THREE NOTES ON LUCAN VI 1)

BY

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1. Sextus the anti-Stoic

That Lucan was profoundly influenced by Stoicism needs no illustration. It is, however, interesting to observe that even so minor a figure as Sextus Pompey, who in Book 6 is made to consult the witch Erictho about the outcome of the battle of Pharsalus, is characterized, at any rate to some extent, in terms of Stoic values. This is, I think, already apparent from the words with which Sextus is introduced into the episode (417-20) 2):

degeneres trepident animi peioraque versant;
ad dubios pauci praeumpto robore casus
spemque metumque ferunt. turbae sed mixtus inerti
Sextus erat.

The meaning of lines 417-9 seems to be that, while the degeneres simply despair, others, the minority, derive courage from the uncertainty of the future, at the same time hoping for victory and fearing defeat. Duff takes ad dubios casus with praeumpto: 'a few, fortifying themselves beforehand for the uncertain issue, felt hope as well as fear'. A clearer sense is assigned to ferunt (= 'bring') if ad dubios casus goes closely with the verb; thus Bourgéry-

1) This article derives from my thesis Material for a Reading of Lucan, De Bello Civili, Book 6, 413-759 (Bodleian MS. B. Phil. C. 23), University of Oxford, 1974. I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor R. G. M. Nisbet, for his help and encouragement. I am also grateful to Dr. J. H. Brouwers for a number of valuable suggestions.

Ponchont translate ‘opposer à l’incertitude des événements l’espoir et la crainte’ 3). There seems here a hint of the Stoic idea that man should be prepared for every eventuality, even the worst 4); cf. Cic. Off. i, 81 ante constituere quid accidere possit in utramque partem; Hor. C. 2, io 5). As so often Seneca supplies the most instructive analogy. In a letter to Lucilius (104, 12) he remarks: Horum nihil cogitabis nec remedia vulneribus oppones, sed ipse tibi seres sollicitudinum causas alia sperando, alia desperando? Si sapis, alterum alteri misce: nec speraveris sine desperacione nec desperaveris sine spe 6). Sextus in other words belongs to the unstoical many, not to the Stoic few.

If there is a hint of Stoic doctrine behind these lines it is only a hint. Lucan, however, makes more obvious use of Stoic belief as a standard of reference in the interchange between Sextus and Erictho (589 sq.). Sextus’ speech skilfully establishes him as an anti-Stoic, or at any rate a man wholly lacking the Stoic virtues 7). His opening address is deferential (590-3):

o decus Haemonidum, populis quae pandere fata
quaeque suo ventura potes devertere cursu,
te precor ut certum liceat mihi noscere finem
quem belli fortuna paret.

There may be a hint of religious language in his words, viz. decus (cf. Hor. C.S. 2; Lucr. 3, 3), the two appositional clauses quae...

3) Another possibility, suggested to me by Mr. J. D. P. Bolton, is that ferunt might here have the sense ‘endure’, ‘put up with’ (cf. e.g. 1, 125): ‘a few, forearming themselves against the uncertain future, bore hope and fear with equal patience (que ... que)’. Certainly (in his words) ‘it would be much in Lucan’s manner to depict hope as a cross to be borne like fear’. However, in view of Luc. 2, 15 (liceat sperare timenti) and Sen. Ep. 104, 12, I still slightly prefer the rendering of Bourgéry-Ponchont.
4) The Cynics held the same view: cf. Diog. Laert. 6, 63 τὸ γοῦν πρὸς πᾶσαν τύχην παρεπαξενάθαι.
5) Cf. infra on 596-7.
6) I owe this reference to Mr. J. D. P. Bolton.
7) Ignava in 589 deftly deflates the pompous epic periphrasis; cf. e.g. Ov. Met. 11, 312 alipedis de stirpe dei versata propago.