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Virtue Conquered by Fortune: Cato in Lucan's *Pharsalia*

Nathaniel Brent Pribil

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Virtue Conquered by Fortune: Cato in Lucan's *Pharsalia*

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This thesis looks at how the Roman poet Lucan uses the character of Cato to elucidate his beliefs about Fortune and Stoicism. The traditional Stoic view of Fortune views it as a force for good that allows people to improve through hardship. Lucan portrays Fortune as a purely antagonistic force that actively seeks to harm the Roman people and corrupt even good individuals like Cato. Lucan's Fortune arranges events to place Cato in a situation where it is impossible to maintain his virtue. Rather than providing him an opportunity to improve in the civil war, Fortune makes it so that whatever choice Cato makes, he becomes guilty. Brutus' dialogue with Cato in Book 2 of *Pharsalia* illuminates the position that Cato is in. Brutus looks to Cato as the traditional Stoic exemplar that can forge a path for virtue in civil war. However, Cato admits that joining any side in the civil war would cause him to become guilty. Fortune's support of Caesar and its dominance over contemporary events has forced Cato into this situation. Cato's desert march in Book 9 continues to show Fortune's dominance over Cato by continually denying him opportunities to gain virtue for himself. Lucan's portrayal of Fortune shows his rejection of Stoic teaching about Fortune and the ultimate futility of trying to remain virtuous in a time of civil war.

Keywords: Lucan, stoicism, Fortune, *Pharsalia*, Cato, Seneca the Younger

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Introduction

In the early Roman Empire, Cato the Younger was held up as an example of virtue.[1] For the Stoics, Cato came closer than nearly any other man to achieving the status of a Stoic wise man.[2] His behavior in the civil war, fighting on behalf of the Republic and giving up his own life so he might remain free from Caesar's influence, especially marked him as an example to others. Lucan cannot talk about the civil war between Caesar and Pompey without mentioning Cato as well.[3] Even though Lucan appears to be following traditional views of Cato, a closer look reveals that he uses Cato to highlight the moral degeneration that Fortune brings to the civil war. The inability of Cato to fully preserve his virtue emphasizes the power and insidiousness of Fortune. Lucan's portrayal of Cato and Fortune is better seen when contrasted to how his uncle Seneca approaches the same topics.

For Lucan, Fortune has been a commanding force that brings pain and suffering to Rome through its support of Caesar. The portrayal of Fortune as an antagonistic force is similar to how Seneca portrays Fortune in his writings. Lucan seems to engage with Seneca's writings concerning not only Fortune, but also Cato. Scholars have already identified multiple links between Seneca's and Lucan's Cato.[4] For instance, Martindale compares Seneca's and Lucan's depiction of Cato and argues that Lucan fully justifies Cato's participation in the war while

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[1] Seo 2013, 67-68. She notes that students in Lucan's time were even assigned to give speeches as Cato would have done in justifying his suicide. Also Feeney 1991, 283. For more on Cato the Younger and his reception in antiquity and beyond see Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.*; Dio Cass. 38.3; Sall. *Cat*. 54.5-54.6; Cic. *Mur*. 60, 63. Goar 1987; Stem 2005; Belliotti 2009, 71-78; Yates 2011.

[2] For Stoicism see Sen. *Prov.* 1.1-2.12, *Ep*. 16, 66, 71, 96, 98, 107; Cic. *Tusc*. 3.14-15, 3.82-84, 4.37-38, *Parad*. 1-19; Epic. *Dis*. 1-6; M. Aur. *Med*. viii.-ix; Rist 1969, 112-132; Sandbach 1989, 101-08; Long 1996, 179-201; Inwood 2003, 153-232; Brennan 2005, 52-72, 243-57; Long 2006, 223-377; Sellars 2006, 31-54; Graver 2007, 85-171.

[3] For discussion on Lucan, especially how he uses Cato see Ahl 1976; Johnson 1987, 36-56; Bartsch 1997, 93-123; Leigh 1997, 210-78; Behr 2007, 116-64; Seo 2011, 199-222; Tipping 2011, 223-36; Fratantuono 2014, 68-89.

[4] Lucan's portrayal of Stoic doctrines seems to have been mined from Senecan descriptions of Stoicism. One example particularly relevant to this section is that this section features the only usages of *inconcussa* which is "taken over from Seneca's moral essays." Fantham 1992*a*, 126.

Seneca is fairly ambiguous.[5] Sklenář discusses how Lucan's depiction of Cato is similar to Seneca's depiction of Cato in *De Constantia sapientis*.[6] However, there has not been much engagement specifically considering how Lucan's depiction of Cato and Fortune shares similarities with Seneca's writings on those topics.[7] While there has been discussion of Cato as a character in Lucan, this thesis will focus on how Lucan uses Cato to argue against the Stoic notion that Fortune's purpose is to provide opportunities for men to show their virtue. First I will look at Seneca's portrayal of Fortune and Cato by looking at *De providentia* and *Epistulae Morales* 71 and 104 and then show how Lucan's description of Fortune and Cato contrasts with Seneca's depiction. Though Lucan's Fortune does have some similarities with Seneca's, ultimately the purpose of Lucan's is different. Instead of being a force for ultimate good, Fortune causes the best of men, Cato, to make an impossible choice and prevents him from displaying his *virtus*.

Seneca's Portrayal of Fortune and Cato

Seneca portrays Fortune as something that gives challenges to men in order for them to become better individuals.[8] This is best seen in his essay *De providentia*.[9] He states (*Prov.* 3.4):

> Ignominiam iudicat gladiator cum inferiore componi et scit eum sine gloria vinci,
> qui sine periculo vincitur. Idem facit fortuna: fortissimos sibi pares quaerit.[10]

---

[5] Martindale 1984, 72-73.
[6] Sklenář 2003, 63.
[7] I did note Martindale 1984 above, but he does not spend much time on the topic and his conclusion is different from mine.
[8] Seneca is concerned with men in *De providentia*. For instance at 2.1 he states: "No evil can happen to a good man (*Nihil accidere bono viro mali potest*)." There is no discussion of good women or women at all. This does not mean that Stoics considered women incapable of being good or virtuous but typically relegated women's roles to the home where they would be much less susceptible to endure the challenges Seneca talks about here. For more information on Stoicisms and women see Engel 2003 and Aiken and McGill-Rutherford 2014.
[9] *De providentia* was written to Lucilius who was a friend to Seneca and who was the recipient of many of Seneca's letters and essays. The dating of *Prov.* is quite uncertain. The only firm dating for it is that it was written after the death of Tiberius in 37 CE. See Griffin 1976, 396, 400-01. The edition of *Prov.* used here is the one found in Vol. 1 of Seneca's Moral Essays from the Loeb Classical Library.
[10] This translation and all others are my own.

> The gladiator thinks it a disgrace when he is placed against an inferior, and he knows that he who conquers without dangers, conquers without glory. Fortune does the same. She seeks out the strongest as equals to herself.

Seneca compares the good man to a gladiator. In this analogy Fortune sends hardships to face the good man just as a gladiator faces beasts or men in an arena to prove his own strength. This is an analogy characteristic of Senecan Stoicism.[11] At another point he states that the gods allow harsh Fortune to come to good men in order to make them better.[12] Though Fortune may cause hardship to come to men, the ultimate purpose of Fortune is for good. Through hardship, men become stronger and are able to exhibit their virtue.[13]

Cato comes up fairly regularly in Seneca's writings. For this discussion, two of his moral epistles, 71 and 104, are particularly pertinent because Cato's actions and behavior in these epistles closely resemble how Lucan portrays Cato.[14] *Ep.* 71 discusses the Supreme Good and how to understand and act in accordance with it. 71.8-17 presents Cato as an example of

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[11] Leigh 1997, 267. Leigh does mention how Panaetius talked about the image of the wise man as one who performs before the Gods but Seneca takes this imagery further since the wise man is not just performing but fighting.

[12] "Do you marvel, if God himself, the biggest lover of good men, who wants them to be the best and most excellent, assigns a Fortune to them by which they may be harassed." *Miraris tu, si deus ille bonorum amantissimus, qui illos quam optimos esse atque excellentissimos vult, fortunam illis cum qua exerceantur adsignat*. Sen. *Prov*. 2.4

[13] Virtue is a very important concept for Seneca and Stoics as a whole. For Stoics, virtue was the sole thing that was necessary for happiness. Everything else was either indifferent or bad. Brennan states that "virtue is an unshakable and consistent disposition to assent only to kataleptic impulsive impression. (Brennan 2005, 104)." Kataleptic impressions are impressions that actually reflect reality and are thus true impressions. Seneca's definition of virtue follows this reasoning since in *Ep.* 71.32 he said: "What will be this virtue? True and steadfast judgment (*Quid erit haec virtus? Iudicium verum et inmotum*)." The only kind of judgment that would be true and steadfast is a judgment that is based off of true impressions. Additionally, for Seneca there are different attributes that are virtues but they are all equal to each other and fall under the heading of virtue. In *Ep*. 66.9 Seneca states that every virtue has no limit and then references different virtues such as constancy, courage, truth, and loyalty which have no limit. All these individual virtues are part of virtue which Seneca states is the only good. (*unum bonum esse virtutem Ep.* 71.32). Since virtue is the only good thing, the acquisition of virtue marks one as a good man and the absence of it dooms one. For more information on virtue and Stoicism see Long 1996, 182-89.

[14] It is difficult to know whether Lucan deliberately used these specific writings of Seneca when he was writing *Pharsalia*, particularly since some argue that Seneca's moral epistles were written after Lucan already wrote part of *Pharsalia*. The first three books of *Pharsalia* were published in 62 or 63 CE while Sen *Ep.* were written between 62-64 CE but most probably in late 63-64 CE. (Griffin 1976, 396 and Fantham 1992*a*, 91) Ahl, however, argues that books 1-3 could have been published as late as 64 (Ahl 1976, 353). Regardless, my argument does not necessarily depend on Lucan using these specific epistles from Seneca to influence *Pharsalia*; instead, these epistles could be emblematic of Seneca's views on Cato that Lucan potentially got from other sources.

someone who seemingly suffered ills but actually received good in the end. Though Seneca states that Fortune could abandon Scipio in Africa, "it was foreseen that Cato would not receive any harm (*et Scipionem in Africa nominis sui fortuna destituat. Olim provisum est, ne quid Cato detrimenti caperet*. Ep. 71.10)." The proximity of *fortuna* to the phrase concerning Cato suggests that it was Fortune that determined not only Scipio's but also Cato's fate. Though Cato suffered many setbacks in his political and personal life, he met all those with the equanimity and virtue called for from a Stoic.[15] Even his death was just as good as his life (*Non est ergo M. Catonis maius bonum honesta vita quam mors honesta Ep*. 71.16), because he met it with the same Stoic attitudes as he did his life. *Ep.* 71 sets Cato up as a model Stoic for all, one who met all the trials Fortune could throw at him with the right attitude such that he could not be harmed.

Ep. 104 also discusses Cato and how one can better one's life by studying Cato's example. In this letter Seneca states that one should gain wisdom by learning about the lives of those who successfully confront the vicissitudes of Fortune. These men provide the best examples to learn from.[16] Before directly discussing Cato, Seneca tells how one should stand against whatever Fortune throws. He states (*Ep*. 104.22):

> Unus est enim huius vitae fluctuantis et turbidae portus eventura contemnere, stare fidenter ac paratum tela fortunae adverso pectore excipere, non latitantem nec tergiversantem.
>
> For the one harbor from this surging and stormy life is to disregard the future, to stand faithful and to purposely receive the spears of Fortune with chest turned towards them, not hiding or turning back.

[15] Earlier in *Ep.* 71.5 Seneca states "All things which appear bad to others, will both become mild and be transformed into good, if you will stand forth above them. *Omnia denique, quae ceteris videntur mala, et mansuescent et in bonum abibunt, si super illa eminueris*." Seneca believes it is possible for Lucilius to meet this expectation.

[16] Socrates is one example Seneca discusses who remained *aequalis* despite all the trials from Fortune (*Ep.* 104.28). This juxtaposition of Cato and Socrates shows the high regard Seneca holds Cato in.

Seneca believes that one should directly meet the challenge that Fortune gives.[17] Seneca then proceeds to give Cato as an example of one who met Fortune head-on. He states (*Ep*. 104.29):

> Accipe hunc M. Catonem recentiorem, cum quo et infestius fortuna egit et pertinacius. Cui cum omnibus locis obstitisset, novissime et in morte, ostendit tamen virum fortem posse invita fortuna vivere, invita mori.
>
> Look at Marcus Cato the Younger, towards whom Fortune acted with more hostility and obstinance. He stood against Fortune in all places, lastly even in death, he showed that a strong man can live and die though Fortune is unwilling.

Fortune was particularly determined to lead Cato away from a virtuous path, yet Cato was able to maintain his virtue. Seneca points specifically towards Cato's stand against Fortune at his death as well. Though Seneca does not detail Cato's death in this epistle, Lucilius would have almost certainly been aware of Cato's suicide. His suicide then is not some shameful defeat but a heroic stand against Fortune. Rather than looking at Cato and his suicide and becoming horrified at what Fortune can do to an individual, one instead should be encouraged by Cato's story.

Also, note what words Seneca uses to explain Cato's and Fortune's actions. Though unsavory words such as *infestius* and *pertinacius* describe Fortune, *egit* is the verb used to describe her actions. While *ago* has a wide array of meanings, it is a fairly bland word to use in contrast to other more violent words that could be used to highlight the hostile actions Fortune took against Cato. Furthermore, the verbs *obstitisset* and *ostendit* are applied to Cato's actions. *Obsto* is a stronger verb than *ago* which helps give Cato the stronger presence in this passage. Fortune may *agit* against Cato but he *obstat* right back against Fortune. Additionally, *ostendit* emphasizes how others can learn from Cato. His actions display a lesson for others. Against a powerful force like Fortune, Cato comes across as a significant force in his own right, one that others can learn from.

[17] Leigh 1997, 210-215 discusses how the good death is found by charging into battle. Getting a spear in the back is shameful. What is true for physical warfare is also true when fighting against Fortune.

Further in *Ep.* 104, Seneca looks at Cato's actions at the start of the civil war as an example of Cato's heroic actions in the face of Fortune (*Ep*. 104.30):

> Denique in illa rei publicae trepidatione, cum illinc Caesar esset decem legionibus pugnacissimis subnixus, totis exterarum gentium praesidiis, hinc Cn. Pompeius, satis unus adversus omnia, cum alii ad Caesarem inclinarent, alii ad Pompeium, solus Cato fecit aliquas et rei publicae partes.
>
> Finally in that fearful republic, when Caesar was on one side supported by ten most battle-hardened legions, and by so great a guard of foreign people, on the other side Pompey, one sufficient adversary to all, when some inclined towards Caesar, others towards Pompey, only Cato made another party for the republic.

Note that Seneca is not necessarily going for historical accuracy here. Cato is an example for Seneca and, as such, he is highlighting and potentially altering certain events to make Cato seem even more like a bastion of virtue. In this characterization Caesar has the support of ten legions and many foreigners. Pompey seems to stand alone. Cato's choice determines a party for the Republic. No party for the Republic existed before Cato's involvement. Seneca claims Cato said: "If Caesar will win, I will die, if Pompey, I will go into exile (*Si Caesar vicerit, moriturm, si Pompeius, exulaturum*. *Ep.* 104.32)." Cato marks out a severe penalty for himself no matter which side he chooses, keeping him independent from either. Seneca also claims that Cato challenged both Pompey and Caesar (*et Pompeium et Caesarem…simul provocavit*. Ep. 104.33).[18] Cato is an example of how one should not bow to pressure from others but stick to what one knows is right.

Seneca uses similar words, *unus* and *solus*, to describe Pompey and Cato. Applying *solus* to Cato helps show Cato's exemplary nature. Applying *unus* to Pompey fills a similar purpose.

[18] *Provocavit* has a connection to gladiators. The *provocator* was a type of gladiator which was armed with shield and sword. *Provacatores* existed as early as the late republican period. Since *provocatores* typically fought against men of similar rank, Seneca could be alluding that Cato, and Seneca by extension, view Pompey and Caesar as equals to himself. See Junkelmann 2000, 37, 57-59 for more on *provocatores*. For usage of *provocare* see Leigh 1997, 274 n.104.

Obviously, Pompey was not the only figure who fought against Caesar in the civil war so Seneca is deliberately underplaying Pompey's strength. If Pompey is willing to stand alone against Caesar, then that could show how much power Pompey alone has. Both Pompey and Cato stand out as antagonists to Caesar's might. Cato's lone stance for the Republic contrasts with Pompey's stance against Caesar. Though both are singular individuals here, Cato is the one who should be looked to as an example since he did not just fight against Caesar but for the republic.

In the same section Seneca mentions Cato's march across the desert. Seneca states (*Ep*. 104.33):

> Vides posse homines laborem pati: per medias Africae solitudines pedes duxit exercitum. Vides posse tolerari sitim: in collibus arentibus sine ullis inpedimentis victi exercitus reliquias trahens inopiam umoris loricatus tulit et, quotiens aquae fuerat occasio, novissimus bibit.
>
> You see that men can endure hardship: he led an army on foot through the middle of the African desert. You see that thirst can be endured: in burning hills without any luggage train, dragging the remnants of a conquered army, he enduring while clad in armor the lack of water and whenever there was the opportunity for water, he was the last to drink.

Seneca focuses on specific details like Cato leading on foot and being the last to drink to again show Cato as an example of a great Stoic and a great leader. Yet also observe the army that Seneca describes here. The army is conquered (*victi*) and Cato needs to drag (*trahens*) them in order to get them across. The picture here is that Cato alone remains unconquered and is the sole source of the army's ability to march across the desert. Cato stands as an example of one who can certainly endure hardship and thirst, but also one who singlehandedly leads an army.

Since Seneca's discussion of Cato is immediately preceded by discussing how Fortune dealt even more harshly with him, the audience is led to believe that Pompey, Caesar and the desert march were all obstacles that Fortune threw at Cato. From these two epistles, Seneca sets Cato up as one who was able to confront Fortune's assaults and successfully withstand them with

character intact. Cato's choice to join with Pompey was not a capitulation but a bold stand that marked which side the republic was on. Cato is an example for all and gives hope that one can similarly stand against Fortune and rise triumphant.

Cato's Dialogue with Brutus

Lucan's depiction of Cato touches on many similar details and events as Seneca's, but the conclusion is ultimately quite the opposite. Both Lucan and Seneca portray Fortune as an antagonistic force; however, Seneca teaches that Fortune actually serves a good purpose for men since it helps them become better. Lucan consistently emphasizes Fortune as a powerful actor but implies that Fortune aggressively works to undermine *virtus*. In fact, Lucan says that Fortune is behind Caesar and thus causes Rome to suffer the civil war. In 1.264 he states: "Fortune labors so that Caesar's motions are justified and finds reasons for arms (*iustos Fortuna laborat esse ducis motus et causas invenit armis).*" Rather than fighting against Caesar's destruction of Roman mores and standards or even standing aside as a neutral party, Fortune is actively working to help Caesar and to justify his movements and to find cause for violence. Fortune is vigorously supporting Caesar and ensuring further trials and destruction against the Roman people and specifically against Cato. Fortune's support of Caesar leads to Cato having to make this choice between Pompey and Caesar. There is no discussion anywhere in Lucan of civil war helping make people better. Instead there is constant emphasis on how civil war turn values on their head.[19] These trials cannot make people better.

Brutus' dialogue with Cato in Book 2 shows the precarious situation Cato is in. More particularly, this section shows how craftily Fortune has sculpted a situation for Cato. Brutus'

[19] See Bartsch 1997, 50-52.

speech to Cato helps set up Cato's character and shows what is at stake in Cato's decision. At one point Brutus says (2.242-45):

> Omnibus expulsae terries olimque fugatae virtutis iam sola fides, quam turbine nullo excutiet Fortuna tibi, tu mente labantem derige me, dubium certo tu robore firma.
>
> You are the lone confidant of virtue which has long since been expelled and chased away from every land, and which Fortune will not cast off from you by any commotion. Guide me who am wavering in mind and strengthen my uncertainty with your certain strength.

This is the essentially the same point Seneca made. Cato stood virtuous regardless of what Fortune could throw at him. Note that *sola*, while modifying *fides* is also modifying Cato, since *fides* stands for Cato here. Cato is again alone like Seneca described in *Ep*. 104.30. Though Seneca used *solus* to mark Cato as the lone defender for the republic, Lucan's Brutus is elevating Cato to being the sole defender of virtue. Lucan's Brutus is also looking to Cato as an example. He wants Cato's strength to shore up his own doubtful and wavering mind. The way Brutus looks at Cato is how Seneca wants the aspiring Stoic to view Cato.

Brutus also sets up the potentially terrible consequences that would follow should Cato choose a side in the war. He claims: "You will have this lone reward for your long-enduring virtue, war, which will approve others, will make you guilty (*Hoc solum longae pretium virtutis habebis: accipient alios, facient te bella nocentem*. 2.258-59)." Cato is different from all the other participants since they choose war motivated through base desires like money or hunger. Brutus states (2.254-55):

> Nullum furor egit in arma: castra petunt magna victi mercede; tibi uni per se bella placent?
>
> Madness drove no one to arms. They have been overcome by a great bribe to seek after the war camps. Are you the only one whom war pleases by itself?

All the others chose war because they sought to gratify some other desire. This desire forced them into the war. *Victi* shows the impotence others have in this situation. They have been overcome and defeated by some kind of reward. *Uni* marks Cato again as a lone unique figure meaning he is not among the *victi*. Since Cato is the exemplar Stoic, none of the desires that would motivate others to go to war should have any effect on Cato. Thus when Cato goes to war, he does so because war in and of itself is attractive to Cato. Though this is seemingly contradictory to Brutus' earlier claim that Cato cannot lose his virtue, it actually is not since Cato would lose virtue through his own choice, not because Fortune did something to him. Cato's choice in the face of Fortune is what would make him guilty. His will is entirely free so his decision to go to war is fully his own. The *sola fides* of virtue would then become the *unus* motivated to fight for the sake of war itself. Such an action would make Cato *nocens*.

Cato's response at first seems to follow Seneca's representation. Lucan makes slight changes to this scene that contradict Seneca's portrayal. Cato agrees to join with Pompey because that is the side he sees the republic is on. This contradicts Seneca's portrayal of the scene. Rather than Cato making a party for himself and establishing that party for the republic, Cato sees the republic already on Pompey's side and joins himself to it. Cato also says that foreign kings are joining in the battle against Rome (*Diductique fretis alio sub sidere reges* 2.294). Foreign kings apply more to the kings of the East who join with Pompey.[20] In Seneca's version of this scene, the foreigners are aligned exclusively with Caesar. While this line does not explicitly name Pompey, the reference to kings here brings to mind the rulers of the East rather than leaders of Gaul or Germania. If this is the case, the foreign leaders are linked to Pompey rather than Caesar in Lucan. While this does not prove that Lucan is directly contradicting

[20] Fantham 1992*a*, 133.

Seneca, it is a change Lucan makes that could show he is responding to how Seneca portrays this scene.

Yet these changes become more dramatic when we see how Cato attempts to answer Brutus' charge against him. Cato begins by admitting that civil war is *nefas* (2.286).[21] Note that Cato is calling the war an evil, not something that is "indifferent."[22] Indifferents, according to Stoics, are items that have no effect on the moral worth of an individual. The vast majority of what humans encounter are indifferents such as money or health. The way humans use money or health determines if it is good or bad.[23] By calling civil war *nefas*, Cato is saying that civil war by itself, independent of how one uses it, has a negative impact on one's morality. Whether or not one enters civil war with good intentions, participation in it is an evil. He then says "wherever fate carries, virtue follows safely (*Sed quo fata trahunt, virtus secura sequitur* 2.287)." This line is similar to what Brutus said earlier and is reminiscent of Seneca's depiction of Cato, thus giving the impression that though the civil war is an evil, it cannot contaminate Cato's virtue.

Yet the very next line undermines this view.[24] He says that "the offence is with the gods because they have made me guilty (*crimen erit superis et me fecisse nocentem* 2.288)." While Cato ultimately lays the blame at the gods' feet, he does not deny that he is *nocens* as a result of the war.[25] He agrees with Brutus' statement that civil war would make him *nocens*. This is the

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[21] *Nefas* is an extremely loaded word. Though its base meaning merely means "unlawful" it usually connotes something unspeakably bad, something that has so broken the religious standards of society that one should not even speak about it (Thorne 2016, 77). If one merely said "Civil war is unlawful," it would be as dry as saying "Oedipus' incest was unfortunate." For more discussion of *nefas*, see O'Higgins 1988, 214–218; Feeney 1991, 276–283; Masters 1992, 7, 212–215.
[22] Sklenář 1999, 288. "Indifferent" is the term used by Sklenář and others to translate the Stoic term *adiaphora* (ἀδιάφορα).
[23] Long 1996, 186.
[24] Bartsch 1997, 120 notes that Cato's position is self-contradictory since he claims he is both virtuous and guilty.
[25] Some argue that this exonerates Cato so he does not share in any guilt. See Fantham 1992*a*, 132; George 1991, 251-54. George not only argues that Cato is blameless but also that his reply is entirely in keeping with Stoic

case no matter what choice Cato makes.[26] Long states: "Lucan suggests that Brutus and Cato were set a choice without an innocent option: both supporting and resisting Caesar's rise would back a potential tyrant…and withdrawal from such a crisis was also damning."[27] Cato cannot just be a spectator and see the destruction without participating.[28] Even if Cato did choose to fight in the war, any glory that he would gain in battle would be tainted anyway since glory is won at the expense of fellow citizens. There is no way to gain *virtus* through combat in civil war.[29]

This situation that Fortune has set upon Cato drives him to drop his normally Stoic image and express the depth of his despair. Cato saying that he will mourn Rome like a dead father would mourn his child by sticking his hand in a flame goes against the Stoic standard of how one should mourn.[30] Scholars are divided on the implications of Cato mourning here. Some claim that this shows that Cato is failing at being a Stoic.[31] Others argue that since Seneca says that mourning is justified in specific circumstances then Cato is not failing here.[32] However Cato is not merely saying that he wants to mourn for Rome, but that he wants to mourn in a public and excruciatingly painful manner. While Seneca and others may say that mourning is acceptable, they do not countenance the sorrow that includes self-harm.[33] Rather than providing an example

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doctrine. On the other hand Long states "Cato claims that he will inevitably be damned by the situation imposed on him by the gods." Long 2007, 186. Sklenář also shows that providence is directing Cato to moral wrongs and is thus hurting virtue. Sklenář 2003, 67.

[26] Frantantuono says this is "a choice between insanities." Fratantuono 2014, 70.

[27] Long 2007, 184.

[28] Leigh 1997, 28 shows how this is reminiscent of Seneca *Ep.* 74, which shows that Stoics are not obligated to stand back when bad things happen to things they care about.

[29] Gorman 2001, 265-66; Bartsch 1997, 51-52.

[30] Seo 2013, 72.

[31] Bartsch 1997, 118-19.

[32] George 1991, 251-54.

[33] *Ep*. 63 especially illuminates Seneca's thoughts on grief. Lucilius' friend, Flaccus, has died and Seneca is consoling him. He states that he is not saying that Lucilius should not feel sorrow, though that would be better. (*Illud, ut non doleas, vix audebo exigere; et esse melius scio*.) But he does say that only one who has been raised above fortune could not mourn and even then that man would still feel something but it would only be a pinch. (*Sed cui ista firmitas animi contingent nisi iam multum supra fortunam elato? Illum quoque ista res vellicabit, sed tantum*

of Stoic virtue, Cato here fails to be a good example. This uncharacteristic failure becomes understandable when one understands the impossible predicament Fortune has put Cato in. All his fortitude and striving for virtue has done nothing to help him. Such a failure of his life's philosophy combined with the impending destruction of his homeland calls for the utmost despair Cato can muster.

Additionally, Cato's attitude towards the fight suggests that he himself realizes the futile and hopeless situation Fortune has brought upon him. He readily admits that it is a lost cause he is fighting for. He knows that liberty is gone but chooses to struggle on. Cato says (2.315-319):

> me solum invadite ferro, me frustra leges et inania iura tuentem. Hic dabit, hic pacem iugulus finemque malorum gentibus Hesperiis: post me regnare volenti non opus est bello.
>
> Attack me, who holds in vain to the laws and the useless oaths, with the sword. This very throat will give peace and an end of evils to the people of Italy. After I die, there is no point to war for those who want to rule.

Cato acknowledges that he is holding in vain onto the laws. He cannot claim that he is joining the civil war in order to preserve the laws. This removes a potential excuse others could give for Cato's joining the civil war. This is reminiscent of when Brutus said that war is pleasing to Cato in and of itself. Everyone else has a reason or excuse except for Cato. Now Cato himself is acknowledging that one potentially noble reason for joining the civil war is completely empty. Though he does not say and probably would never agree that war is pleasing to him, Cato does conspicuously lack a noble reason for joining the civil war. Admitting that this reason is empty furthers shows why Cato would be *nocens* and also illuminates the cruelty Fortune has placed upon Cato. If there were still a possibility that the laws could be preserved then this reason would

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vellicabit.) Seneca allows that men in their present condition can mourn but Cato is more than a man. He has been set up as one who is *elatus supra fortunam* and so, though he can still be expected to feel sorrow, it would not be to the same degree as one who sticks his hand into a flame. Even normal men should not overly mourn. Seneca states: *Lacrimandum est, non plorandum*.

be legitimate but Fortune has arranged that Cato is the lone supporter of the laws. Everyone else has abandoned the oaths making them useless. Nevertheless he has the hope that somehow his death could give an end to war.[34] Though this is a nice sentiment, Cato's death alone would hardly end the conflict between Caesar and Pompey making this wish itself a useless and vain hope just like the laws that Cato upholds. Cato acts in a similar fashion to how Leigh portrays the narrator of *Pharsalia*, namely "an agent in his own drama, seeking to reverse the course of history, uttering the futile prayers of a character in a Senecan tragedy."[35] Cato wishes his actions could bring back liberty to the republic. He wishes that his death could somehow end the civil war. Yet he wishes in vain.

Cato's speech uses language reminiscent of Seneca from *Ep.* 104 when Seneca says that one should meet the weapons of Fortune face-on. There is also a connection with Cato's wish that he be attacked with the sword and Stoic writings that discuss gladiators as examples of the virtue that Stoics should have.[36] In *Tusculan Disputations* Cicero praises gladiators as "men who would rather receive a blow than shamefully avoid one" (*illi, qui, accipere plagam malunt quam turpiter vitare*! 2.41). Though gladiators were typically conceived as the dregs of society, Cicero shows how even they can show virtue through their willingness to receive pain and injury.[37] Seneca also connects gladiators with Stoic virtue and additionally uses language that Lucan does as well. In *Ep*. 30.8 Seneca, showing that death should not be feared, offers the defeated gladiator as an example of one who meets death with fortitude:

> Sic gladiator tota pugna timidissimus iugulum adversario praestat et errantem gladium sibi adtemperat.

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[34] Stover 2008, 571-580. He argues this passage suggests Lucan intended to mark the end of *Pharsalia* with Cato's death, making his death actually mark the end of the war for the poem.
[35] Leigh 1997, 43.
[36] See Pope 2014, 49-63 for additional details.
[37] Pope 2014, 50. For more information on the status of gladiators in Roman society see Barton 1993, 12-15 and Ville 1981, 339-43.

> Thus the gladiator, though most fearful through the whole fight offers his throat to the adversary and guides the wandering blade to himself.

The gladiator does not attempt to hide his vitals or shrink away from the blade but helps guide the blade to his own throat. In Lucan, Cato is also offering up his throat and inviting the sword to attack him. As such he is implicitly acknowledging his defeat at the hands of Fortune. He recognizes his position and offers up his life seeing that there is no point for further struggle.

Cato wishes that swords could be thrust upon him so he could sacrifice himself for Rome (2.306-313). In particular, he says (2.313-14):

> Hic redimat sanguis populous, hac caede luatur, quidquid Romani meruerunt pendere mores.
>
> Let this blood redeem the people, and let whatever the morals of Rome deserve to pay be bought by my death

There are also stories of gladiators who choose to fight and die in exchange for others.[38] Though Cato is unable to have swords and spears thrust into him, ironically other characters, such as Scaeva, meet this fate.[39] However, instead of being a sacrifice that brings about the end of war, Scaeva's sacrifice ensures the continuation of Caesar's cause and is a perversion of patriotism.[40]

Fortune's hand twists what Cato hopes for and causes the opposite of what he wishes when others meet the spears. Leigh notes that wounds give glory since they show the hardships one encounters.[41] Cato seeks the wounds to display his virtue but no wounds come. He is not injured through the poem at all and so is denied physical marks to prove his virtue and devotion.[42] Since Lucan's poem is unfinished, it is possible that he intended to feature more

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[38] See Pope 2014, 133-142 which discusses a story in pseudo-Quintilian *Declamationes Maiores* 9 about a poor young man who takes the place of his rich friend in the arena and eventually dies as a result.
[39] Lucan also seems to portray Scaeva like a gladiator. Leigh discusses how Scaeva's fight show him as one before an audience and other details of the fight have parallels in the arena (Leigh 1997, 243-46.)
[40] Leigh 1997, 226.
[41] Leigh 1997, 226.
[42] Long 2008, 187.

scenes with Cato, potentially even Cato's suicide.[43] If it was the case that Cato's suicide was going to be shown, then it would add further irony. No one else was able to nor could kill Cato so he has to take that duty on himself. He is the one who thrusts a sword into himself. Cato's suicide could also arguably mark the end of the war since he is one of the last major opponents of Caesar. Thus Cato's wish is fulfilled but Caesar has won and already brought massive destruction. Cato's death does not prevent further war.

Cato and the Desert March

Moreover Cato's march through the desert continues to show Fortune's mockery.[44] By Book 9, Pompey is dead and Cato now assumes leadership of the anti-Caesarean faction. After receiving word of Pompey's death from Cornelia, Pompey's wife, Cato gives a brief eulogy honoring Pompey. Within it he states (9:204-06):

> Olim vera fides Sulla Marioque receptis libertatis obit: Pompeio rebus adempto
> nunc et ficta perit.
>
> True belief in liberty died once Sulla and Marius were received at Rome, now that
> Pompey has been removed from these affairs, even false belief is dead.

Cato acknowledges that legitimate belief in liberty perished during Marius and Sulla's conflict. There was never a chance that true freedom was at Rome. Cato made a similar point back in Book 2 when he acknowledged that he was holding onto the laws in vain. Nevertheless Cato was still exhibiting a false hope. He kept up the façade that fighting for Pompey would be in defense of Rome's liberty. Now that Pompey is dead even that false hope is gone. There is no point in

[43] While many believe that the poem is unfinished there is still debate surrounding this, see Masters 1992, 216-59 who makes the case that the poem is complete. If that is the case, then Cato is even worse off since he is not even able to kill himself within the poem in protest to Caesar.
[44] Many view Cato's march through the desert as an encomium of Cato. See Fantham 1992*b* and Ahl 1976. However Leigh 1997, 265-82 argues that this episode shows the failure of Stoicism.

even pretending that liberty could return to Rome. Pompey acknowledges Fortune's hand in these affairs when he ends his eulogy (9.212-13):

> Et mihi, si fatis aliena in iura venimus, fac talem, Fortuna, Iubam; non deprecor hosti servari, dum me servet cervice recisa.
>
> As for me, if because of the fates we come under foreign power, let Fortune make Iuba so great. I do not pray to be protected for the enemy, provided that he protects me with my head removed.

Cato seems to be praying for Fortune to make Iuba as great as Ptolemy since Cato's next sentence discusses how he would prefer his head to be cut off. If Cato should fall under Juba's dominion, he would want his head to be cut off like Pompey's was. Since Cato is praying for Fortune to make Iuba behave like Ptolemy, Pompey is acknowledging Fortune's power over affairs. Additionally, this suggests that Fortune was behind Ptolemy's actions as well. This is explicitly stated in 9.223 when Cato tells Tarcondimotus, the king of Cilicia: "Fortune took Magnus away (*Magnum fortuna removit*)."[45] Pompey's death, which finally killed off all hope for liberty, was Fortune's handiwork. Fortune continues to destroy all of Cato's hopes.

Nonetheless Cato manages to rally the remaining soldiers. He tells them that they are free of any master and that "now it is safe to conquer for yourself (*iam tibi vincere tutum est* 9.260)." The narrator tells us that "by the voice of Cato, endurance for just war was pressed into the men (*Sic voce Catonis inculcata viris iusti patientia Martis* 9.292-93)." Instead of having Cato's men cross the desert as a confused rabble, Lucan takes the time to show Cato inspiring his forces. This stands in contrast to Seneca's depiction of Cato's army in *Ep.* 104.33. There Seneca characterized the army as a beaten force that Cato had to drag through the desert. The picture of the army that Lucan portrays here though is of a more lively sort. Cato is still responsible for

[45] See also Cato 9.265-66: "Fortuna has now left one out of three masters (unum fortuna reliquit iam tribus e dominis)." Fortune has left Caesar has the lone remaining triumvir.

inspiring the men through his words but he only has to give a good speech at the beginning of the march and the men readily follow him. The army is a beaten force but their response to Cato's words does not seem like the response of beaten men. The army that Cato sets off with seems to have more morale and vitality than the force Seneca portrayed. Though Cato had already acknowledged there was no hope remaining for Rome and little chance that his force could stand up to Caesar, his successful speech does provide a flicker of hope that he could finally meet the honorable death he wished for back in Book 2 and potentially make a grand last stand for his ideals. Though this gives hope that Cato's dreams could be reached, since he now has men willing to follow him, free from a tyrant's hand, Fortune has different plans in store for Cato.

Cato attempts to overcome hardships by using language reminiscent of Seneca. After inspiring the remaining troops to continue to follow him, Cato attempts to reach Juba's territory. Following a disastrous attempt to sail across the Syrtes, Cato decides to march through the desert to reach Juba. Cato makes no attempt to hide the hardships his men will face in the desert, but he still manages to inspire them by calling upon rhetoric familiar to Seneca. Cato states (9.402-06):

> Serpens, sitis, ardor harenae dulcia virtuti; gaudet patientia duris; laetius est, quotiens magno sibi constat, honestum. Sola potest Libye turba praestare malorum, ut deceat fugisse viros.
>
> Snakes, thirst, the heat of the sand, these are sweet to virtuous men; endurance rejoices in hard times; virtue is happy whenever it stays true to its values at great cost. Only Libya with its throng of evils can prove that it is proper for men to have fled.

Though the desert is full of dangers, virtuous men should cheerily meet them. Words like *gaudet* and *laetius* are normally not terms one would use to describe those who are facing a deadly desert crossing. Cato's use of the words continue to show his attempts to keep facing trials like a good Stoic. They should rejoice since the trials of the desert will allow the men to regain any glory lost when they fled after Pharsalia. These trials will supposedly make the men better.

Indeed, the narrator does show that Cato's virtue is immortalized through the trials he endures and his leadership as they go through the desert. The narrator tells of Cato never being carried, but always walking in front on foot; of Cato getting the least sleep of all; of Cato being the last to drink of any spring they found (9.587-593). However immediately after discussing Cato's example, the narrator seems to consider Fortune the source of Cato's praiseworthy actions. He states: "Whatever we praise in any of our ancestors, it was from Fortune (*Quidquid laudamus in ullo mairorum, fortuna fuit* (9.595-96)." This continues to show that even the glory and praise that Cato may deservedly receive from his desert march is all dependent on Fortune's whims. Even Cato at his best is wholly within Fortune's hands.

Further along in this section, the narrator gives extremely high praise to Cato which, after taking a closer look, does not elevate Cato as high as a first glance would suggest. The narrator states (9.601-04):

> Ecce parens verus patriae, dignissimus aris, Roma tuis, perquem numquam iurare pudebit, et quem, si steteris umquam cervice solute, nunc, olim, factura deum es.
>
> Behold the true parent of his country, most worthy to be worshipped at altars, by whom one will never be ashamed to swear, and if you Rome will ever stand with neck freed, now or later you will make him a god.

This is high praise indeed.[46] Certainly one could accept this praise at face-value since Cato does show his firm adherence to his principles in this section. Nevertheless such effulgent praise may deserve some scrutiny. Especially since Cato is not the only one the narrator says should become a god. In 1.47-66 he also apotheosizes Nero with even more praise than Cato receives here. While there is much discussion whether the narrator's, and by extension Lucan's, praise is sincere, the fact remains that both Cato and Nero are apotheosized by the narrator.[47]

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[46] Goar 1987, 47 states that "the Augustan poets never suggested that Augustus should become the chief god of the Roman people, as Lucan seems to be doing here."
[47] For discussion of Lucan's apotheosis of Nero see O'Hara 2006, 132-36; Grimal 2011; Ahl 1976, 47-49.

Yet for Lucan, taking one's rank among deity is not necessarily a laudatory position. In Book 7 the narrator bemoans the impotence of the gods saying: "We lie when we say that Jupiter reigns (*mentimur regnare Iovem* 7.447)," and "Mortals have never been taken care of by any god (*mortalia nulli sunt curata deo* 7.454-455)." This does not mean that the gods do not exist. It just means that they simply do not care about humans and have no influence over the lives of men.[48] Hence it is little complement to call Nero or Cato a god. For Lucan, the gods are fickle and cannot be depended upon. Only Fortune exerts power and influence over the lives of men. There is no way to know what the gods want. Taking the place of empty, inaccessible deities is hardly an envious position. Cato may truly be worthy of worship and divine in his actions. Yet none of that worship means anything since Cato as a god can give no help to those who may worship him. Fortune has more power over men than Cato can ever have, even if he should become a god.

This impotence is reflected by Cato's actions once he and his men are attacked by the snakes in the desert.[49] Immediately following the narrator's praise of Cato, his troops begin their march through the snake-infested part of the desert. As the snakes bite his men all Cato can do is "watch the sad fate of his men (*tot tristia fata suorum…videns* 9.735-36)." Cato cannot prevent the snakes from attacking or treat his men once the snakes bite. He can only watch. The narrator's long and morbid details of the snake bites highlight what Cato sees. When Aulus is bitten and the venom sets his insides on fire, the narrator states: "Neither the honor of his country, nor the power of sad Cato controlled the burning man (*Non decus imperii, non maesti iura Catonis ardentem tenuere virum* 9.747-48)." For all the hope and inspiration Cato gave the

[48] Ahl 1974, 569 states: "At no point during the Pharsalia does Lucan go so far as to say that the gods do not exist. He argues, rather, that they no longer wield any power in human affairs."
[49] Johnson 1987, 55-56 discusses how Cato's march as a whole shows "the inglorious impotence of the many and the glorious impotence of the great man."

men previously, he is useless in providing actual help against the snakes. Once the snakes bite, all control is lost. Aulus was the first man bitten and Cato's impotence with Aulus is highlighted again and again as the narrator spends dozens of lines detailing the effects of the snake bites. Furthermore Cato chose the spring from which the snakes attacked.[50] Cato's actions inadvertently initiated the snake attack on his men. The most he can do is encourage them to bear their hardship with Stoic fortitude, but that is all he can do. He cannot prevent the snakes from attacking, he cannot do anything to heal his men.

This scene becomes even more tragic once the soldiers realize they are spending their strength and lives fighting snakes rather than Caesar. After seeing many men die from the snakes, the remaining soldiers repeatedly cry out (9.848-851):

> Reddite, di, clamant, miseris quae fugimus arma, reddite Thessaliam. Patimur cur segnia fata in gladius iurata manus? Pro Caesare pugnant dipsades et peragunt civilia bella cerastae.
>
> O gods, return the arms from which we fled to us miserable ones, return Thessaly. Why, with hand sworn to the sword, do we suffer lingering fates? The vipers fight in place of Caesar and the serpents finish the civil war.

The soldiers highlight the irony of Cato's earlier words. He brought the men together in a last ditch effort to fight for Rome's lost liberty, ostensibly to fight against Caesar and gain an honorable death in defense of liberty. Yet note that these trials that the narrator highlights are not against Caesar. Cato and his men's strength are spent not against the forces of Caesar, but against the snakes. The soldiers here explicitly state that the snakes take Caesar's place. This is a pathetic scene. The men who, after being driven and scattered from Pharsalia, after gaining courage from Cato to return and face Caesar, are now not even worthy enough to face him. The soldiers are ostensibly willing to face hardship and give their lives against Caesar, but in the

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[50] Malamud 2003, 42-43.

desert their lives will be lost with no harm to Caesar. Though we cannot say how much longer Lucan would have made the book, Cato's forces fail to encounter Caesar at all. The cause of these trials and also their deliverance is again Fortune. The narrator states: "Tired from such danger, hesitantly and late Fortune gave help to the miserable ones (*Vix miseris serum tanto lassata periclo auxilium Fortuna dedit* 9.890-91)." Though it is not explicitly stated, Fortune is tired out (*lassata*) from the danger because it is the one responsible for sending danger to Cato's men in the first place. It determines what dangers Cato and his men face and how long they have to suffer it. Fortune could have conjured up a showdown between Cato and Caesar, but instead made Cato and his men give their lives up fighting snakes.

Lucan emphasizes the cruel irony of the situation by describing Cato in gladiator language. Lucan describes Cato as one who "watches while spread out on the open sand and challenges fortune at every hour (*nuda fusus harena excubat atque omni fortunam provocat hora* 9.982-83)." The image of Cato spread out on the sand recalls the image of the arena.[51] Furthermore the narrator uses *provocat*, a word that has gladiator overtones as mentioned above when Seneca uses it to describe how Cato challenged Caesar and Pompey, potentially viewing them as equals to be fought. Here it appears that Cato challenges Fortune as an equal, yet that notion is preposterous as Fortune has amply demonstrated its complete mastery over Cato. This image comparing Cato to a gladiator is practically mocking him. However much he wants to actually fight against Caesar and die for his ideals, at best he can encourage his men, watch as they suffer and die, and run. As Leigh states: "the Stoic gladiator has now become a witness and a spectator."[52] Fortune continues to deny his request made in Book 2 that he die for the sake of

[51] Leigh 1997, 274.
[52] Leigh 1997, 275.

the nation. Though Cato is willing, if not eager, to die for his beliefs, Fortune forces him to stand back and watch his men die while he continues to live.

Lucan also makes a potential change to the historical record at the end of the desert narrative which gives a final cruel blow to Cato's ability as a leader. The narrator states that it took Cato two months to cross the desert (*Bis positis Phoebe flammis, bis luce recepta vidit harenivagum surgens fugiensque Catonem* 9.940-41). The narrator describes Cato as *harenivagum*. While this can be have as plain as meaning as "desert wanderer" the word *vagus* often has the connotation of someone who is lost or uncertain. This final adjective that the narrator applies to Cato leaves the impression that Cato did not lead his men directly through the desert but became lost and wandered through, prolonging his men's suffering. Additionally since *harena* also can refer to arena combat, this is another connection Lucan makes between Cato and gladiators. If a gladiator were just wandering in the arena, without meeting his opponents, that would be a most disgraceful act. Plutarch in his account of Cato's march through the desert says that it only took seven days (*Vit. Cat. Min*. 56.4). It seems more likely that Plutarch's timeline is more correct than Lucan's. If that is the case, then Lucan is deliberately lengthening the amount of time it took Cato to get through the desert to emphasize the difficulty and turmoil he and his men suffered; the suffering that amounted to nothing in the end.

Conclusion

Though Lucan's Cato does attempt to make the right choices, though he continues to strive and uphold Stoic values, Fortune has placed him in an impossible conundrum where he emerges as a guilty party. Rather than following Seneca's portrayal of Fortune being an element that ultimately proves the worth of a man, and that gives him the opportunity to be better, Lucan makes Fortune a purely antagonistic figure. Fortune does not want to make men better, it just

wants to see them suffer. Even Cato's desert march, the trials of which seem to highlight and show off Cato's virtue, ultimately proves Fortune's continuing control over Cato's life and his inability to prevail against Fortune. This version of Fortune is incompatible with Stoicism. Instead of providing an opportunity for Cato to exemplify his virtue and prove his standing, it forces him to become guilty no matter what choice he makes.[53] Though Brutus and Cato's encounter in Book 2 does not often specifically name Fortune, this section is emblematic of how Fortune is portrayed through the rest of the work. Not only is it a source of harm to Cato, it actively works to harm the whole Roman people. Fortune's actions toward Cato in his desert march continue to emphasize Fortune's power and Cato's impotence. Cato is an excellent figure to show man's impotence in the face of Fortune since Cato in Lucan's time was used as a model of virtue. If a man of such great virtue and excellence as Cato is ultimately impotent against Fortune, what hope could anyone else have? Instead of Cato being a good example to others on how to conquer Fortune like Seneca portrays, Lucan uses Cato as an example of how powerful Fortune is and how the best of men can be conquered by it.

[53] Sklenář 1999, 289.

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