

A Failure of Epic Proportions: The Insufficiency of Lucan's Pompey in Comparison to Hector

It is a truism to say that Lucan, in writing his *Bellum Civile*, draws on the *Iliad* for inspiration. Not only does Lucan acknowledge and clearly concur with Homer's candid estimation of war, but the figures who appear in the *Iliad* have a profound influence on Lucan's style of characterization. Lucan uses an "intertextual technique for constructing his characters," combining multiple mythological models into single characters as well as splitting single models across multiple characters (Baraz 2021). Lucan infuses his characters with allusions and comparisons to figures from myriad texts, playing on similarities and differences to draw greater significance from those characters. Traditional, well-attested connections exist between Caesar and Achilles and Pompey and Agamemnon, but Lucan's models are not quite as simple as they seem. Despite his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles' primary prey, the one whom he longs most to defeat and eventually lays low in battle, is not Agamemnon, but Hector. In fact, the way that Lucan draws significance from complicated parallels between Hector and Pompey provides considerable insight into Lucan's purposes for and characterization of Pompey. Pompey's victory at Dyrrachium resembles Hector's assault on the Achaean walls, with parallel similes emphasizing the heroes' great power (Christophorou 2017). The Trojan and Pompeian armies are similarly composed of multifarious races and nations, and in both cases, this composition is a great weakness (*Il.* 4.437-8, *BC* 7.56-7). Additionally, both heroes are full of fame before the start of their wars, and they both experience initial success, only to be eventually defeated. Perhaps the behavior of the weak, aging Pompey seems irreconcilable with the model of fierce, young Hector. Such differences, however, are precisely what makes the comparison so valuable, for it is by comparison with Hector that Pompey demonstrates the magnitude of his insufficiency.

Lucan's simile of the oak tree is modeled on a Homeric simile describing Hector, demonstrating that, while Pompey rivals Hector in greatness, he far surpasses his model in decay (*BC* 1.135-145, *Il.* 14.414-17). Lucan draws a connection between the two heroes, but changes key details to make the extent of Pompey's weakness clear. Lucan emphasizes this weakness by modeling Pompey's words to Cornelia in Book 5 on Hector's encounter with Andromache in Book 6. Hector and Pompey face the same choice between family and war, but Hector makes his choice without wavering, firmly rooting his identity in the glory of battle. Pompey, however, struggles to discover where his identity lies, wavering between the elegiac and the epic.

Pompey and Hector also both struggle for glory in spite of their fated defeats. Their parallel despairing prayers demonstrate that the two men are unaware of what Fortune has planned, or that they seek to change her (*Il.* 6.448, *BC* 7.657-8). Hector, however, eventually seeks glory within his fated death, while Pompey seeks that fame in defiance of it. They show similarities also in their deaths: both men receive gifts of untarnished dignity, despite their assailants' attempts to mar their appearances (*Il.* 188-91, *BC* 8.664-6). But Pompey's moment of retained glory is, at the very least, only aesthetic. He is ripped in two, and his shade receives no rest after his death, while Hector receives the honor due a hero. Lucan thus equates the fall of the Roman Republic with the fall of Troy but removes the beauty from the tragedy: for Lucan, there are no true heroes, and civil war is an ugly thing. Because of his insufficiency, Pompey's failure results in even more dire consequences than Hector's: in the latter case, although a mighty city falls, Rome rises from the ashes, under the leadership of a greater hero. In the former case, however, the Roman Republic can find no new state but an empire, no new leader but a tyrant.

Bibliography

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