

## ‘STAT MAGNI NOMINIS UMBRA.’ LUCAN ON THE GREATNESS OF POMPEIUS MAGNUS\*

At the age of twenty-five, Gn. Pompeius acquired the spectacular *cognomen* of Magnus. According to Plutarch (*Pomp.* 13), the name came either from the acclamation of his army in Africa, or at the instigation of Sulla. According to Livy, the practice began from the toadying of Pompeius’ circle (‘ab adsentatione familiari’, 30.45.6). The *cognomen* invited play. At the Ludi Apollinares of July 59, Cicero tells us, the actor Diphilus won ‘a dozen *encores*’ when he pronounced, from a lost tragedy, the line ‘nostra miseria tu es magnus’.<sup>1</sup> Four or five years later Catullus scored a fine hit, filching Pompeius’ *cognomen* and giving it to his zealously competitive father-in-law: ‘Caesaris uisens monumenta *magni*’ (11.10). In Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* such plays on the *cognomen* are elevated into something of considerable power, testifying to a consistent controlling design, of the sort which many still deny the poem.

When Pompeius first appears he is compared with Caesar, to his detriment: ‘nec coiere pares’ (1.129). So much for Pompeius’ vaunted intolerance of an equal, of which we have just been reminded: ‘nec quemquam iam ferre potest Caesarue priorem | Pompeiusue parem’ (125f.).<sup>2</sup> Many of the images in this introductory section have a programmatic power, and will recur. With ‘nec coiere pares’ Lucan presents the two as an ill-matched pair of gladiators. The metaphor is ubiquitous. Note, in particular, 5.1–3, and 6.3, ‘parque suum uidere dei’.<sup>3</sup> We are further told that Pompeius seeks ‘fama’, is a ‘popularis’, indulges the people, basks in the applause he receives from the mob in his theatre: ‘famaeque petitor | multa dare in uolgus, totus popularibus auris | impelli plausuque sui gaudere theatri’ (131–3). We will return later to this complex of ideas.

The crucial conceit comes next, when Lucan tells us that Pompeius is a paper tiger: ‘stat magni nominis umbra’ (135). He is ‘the shadow of a great name’. ‘“Name” in the sense of “reputation”’, observes Getty.<sup>4</sup> Certainly; but, of course, his name is ‘Magnus’, so that he is the shadow of his own name. In a reversal of the *nomen/omen* figure,<sup>5</sup> Pompeius’ destiny is no longer embodied in his name, as it once had been. The allusions are picked up shortly afterwards, when Lucan says of Caesar, ‘sed non in Caesare tantum | nomen erat’ (143f.). Getty feels compelled to choose between taking ‘tantum’ as an adverb or an adjective, between translating, in other words, ‘Caesar had more than a mere name’, or ‘Caesar did not have such a great name’. Yet both interpretations are felt. Caesar did not have a name as ‘magnum’ as ‘Magnus’, nor was a name from the past all he had to rely on. And history works further tricks for the poet: for Lucan’s audience, the greatest name in the world was – Caesar.

Pompeius’ name of ‘Magnus’ is an anachronism, a reproach, a promise which he

\* I am most grateful to Dr S. E. Hinds for his criticism and comments.

<sup>1</sup> *Att.* 2.19.3. The ‘dozen *encores*’ are from Shackleton Bailey’s translation. I thank Dr J. R. Patterson for the reference.

<sup>2</sup> Getty collects examples of this formulation in his note on 125, ed. *De Bello Ciuili Liber 1* (Cambridge, 1940).

<sup>3</sup> See here Frederick M. Ahl, *Lucan. An Introduction* (Cornell U.P., 1976), 82–115, esp. 86f.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary (n. 2), ad loc.

<sup>5</sup> On this figure, see Pease on Cic. *Div.* 1.102; Riess, *RE* 18.376ff.

has outlived and can no longer fulfil. Many are deceived (not least Pompeius himself). At the beginning of Book 5, the consul Lentulus Crus urges the Senate 'Magnum... iubete|esse ducem', 'order Magnus to be your leader' (46f.). The reader, with hindsight to guide him, will also detect a doomed promise: 'order your leader to be great'. It is the illusory and insubstantial *nomen* to which the Senators react: 'laeto nomen clamore senatus|excipit' (47f.). Pompeius' case is the same as that of Athens, described half-disparagingly in the list of towns which immediately follows: 'fama ueteres laudantur Athenae' (52).<sup>6</sup>

By 49 B.C., inactive as a *dux* for fourteen years, Pompeius Magnus has his pretensions as another Alexander the Great exposed as a thing of the past.<sup>7</sup> And yet, in a finely judged movement, Lucan transforms the values by which he is to be assessed, and reveals to us a process by which Pompeius does live up to his name, becoming in fact 'magnus', outstripping the petty associations of popular 'fama', and achieving a 'nomen' which is no mere 'umbra'.

The gradual process begins with Pompeius' total defeat at Pharsalus. Now at last it is possible for him to begin to emancipate himself from his past:

iam pondere fati  
deposito securus abis: nunc tempora laeta  
respexisse uacat, spes numquam implenda recessit;  
quid fueris nunc scire licet (7.686–9).

Especially, once Pompeius' part in the civil war is over, he is no longer tainted with the title of 'dux factionis', his 'nomen' is no longer at the head of one party, and a new pair of contestants emerges: from now on, the issue in the fighting, says Lucan,

non iam Pompei nomen populare per orbem  
nec studium belli, sed par quod semper habemus,  
libertas et Caesar, erit (694–6).<sup>8</sup>

Pompeius retires to Larisa, 'scilicet *immenso* superest ex *nomine* multum', observes the poet, with irony, and pathos (717). The laments and tears of the people of Larisa form his escort as he sets out; thereby, for the first time, only in defeat, Pompeius receives true proof and 'enjoyment' of the popularity he had long courted: 'nunc tibi uera fides quaesiti, Magne, fauoris|contigit ac fructus' (726f.).

The narrator can see the implications of Pompeius' defeat, but the character has not yet achieved that perspective, and is still dogged by his name, still a victim of its delusion. At the beginning of Book 8, in flight, 'cunctis ignotus gentibus esse|mallet et obscuro tutus transire per urbes|nomine' (19–21). Later in the book, he speaks to his remaining companions, still hoping for a recovery, keeping his faith in his name:

sed me uel sola tueri  
fama potest rerum toto quas gessimus orbe  
et nomen quod mundus amat (274–6).

He is living in the past, and dreams of going East:

quas magis in terras nostrum felicibus actis  
nomen abit, aut unde redi maiore triumpho? (320f.).

<sup>6</sup> Athens is a long-standing target for such gibes. Compare the words of Livy (taken from Polybius, as J. Briscoe notes in his commentary on Livy 31–33 [Oxford, 1973]): 'contraxerant autem sibi cum Philippo bellum Athenienses haudquaquam digna causa, dum ex uetere fortuna nihil praeter animos seruant', 31.14.6.

<sup>7</sup> The true Alexander in the poem is of course Caesar: cf. M. P. O. Morford, *The Poet Lucan. Studies in Rhetorical Epic* (Oxford, 1967), Ch. 2, pp. 13–19.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Otto Steen Due, *C & M* 22 (1962), 111ff.

Lentulus dissuades him, and advises him to go to Ptolemy. Yes, he is a king, says Lentulus, but there is no need to fear that empty title. For the reader who remembers Pompeius' first appearance, the words which express this conceit are crammed with irony: 'quis nominis umbram | horreat?' (449f.).<sup>9</sup> Who indeed? Not Ptolemy. Barely one hundred lines later, the murder is planned, and Lucan asks, 'tanti, Ptolemaee, ruinam | nominis haud metuis...?' (551f.).

It is only at the moment of death that Pompeius perceives, and begins to achieve, his true 'fama', outgrowing his past and his hunt for a misconceived 'fama'. As he sees the sword,

lumina pressit  
continuitque animam, nequas effundere uoces  
uellet et aeternam fletu corrumpere famam (615–17).

He addresses himself: 'nunc consule famae' (624). Dogmatic interpretations of Pompeius as a Stoic 'proficiens' are awry,<sup>10</sup> but it is none the less true that his claim to genuine 'fama' is validated by his acceptance of an attitude to death which corresponds to the values asserted by the narrator. At the beginning of this book Lucan had sketched out an ideal for Pompeius to aim at in his attitude to death, and one of the questions of the murder-narrative is whether he can attain it: 'quisquamne secundis | tradere se fatis audet nisi morte parata?' (31f.). Death provides Pompeius with a true perspective for his life:

spargant lacerentque licebit,  
sum tamen, o superi, felix, nullique potestas  
hoc auferre deo. mutantur prospera uita,  
non fit morte miser (629–32).

The greatness of Pompeius Magnus is vindicated in his death.<sup>11</sup> His quaestor Cordus, beside the makeshift pyre he has constructed, addresses him thus: 'o maxime...ductor' (8.759f.). The man first introduced as 'famae petitor' (1.131) gains rather than loses 'fama' with his conventionally inglorious death and burial: 'nil ista nocebunt | fama busta tuae' (8.858f.).<sup>12</sup> As so often, Caesar is a foil. In the mighty storm of Book 5, Caesar contemplates suffering the same physical fate as comes to Pompeius, but in his ignorance and egoism lays hold of a brutal and self-obsessed perspective:

mihi funere nullo  
est opus, o superi: lacerum retinete cadauer  
fluctibus in mediis, desint mihi busta rogosque,  
dum metuar semper terraque expecter ab omni (668–71).

Note how Lucan, so characteristically, refers back to these words when he describes Cordus rescuing Pompeius' corpse from the waves:

<sup>9</sup> The words also convey the notion that Ptolemy is the shadow, not of his *own* name, as is Pompeius, but of his ancestors' great name.

<sup>10</sup> Pompeius as a 'proficiens' made his appearance in Berthe M. Marti, 'The meaning of the *Pharsalia*', *AJPh* 66 (1945), 352–76. The idea is conclusively dealt with by A. W. Lintott, *CQ* 21 (1971), 504f. Discussion continues: see W. Rutz, *Lustrum* 26 (1984), 164ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Lintott, 502. Lintott rightly stresses the fact that it is Pompeius' death, not his defeat as such, which provides his amelioration (501).

<sup>12</sup> Lucan's reversals here produce the paradoxes remarked upon by R. Mayer, ed. *Lucan. Civil War VIII* (Aris and Philips, 1981), 185: 'At one moment Pompey's tomb is a disgrace, at the next a glory; now an object of pilgrimage, now lost to sight'.

ille per umbras  
 ausus ferre gradum uictum pietate timorem  
 compulit ut mediis quaesitum corpus in undis  
 duceret ad terram traheretque in litora Magnum (8.717–20).

Caesar was happy for his corpse to float at sea so long as he was feared; Pompeius' corpse does float at sea, but it is rescued, in a bold usage, by somebody's 'fear', a fear that has been conquered by 'pietas'.<sup>13</sup> Again, after Cordus has addressed Pompeius as 'maxime', we must relish the irony when Caesar is subsequently hailed with the same word: by a 'satelles' of Ptolemy (9.1014; two lines earlier, this man 'colla gerit Magni'); and – worse – by Cleopatra (10.85).

Lucan reserves for the ninth book his final transformations of the aura of failure and inadequacy which had controlled the first image of Pompeius.<sup>14</sup> 'Stat magni nominis umbra', we read there; but in the second line of this book, Pompeius is 'tanta umbra'. The conceit thus alluded to is not fully deployed until Cato's encomium later in the book, where we see that only as an 'umbra' does Pompeius achieve true 'nomen'. As Cato begins his speech, it appears at first that his appreciation of Pompeius may not be altogether favourable, for he describes him as 'maioribus inpar' (190). 'Magnus' is not a match (that image again) for 'those who are greater'. But Pompeius receives his due. To Cato, he is 'clarum et uenerabile nomen' (202). As Cato ends, Lucan reminds us, for the last time, of his first picture of Pompeius, as one misguidedly seeking popular fame, a shadow of what his name dictates he should be:

uocibus his maior, quam si Romana sonarent  
 rostra ducis laudes, generosam uenit ad umbram  
 mortis honos (215–17).

The 'umbra' is 'generosa': the qualities which Cato salutes are not those which the living man had thought to be his claim to greatness, but rather qualities which are – strictly – innate:

o felix, cui summa dies fuit obuia uicto  
 et cui quaerendos Pharium scelus obtulit enses...  
 scire mori sors prima uiris, set proxima cogi (208–11).

It matters a good deal that this final validation comes from the mouth of Cato. He understands at the beginning what Pompeius represents at the beginning, and in his speech to Brutus in Book 2 makes it plain that Pompeius is after mastery (320–2). In this speech, Lucan gives him words which chime in with the range of imagery we have been discussing. As Cato announces that he will join Pompeius despite his misgivings, he says, 'tuum... | nomen, Libertas, et inanem persequar umbram' (303). The 'umbra' is that of Libertas here, naturally; but any reader who paused, hesitating whether to attribute it to Pompeius, will be gratified to read, not twenty lines later, 'quin publica signa ducemque | Pompeium sequimur?' (319f.). Pompeius is the played-out leader of a played-out cause: he and Libertas are both 'umbrae', 'nomina'. In his encomium in Book 9, Cato acknowledges that the death of the one is the death of the other (204–6).

<sup>13</sup> The first man to honour Pompeius after his death is motivated by 'pietas', which was the Pompeians' battle-cry at Munda; Pompeius' younger son took the *cognomen* of 'pius' (cf. R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* [Oxford, 1939], 157). Another play on this fact at 9.147, where this son is 'iusta... furens pietate'.

<sup>14</sup> It is not, then, as commonly asserted, a matter of 'Lucan's increasingly pro-Pompeian attitude' (so put by Vivian L. Holliday, *Pompey in Cicero's Correspondence and Lucan's Civil War* [The Hague, 1969], 55); see here Due (n. 7), 106.

Cato likewise understands after Pompeius' death what was signified by that death, for Pompeius, as a man. Yet he is superior to Pompeius in being able to *live* in the light of that knowledge, self-sufficient, free of the fears of death and ignominy, free from superficial assessments of achievement. Lucan discloses this truth in Book 9, when he compares Cato's 'uirtus' and 'nomen' to that of the 'maiores', and of Pompeius himself:

si ueris *magna* paratur  
fama bonis et si successu nuda remoto  
inspicitur uirtus, quidquid laudamus in ullo  
*maiorum*, fortuna fuit. quis Marte secundo,  
quis *tantum* meruit populorum sanguine *nomen*?  
hunc ego per Syrtes Libyaeque extrema triumphum  
ducere maluerim, quam ter Capitolia curru  
scandere *Pompei*, quam frangere colla Iugurthae (593–600).

Yet Cato had never conducted a triumph, to experience the temptations to delusion open to Pompeius. Pompeius' final victory over himself is by so much the more impressive. Emancipating himself from the illusory greatness of his past, Pompeius achieves true greatness by and in death.<sup>15</sup>

*University of Edinburgh*

D. C. FEENEY

<sup>15</sup> It is very likely, as Professor M. D. Reeve suggests to me, that Lucan got at least the germ of his presentation from the writings and conversation of his uncle. Seneca has one or two comparatively straightforward plays on Pompeius' *cognomen*: note *Cons. Marc.* 14.3, 'Cn. Pompeius non aequo laturus animo quemquam alium esse in re publica magnum'; cf. *Ben.* 4.30.2, 'unius uiri magnitudo tanta quondam'. But there is a highly suggestive sequence of allusions in one of the *Epistles*, where Seneca exposes the hollowness of Pompeius' grand title: 'Ne Gnaeo quidem Pompeio externa bella ac domestica uirtus aut ratio suadebat, sed insanus amor magnitudinis falsae...quid illum in Africam, quid in septentrionem...traxit? infinita scilicet cupido crescendi, cum sibi uni parum magnus uideretur', 94.64f.