

## The Speech is the Thing: Failed Battle Exhortations in Sallust, Curtius, and Lucan

The battle exhortation is a common preamble to many battle accounts in Latin literature (Yellin 2008, 12-13). These speeches often follow a relatively standard formula. A commander stands in front of his soldiers, reminds them what they are fighting for and the advantages they have, insults or disparages the opposing side, and provides *exempla* that the soldiers can use for imitation and encouragement. Upon the exhortation's conclusion, the troops are ideally roused, excited, and eager to fight. The exhortation is therefore an opportunity for a commander to display his leadership abilities. Those who can successfully urge on their soldiers also obtain success on the battlefield and, ultimately, success as a commander. As a reflection of skill, Latin authors also used the battle exhortation in their narratives as a rhetorical tool to demonstrate an individual's capabilities (see for example, Caes. *B Gall.* 1.39; Sall. *Cat.* 59-60; Tac. *Agr.* 33-35). On the other hand, unsuccessful battle exhortations or deviations from the traditional formula could signal deficiencies and foreshadow defeat. In this paper, I examine three literary accounts in which military leaders deliver unorthodox or unsuccessful battle exhortations: Catiline's speech before the final battle in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, Darius' exhortation before losing Persepolis in Quintus Curtius Rufus' *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, and Pompey's speech prior to Pharsalus in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. In all of these instances, the commanders loosely follow the regular pattern for battle exhortations but deviate from tradition at key moments. I argue that Sallust, Curtius, and Lucan interject these deviations to signal personality and leadership flaws in their characters.

For example, Catiline begins his speech by seemingly negating the purpose of an exhortation, claiming, "words do not implant *virtus*" (*verba virtutem non addere*, Sall. *Cat.* 58.1). Regardless of this statement, he continues on and attempts to do just that. Yet, rather than

promoting the courage and spirit of his troops as he should, he states that their “spirit, age, and courage urges” him on (*animus, aetas, virtus vostra me hortantur*, 58.19), thus reversing the typical function of the speech. Darius, on the other hand, incorrectly uses *exempla* in his exhortation, reminding his listeners of their flight and failures, rather than successes that they might imitate (*bis me victum, bis fugientum persecuti estis*, Curt. 5.9.8). Pompey’s speech is problematic as well. Although he begins following many of the traditional patterns, he concludes his speech with an image of himself and his wife “groveling at the feet” of the soldiers (*volverer ante pedes*, Luc. 7.379), thus appealing to the troops’ pity and preparing them to die rather than fight (*placuitque mori*, 7.384).

In each of these accounts, authors compose battle exhortations to reveal character flaws in their subjects. Exhortations are a regular and fairly standard occurrence in war, one that every successful and experienced commander should be able to deliver. It is therefore significant when they are executed incorrectly. By deviating slightly from the traditional formula, Sallust, Curtius, and Lucan hint at the speaker’s larger inadequacies, foreshadow their eventual failure, and ultimately provide their own authorial commentary on the causes of those failures.

#### Bibliography

Yellin, Keith. *Battle Exhortations: The Rhetoric of Combat Leadership*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press. 2008.