

XIX.—Literary Criticism in the Mediaeval Commentaries on Lucan

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Most of the studies dealing with mediaeval rhetoric and literary criticism are based upon theoretical treatises like those published in Faral's *Les Arts Poétiques du xii^e et du xiii^e siècle*. But much interesting information concerning these subjects is hidden in the mediaeval commentaries on the classics. They represent the scholastic approach to literature and are typical of the teaching to which mediaeval students were subjected. They exerted an enormous influence upon many generations of writers. Into the dull grammatical comments on the construction and vocabulary of the authors they were explaining, the teachers of the *trivium* sometimes inserted statements about the nature of poetry and attempted to acquaint their students with the rudiments of literary criticism.

The purpose of this paper is to study such criticism scattered through the mass of glosses on the *Pharsalia* found in a number of commentaries, both published and unpublished, compiled before the fourteenth century. For, although the *Pharsalia* was obviously studied for other than its artistic value, and the task of the teacher consisted mostly of a line by line examination of the text for the purpose of elucidating the sense, straightening the word order and imparting historical and encyclopaedic knowledge, the literary standards of these *magistri* emerge out of the mass of unrelated comments. We shall see that, from the meager remarks of the tenth century *Commenta Bernensia* to the fuller discussions of the twelfth and thirteenth century teachers, a change of emphasis can be discerned and a more active interest in literary questions.

The texts upon which this study is based are the following:

1. *Commenta Bernensia*, ed. Hermann Usener (Leipzig, 1869), based on mss. of the tenth century.
2. *Adnotationes super Lucanum*, ed. Joannes Endt (Leipzig, 1909), a mass of glosses found in numerous mss. from the tenth to the twelfth century.
3. *Berolinensis 35*, an enlarged thirteenth century version of the *Adnotationes*. As it is impossible to obtain photostats of this ms. I have used the excerpts given in Endt's edition of the *Adnotationes* and in

the third volume of C. F. Weber's edition of the *Pharsalia* (Leipzig, 1831).

4. Anselm of Laon's Commentary, saec. xii. For the ascription of this commentary to Anselm of Laon, see Manitius, *Geschichte der lat. Lit. des Mittelalters* 3.238. I quote from my own collation of *Berol. 1016*.
5. Arnulf of Orléans' Commentary, written shortly before 1213/14.¹ I quote from my forthcoming edition of the commentary.

Discussions of the *Pharsalia* must from the beginning have included some statement concerning poetry in general and the epic in particular. For there has always been disagreement as to the purpose of poetry and the subject matter of the epic. Soon after the appearance of Lucan's epic, the question still debated by modern scholars as to whether the *Pharsalia* should be classified as history or poetry became a favorite topic for discussion. The history of this dispute has been traced by Eva Sanford in her paper "Lucan and His Roman Critics."² Echoes of it are found in the introductions to our commentaries which, like all mediaeval *Accessus*, are a conglomerate of traditional information concerning the author and his work, inherited from early commentaries and added to by succeeding generations of scholars.³

In the early commentaries Servius's pronouncement, repeated by Isidore of Seville, that Lucan is a historian, not a poet, is echoed slavishly, even though in the body of the commentaries Lucan is commonly called *poeta* and his poetic devices are pointed out. Miss Sanford has shown that in general the feeling is that "the poet's tale must be more involved than that of the historian." Thus the *Commenta Bernensia* state: *Lucanus dicitur a plerisque non esse in numero poetarum, quia omnino historiam sequitur, quod poeticae arti non conuenit* (1.1). Lucan is not a poet because he writes straightforward history.

In the commentaries of the two French teachers, Anselm and Arnulf, however, there is a modification of this statement which shows that they had thought about the nature of poetry or at least that they had found statements about it in earlier works which they considered worth repeating. Anselm, writing in the twelfth cen-

¹ For the date see my paper "Arnulfus and the *Faits des Romains*," *Mod. Lang. Quart.* 2 (1941) 3.

² E. M. Sanford, "Lucan and his Roman Critics," *CPh* 26 (1931) 233-257.

³ E. M. Sanford, "The Manuscripts of Lucan, *Accessus* and *Marginalia*," *Speculum* 9 (1934) 278-295. On *Accessus* in general see G. Przychocki, "Accessus Ovidiani," *Symbolae ad Veterum Auctorum atque ad Medii Aevi Studia Philologa*, 1 (Krakow, 1911).

tury, distinguishes between the art of the poet and that of the historian: notandum etiam quod iste non dicitur proprie poeta cum poesis dicatur fictio, sed tamen quia in topographiis, id est in descriptionibus locorum, fingit, inde uocatur poeta (*Accessus*). Although Lucan is not properly a poet since poetry is fiction, the fact that he sometimes invents gives him a right to be called a poet. Arnulf in the thirteenth century has very similar remarks: while Juvenal is purely a writer of satire, Terence of comedy, and Horace, in the Odes, of lyric poetry, Lucan is not purely a poet, he is both a poet and a historian. (Non iste est poeta purus sed poeta et historiographus; nam historiam suam prosequitur et nihil fingit, unde poeta non simpliciter dicitur sed poeta et historiographus [*Accessus*]). *Fingere* then is characteristic of the poet's art. Arnulf adds that whatever is fictitious in the *Pharsalia* comes not from Lucan but from others: nam si aliquid ficticii inducit, non ex sua parte sed ex aliorum parte inducit; apponit enim uel ut perhibent, uel ut dicunt, uel ut memorant. Anselm and Arnulf never attempt to define the word *fictio* but it is clear that those passages in which Lucan uses his imagination instead of relying on historical sources are the ones which entitle him to be ranked among the poets.

These statements are of course not original. Horace uses *fingere* as a synonym for writing poetry; Servius, in the beginning of his commentary, defines the epic: quod constat ex divinis humanisque personis continens vera cum fictis; but by fiction he seems to mean the supernatural element. The immediate authority of Anselm and Arnulf is probably Isidore (*Diff.* 1.2.21): falsum ad oratores pertinet . . . fictum vero ad poetas. Falsum est ergo quod verum non est, fictum quod tantum verisimile est. What is significant is that these commentators should have adopted such a definition of poetry, for it is unknown to their predecessors and absent from the contemporary *Artes Poetriae*.⁴ For the authors of these rhetorical treatises were interested in the form of poetry, not in its nature.

In most of the commentaries on Lucan as in the *Artes Poetriae* the principles of oratory and rhetoric are considered valid for all

⁴ E. Faral, *Les Arts Poétiques du 12^e et du 13^e siècle* (Paris, 1914); G. Mari, *I trattati medievali di ritmica Latina* (Milan, 1899); G. Saintsbury, *History of Criticism* (1902); J. F. D'Alton, *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism* (1931); C. S. Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York, 1928); J. W. H. Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1934). For further bibliography see W. F. Patterson, "Three Centuries of French Poetic Theory," *Univ. Michigan Publ. Lang. Lit.*, 14.15 (1935).

types of writing. Thus the enlarged version of the *Adnotationes* refers to Cicero's authority in a discussion of the use of digressions in poetry (*Berol.* 35, 9.367: has fabulas ideo introducit ut quodammodo recreetur animus auditoris iam defatigatus in seriis rebus et idem praecepit Tullius in Rhetoricis). But although Anselm and Arnulf are also primarily interested in rhetoric, they are aware of a clear distinction between prose and poetry, a difference of kind as well as of degree, which is entirely lacking in the *Artes Poetricae*. The doubts expressed in the *Accessus* as to Lucan's right to be numbered among the poets are forgotten, even by Arnulf, in the body of the commentaries. His technique is that of a poet and they point out the poetic devices in his method and style: *metricè scribit*, says Arnulf, *fingit*, says Anselm. But this is not all: another characteristic of a poet seems to be that he does not attempt to prove anything and that when he presents many systems he does not bind himself to any one. Historians and philosophers show the fallacies of some theories and indicate the truth of others, but the poet is satisfied with acquainting his readers with diverse views without committing himself to the support of any. Thus when discussing the passage about the tides (1.410), Arnulf remarks that Lucan is using the technique of poetry when he suggests three theories to explain them, without attempting to choose between them or to solve the problem: *apponit tres opiniones sed nullam soluit aut affirmat*, more poetè. The same idea is also found in the enlarged version of the *Adnotationes*: *proprium est poetarum ut non unam sectam solummodo sed diversarum opiniones suo carmini inserant* (6.608).

The commentators point out a great many cases in which the practice of poets differs from that of other writers, and discuss at great length figures peculiar to poetry. Only a few can be mentioned here. The first is the use of the past for the future which, they all agree, is a common device of poetry: *ita loquitur de preteritis quasi futura essent, ita enim solent loqui poete* (Anselm 1.38). In the second place a poet frequently denies that he is capable of treating a subject while actually handling it: *cum dicat, dicit se tamen non dicere, quia non potest digne singula persequi, et uocatur occupatio* (Anselm 2.173). Similar to this is the method, which is noted many times in the *Pharsalia*, of mentioning the absence of something which is then described *per remotionem*: *per remotionem more suo ostendit que soleant fieri in nuptiis* (Arnulf 2.351); *et quid*

soleat fieri more suo per remotionem ostendit (Arnulf 4.749). More-over, obscure and hidden thoughts are often expressed by poets who then proceed to clarify them in the following verses: solent poetae ea quae obscure dicta sunt sequentibus explanare (*Berol.* 35, 6.700); et hoc iam est dictum superius sed occultius (Anselm 4.484). Personification is also found in poetry: per poeticam phantasiam dat sensum inanimatae rei (*Berol.* 35, 8.197). Finally, it is customary for poets to join the end of a book to the beginning of the next and thus to avoid abrupt divisions between the parts of a narrative poem, just as within the books, the commentators observe, transitions from one subject to another are skilfully managed: consuetudo poetarum est, ut finem praecedentis libri initio sequentis iungant quibusdam particulis; ut Maro saepe fecit (*Berol.* 35, 4.1); et, ut solent facere poete, continuat istum librum ad superiorem, nam idem facit Virgilius (Anselm 2.1).

Among the liberties taken by poets with facts or the logical sequence of events, some are due, says Anselm, to the necessities of the metre: et nota quod non tenet ordinem in numerando pro ut sunt propinquiora, sed ut competentius uidit ad ipsa metra (2.421). There are, however, practically no glosses on versification in any of the commentaries; their authors content themselves with an occasional reference to systole or unusual spellings due to metre. Far more numerous are the remarks on single words, usually brief and introduced by the phrase *bene autem dixit*, in which the commentators praise Lucan's use of some strikingly apt word or phrase, or take advantage of the text to expound Latin grammar and provide their students with a fund of synonyms. Particular attention is also paid in all the commentaries to technical words, similes, and metaphors (*Adnot.* 3.44; 3.659; 4.285; *Comment. Bern.* 4.453, 475, etc.).

Ancient debates on poetry usually included some attempt to evaluate the part played by *ars* and *ingenium* respectively. In the mediaeval treatises the tendency, already apparent in Roman criticism, which tended to replace poetic by rhetoric, is carried to the extreme. Style and its ornaments are all important and the form matters far more than the contents: "The beauty of verse is for the most part due to the manner of saying rather than to what is said," says Matthew of Vendôme in his *Ars Versificatoria* (3.1: versus enim plerumque ex modo dicendi maiorem quam ex substantia dicti contrahit venustatem). Anyone observing the rules formulated in

the treatises and using the rhetorical devices ought to be able to write poetry. The theory of the poet's inspiration had practically disappeared during the Middle Ages. It is therefore extremely interesting to find both Anselm and Arnulf stating that poets are divinely inspired: *poete non dicuntur loqui suo spiritu sed diuino*, says Anselm (1.2). The fact that in both commentaries this is found to explain the same line of the *Pharsalia* (the use of the plural *canimus* in 1.2) shows a probable borrowing from some earlier work, perhaps Vacca's commentary. The significant thing, however, is that if this was found in some early gloss all the commentators ignored it with the exception of Anselm and Arnulf. Indeed Arnulf, who may be dependent on Anselm for this, is not content like him to state briefly that poets are said to be inspired. He gives, in this first comment, his definition of poetry: *poete non ore proprio tantum loquuntur sed de spiritus reuelatione, et bene dicuntur poete canere quia metrice scribunt et continentiam et concordiam morum persuadere intendunt*. Poets are inspired by a revelation of the divine spirit, they write in metrical form, and their function is ethical. Arnulf is not merely repeating words that he has read elsewhere, he is giving his interpretation of the aim and nature of poetry.

Concerning the aim of the poet, all the commentators echo the traditional belief in the moral function of poetry. A poem should teach virtue. Cato, in their hands, becomes the embodiment of the four cardinal virtues and every passage in which Lucan praises moral excellence is emphasized and commented on (*Comment. Bern.* 1.11; 4.576; *Berol.* 35, 5.527; Anselm 2.221; 5.527; Arnulf 4.373, etc.). A second aim of the *Pharsalia* is also pointed out repeatedly, for apart from teaching *bonos mores*, Lucan is credited with the purpose of wishing to discourage civil wars: *intentio eius erat reuocare et absterrere animos Romanorum a ciuili bello* (Arnulf 7.387; cf. Anselm 2.1: *ad maiorem dehortationem ciuilis belli*, and similar glosses scattered through the commentaries). But here again Anselm and Arnulf have something more to offer than the earlier compilers. They know that in the classical theory *delectare* was one of the chief aims of the poet. Just as Cicero and Horace had maintained that poets give pleasure as well as instruction, so the later commentators on Lucan believe that poetry should afford pleasure: *poete solent delectare quandoque* (Anselm 2.410); *ecce*

hic habemus quare adduxit digressionem, causa uidelicet delectationis arguendum (Arnulf 10.332; cf. 9.318, etc.). Moreover Arnulf makes it clear that the *Pharsalia* is to be classed as ethical not because it teaches morals (non ideo quod det precepta morum) but because, by presenting noble and virtuous characters to be admired, Lucan makes virtue attractive to his readers. This again shows more insight into the real nature of poetry than is found in any of the earlier commentaries.

When in the *Accessus* Anselm calls Lucan a poet because there is fiction as well as history in the *Pharsalia*, he gives as an example the fact that Lucan often changes place names, those for instance of the ports he mentions: sed quia in topographiis, id est in descriptionibus locorum, fingit, inde uocatus est poeta, nam in describendo mutat ipsos portus. The commentators often notice that changes in place names are introduced by poets. Thus the *Commenta Bernensia*: sciendum est mutavisse illum nomen ex vicino sicut frequentissime apud poetas invenimus (7.451). Similar statements are found in Servius: topothesia est, id est fictus secundum licentiam locus (*Aeneid* 1.159), and later: diximus superius nomina poetas ex vicino usurpare (1.274). But Anselm combines the freedom granted by poetic license, of which it is essential for a poet to take advantage, with the deepest reverence for the precept given by Horace in the *Ars Poetica*: that a poet's lies should be consistent with reality (*Ars* 151f.; cf. the gloss to 119: omnis poeta aut certam historiam dicit aut fingit. Si autem certam scribis famam sequere, aut si fingis habeat artem et verisimilitudinem figmentum tuum; cf. also the gloss to 151: nec enim veritatem poetae pollicentur, sed discrepantiam in eo quod fingunt vitare debent; cf. 338 and gloss; Servius on *Aeneid* 3.46; vituperabile enim est, poetam aliquid fingere, quod penitus a veritate discedat). Anselm makes of verisimilitude the condition without which a poem cannot be successful. In statements like the following: omnis scriptor uerisimiliter debet scribere (1.213) he seems to consider verisimilitude a necessary qualification of all literary works. But it is clear from many other passages where this is stressed that he meant it to apply more specifically to narrative poetry: omnis qui narrat uerisimiliter saltem debet narrare (4.810).⁵ The other commentators occasionally show that Lucan is not guilty of contradiction or that his inventions are

⁵ Cf. Anselm 1.156; 2.113; 5.462, 613, 653; 6.39, 45, 55, 343, 570, etc.

likely. But in this constant emphasis on verisimilitude Anselm is unique among the commentators on Lucan. For he raises *verisimilitudo* to the position of a literary law, the observance of which is required of all narrative poets.

So far comments have been emphasized which show unusual discernment on the part of twelfth and thirteenth century critics. Nevertheless, both Anselm and Arnulf belong to their period and their flashes of insight, whether due to classical texts, most of which they probably only knew at second hand, or to ancient commentators, are brief and infrequent. They stress throughout the pedagogical value of narrative poetry, for the purpose of acquiring both moral standards and factual knowledge. The long didactic passages in the poem in no way detract from its poetic value and Lucan's intention to instruct needs no justification: *poeta ideo introducit quia hic habuit locum exponendi illud quod multis latuit, scilicet qualiter sol se haberet illis qui sunt sub Cancro (Berol. 35, 9.529)*. Arnulf calls Lucan *bonus philosophus* in connection with the passage on death in the fourth book (4.576ff.), and refers to Martianus Capella for more information on the same subject. The main interest of all the commentators, as it was that of the authors of the *Artes Poeticae*, is in the externals, in the ornaments of style, tropes and figures, and in the formal architecture of the poem. In the *Accessus* to Anselm's commentary, for instance, we find the traditional statements concerning the two orders, the *ordo naturalis* and the *ordo artificialis*, used to begin narrative poems: *et nota cum sint duo ordines, unus naturalis et alius artificialis, quo artificiali utitur Virgilius, iste uero utitur naturali; nam ita narrat ut res gesta est*. All the commentators, early and late, note deviations from the regular procedure. There is, for instance, the invocation which they consider ironical and sarcastic (*iste non utitur inuocatione more poetarum sed quadam derisoria*, Anselm 1.63); the fact that the narration does not begin immediately as it should (*facta inuocatione et propositione . . . debet sequi narratio. Sed ad maiorem narrationis euidenciam discordie causas assignat ut, causis assignatis, quasi uerisimilius uideatur quicquid de bello sequitur*, Arnulf 1.67; cf. Anselm *ibid.*: *facta propositione et inuocatione deberet statim narrare*); that some books do not end with the epilogue required by the rules of rhetoric (*apostropha ad vicem epilogi finit librum*, *Comment. Bern.* 7.847).

It would be tedious to examine all the comments that have to do with the structure of the poem. "The authors delight in variety" says Arnulf (5.462) who, like the other commentators, considers that his main task is to point out the different rhetorical devices and particularly those grouped under the general name of *amplificatio*. Among these, digressions and descriptions deserve a brief mention, for they recur most frequently in the later commentators, and it is interesting to see how close their remarks are at times to those of the theorists of rhetoric, particularly Matthew of Vendôme, Arnulf's most bitter enemy. While Geoffrey of Vinsauf sees in descriptions nothing but a way of enlarging and developing his subject matter (*descriptioes dilatant materiam et fiet illa brevis diffusa*, *Documentum de Arte Versificandi* 2.2.3), Matthew insists that they must not be introduced artificially but must be a necessary part of the work.⁶ Anselm and Arnulf take pains to justify Lucan's use of these devices, as preparing subsequent actions and situations, throwing light upon the characters, and putting the reader in a receptive frame of mind: *nunc describit locum ubi ciuitas Ilerda erat sita et hoc ualebit ad futuram narrationem* (Anselm 4.11); *ecce ad quid hunc locum descripsit, ad ostendendam Cesaris uehementiam* (Arnulf 6.29). Always harping on *verisimilitudo*, Anselm shows that digressions are often introduced in order to render probable situations or events which might otherwise seem untrue: *ideo hanc digressionem facit, quia non esset uerisimile ut tantus homo ueniret ad eam* (6.570). Arnulf finds digressions sufficiently justified by the pleasure they afford the reader: *tota hec digressio causa delectationis fuit* (9.318).

The authors of the *Artes Poetrie* based their doctrine, not only on such ancient sources as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De Inventione* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*, but on the laws governing the writing of poetry extracted from their reading of the classics by the teachers of the *trivium*. Their influence was great on authors writing both in Latin and in the vernacular. That is one reason why, in spite of the unutterable dullness of some of the material, it is important that mediaeval commentaries on the classics be published and studied. I have tried to show that two French commentators on Lucan are particularly worth studying, Anselm of Laon and Arnulf of Orléans. Their work was known to later

⁶ See Faral, *op. cit.* 74ff.

generations, especially that of Arnulf, which was copied in many manuscripts and used by later commentators. When we remember the importance attached to the theory of the poet's inspiration and the emphasis placed by some sixteenth century French poets on fiction as poetry, it is not, I think, fanciful to suggest that some of these statements concerning poetry may have influenced the later humanists and indirectly the Renaissance poets.⁷

⁷ For a recent discussion of the relation between the 12th and 13th century French Renaissance and the Italian Renaissance, see B. L. Ullman, "Some Aspects of the Origin of Italian Humanism," *PhQ* 20 (1941) 20-34.