

When the Troops Reluctantly Go Marching In: Exploring Caesar's Failed Martial Exhortations in
Book One of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

Speeches, whether given by characters or the narrator, comprise a significant percentage of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*; so much so that Quintilian remarked that Lucan serves as a better model for the orator than for the poet (*Inst. Or.* 10.1.90) and Bramble (in Kenney and Clausen, 1982) remarked that Lucan "refused to narrate." One speech type, the battle exhortation (*cohortatio*), recurs throughout the poem, as one might expect in an epic about a war. However, in contrast to the reader's expectations, Caesar's speeches often fail to incite the troops to fight. Instead, motivating speeches are delivered by relative unknowns. The inconsistency in the effectiveness of Caesar's speeches and the ability of lesser commanders to motivate the troops invert the earlier models of the *cohortatio* in Greek and Roman literature. This paper examines Caesar's battle exhortation and their efficacy in exciting the troops in Book One of the *Bellum Civile*. What makes Caesar's speech unpersuasive and the speech of his inferior, Laelius, persuasive?

Caesar's first battle exhortation in the *Bellum Civile* occurs at Ariminum, just after he crosses the Rubicon. His speech comes second in a group of three speeches (1.273-386). Curio addresses Caesar first, questioning Caesar's decision. Then Caesar, ignoring Curio, addresses his troops in order to move them to action. In response, the troops are *dubitum*; the speech does not achieve its goal. Directly addressing Caesar, Laelius delivers a rousing speech proclaiming the army's dedication to its leader. Laelius' speech excites the army and achieves what Caesar's speech could not. This speech in effect corrects Caesar by showing him the type of exhortation they really wanted. The failure on Caesar's part seems to stem from a disconnect with his troops. He attempts to motivate them with the incentive of avoiding punishment if Pompey wins and

also with the necessity of eliminating a wicked foe. However, Laelius' speech focuses primarily on fighting and obeying Caesar, regardless of the command. In addition to missing the mark on subject matter, Caesar does not structure his speech with any unity, jumping from one addressee to another and drawing on several exhortation styles but not following through on any of them.

In these speeches, Lucan has modified the earlier models of the battle exhortation (as outlined in Keitel, 1987 and Zoido, 2007) to match the chaos and deteriorated morals as Lucan presents them (Sklenar, 2003; Johnson, 1987). Additionally, the inconsistent style of Caesar's exhortation and the variability in his ability to effectively motivate his troops shows a disconnect between the general and the troops and may also point to difficulties in defining the role of rhetoric when the structure of the government is in flux.

Bibliography

Iglesias Zoido, Juan Carlos. "The Battle Exhortation in Ancient Rhetoric." *Rhetorica*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2007), pp.141-158.

Johnson, Walter Ralph. *Momentary Monsters: Lucan and his Heroes*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Keitel, Elizabeth. "Homeric Antecedents to the 'cohortatio' in the Ancient Historians." *The Classical World*, Vol. 80, No. 3 (1987), pp. 153-172.

Kenney, E. J. and W. V. Clausen (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, Vol. II: Latin Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Sklenar, Robert. *The Taste for Nothingness: a study of virtus and related themes in Lucan's Bellum Civile*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.