amplify the pathos of their works in ways which are incompatible with heroic masculinity. For example, the complaints and ship-burning of the Trojan women in V.603-664 powerfully reinforces the *Aeneid*’s messaging on the sacrifice and suffering required in the founding of empire – but relies on “feminine” conceptions of irrationality and hysteria, which could not have been put in the hands and mouths of men. Similarly, the trio of ill-fated women associated with Aeneas – Creusa, Dido, and Lavinia – passively reflect the *Aeneid*’s theme of sacrifice in the name of imperial destiny. Creusa suffers death; Dido abandonment; Lavinia forced marriage – with the latter two being fundamentally “feminine” plights. However, with Lucan, his women (rather than echoing one broad theme, as in the *Aeneid*) embody the pathos of their masculine heroes in more diverse, explicit ways. In fact, Lucan

²⁵ Ibid: p.306

²⁶ Ibid: p. xxxviii

pairs each male protagonist with a woman who embodies their same defining trait and narrative. Caesar is captivated by the ambitious and ruthless Cleopatra; Pompey is accompanied by Cornelia, who is as emotional and dependent as him; Marcia's austere marriage to Cato in I.362-392, sexless and purely patriotic, is of the same mettle as Cato's own disciplined defence of Republican virtue. These *Pharsalian* women also have direct parallels with Aeneas' three partners. Cleopatra and Dido are both powerful North African queens (indeed, Virgil's Dido is an allusion to the historical Cleopatra); Cornelia's role in the *Pharsalia* is as attendant wife, just as Creusa is defined as mother to Ascanius and wife to Aeneas; Lavinia, like Marcia, marries for the sake of national good. Yet these parallels only serve to highlight the dramatic contrast between the women of the *Aeneid* – who serve as passive sacrifices in Aeneas' imperial destiny – and the more active role and diverse themes which Lucan's women represent: seducing in the name of usurping the throne (Cleopatra); serving as a sympathetic icon of Pompeian resistance after Pompey's death (Cornelia); approaching Cato with an offer of marriage (Marcia). Ultimately, however, Lucan does not drastically alter Virgil's philosophy of gender. Women in the *Pharsalia* still they all reinforce the *pathos* of their male counterparts in a way which allows both sexes conform to gender norms: it is almost comical that Cornelia swoons, without fail, in each of her scenes alone with Pompey, for example (V.761-815; VIII.86-108). Yet Lucan's women enjoy a slightly richer range of characterisation and thematic representation than Virgil's.

Altogether, the *Pharsalia* is more nuanced its reception of the *Aeneid* than we may be familiar with. The *Aeneid* has played an ecliptic role as cultural and political symbol of imperial Rome – even if Virgil's precise attitude to this and imperialism became questioned after the mid-twentieth century²⁷. This was true for Virgil's contemporaries, as when Propertius exclaims "Give way, Roman writers; give way, Greeks! Something greater than the Iliad is being born." (*Elegies* 2.34, 65-66), and, even in 1944, T. S. Eliot would hail the *Aeneid* as the "classic of all Europe... at the centre of European civilization, in a position which no other poet can share or usurp"²⁸. Yet what is unusual about Lucan is his seeming immunity to this *extra*-literary importance of the *Aeneid* as a "classic" or as a national symbol. Above all Lucan seems to see the Virgilian precedent as merely an influential form of *literary* representation. Lucan is intimately aware of the limitations and assumptions of Virgil as a *writer*, and confidently dissects, echoes, and amplifies them. Indeed, the clear perception of the *limitations* of literature manifests more explicitly in other works of "Silver" Literature. We find it in Tacitus' cynical innuendo ("mine is a narrow and inglorious task", *Annals* 4.32) or in Juvenal's contemptuous scorn ("if nature denies, scorn makes such verses as it can – such as I write", *Satire* 1.79 f.). Perhaps it is attributable to the intensive rhetorical education which these writers received, where students embodied unrealistically hyperbolic pathos and practised the constant reversal of rhetorical perspectives²⁹. We might wonder what role this education had in engineering awareness of the fundamental *malleability* of argument and pathos, of its often-meaningless nature, reduced only to the sheen of artifice. Thus, Lucan can cynically and confidently twist, as we have seen, everything as diverse as the *Aeneid's* characterisation of people; its conception of universal *pathos* and order; its approach to literary artifice. If the selected judgements of posterity are any measure of how successfully Lucan fulfilled this epic task, we should accompany Chaucer in the fourteenth century, as

27 See, for example, Adam Parry, "The Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*", *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 2, No.4 (Winter, 1963): pp. 66-80; Walter R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976: pp.1-22

28 T. S. Eliot, "What Is a Classic" in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* edited by Frank Kermode. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1975: p. 130

29 For a contemporary account of this, see Petronius, *Satyricon* I, cf. Tacitus, *Dialogus* 35. See also Stanley F. Bonner, "Lucan and the Declamation Schools". *The American Journal of Philology* 87, No.3 (July, 1966): pp. 257-289

he dreams of wandering the House of Fame. There, we will find the “great poet” Lucan – whose shoulders “bore [Chaucer] up” – now resting, immortal, upon a pillar of iron³⁰.

Word count (excluding footnotes): 3,997

30 Geoffrey Chaucer, *House of Fame*, trans. A. S. Kline, 2007: lines 1499-1500