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FAMAE PETITOR. LUCAN'S PORTRAYAL OF POMPEY

ABSTRACT. Pyplacz Joanna, *Famae petitor*: Lucan's Portrayal of Pompey.

A certain number of scholars have already pointed out that Lucan's portrayal of Pompey in the *Pharsalia* is far from being idealised. In fact, though the poet's sympathies are apparently with the Republicans, yet his attitude to Pompey is rather critical. Lucan's Pompey is depicted as a senile and narcissistic leader who dwells on his past success and lives in the world of his own fantasies. Trapped in the vicious circle of his delusions of grandeur, Lucan's Pompey is rather grotesque than majestic. The harder he tries to enhance his public image, the more pathetic he becomes both in the eyes of his friends and in those of his enemies. The effects of his efforts are, therefore, quite contrary to their purpose. On the one hand, the figure of the senile and deluded Pompey is the caricature of the decaying Roman Republic. On the other hand, however, he is the caricature of the literary paradigm of a standard epic hero.

Keywords: Pompey, Lucan, irony, comic, epic, Roman Republic, decay, caricature, hero.

The fact that the senility of Lucan's Pompey mirrors that of the Roman Republic is already common knowledge. As Frederick Ahl has written, "[...] the republic too is old before its time, senile and ready to collapse less than a hundred years after the destruction of Carthage. If Pompey is, as Lucan describes him in l. 135: «magni nominis umbra» [...], so also is the republic."¹ W.R. Johnson, for his part, has called Lucan's Pompey *ridiculous by design*.²

Therefore, the aim of this article is not to prove what is quite evident, but, firstly, to show through selected examples, what particular techniques Lucan uses in order to portray Pompey as the representative figure of the decaying Republican Rome and, secondly, to try to find an answer to the question, what final effect he has achieved by employing those techniques, both as regards Pompey himself and the whole State.

¹Ahl 1976: 157–158.

²Johnson 1987: 72.

In the first book of the *Pharsalia*, Lucan introduces Caesar and Pompey by means of the famous metaphor of the oak and the lightning which illustrates the major differences between the two protagonists of his poem. The lightning symbolises the dynamic Caesar, and the oak – the indolent and ageing Pompey.³ In spite of its almost total decay, the ancient and almost rootless tree is the object of unceasing worship and veneration and its leafless branches still provide shade and shelter:

[...] Stat magni nominis umbra;
 qualis frugifero **quercus** sublimis in agro
 exuvias veteris populi sacrataque gestans
 dona ducum nec iam **validis radicibus** haerens
 pondere fixa suo est, nudosque per aera ramos
 effundens trunco, non **frondibus**, efficit umbram;
 et quamvis primo nutet casura sub Euro,
 tot circum silvae firmo se **robore** tollant,
 sola tamen colitur. [...] (I 135–143).

This simile most probably stems from Homer's *Iliad*:⁴

ὡς δ' ὄθ' ὑπὸ πληγῆς πατρὸς Διὸς ἐξερῖτη δρυς
 πρόρριζος, δεινὴ δὲ θεοῦ γίγνεται ὀδμή
 ἐξ αὐτῆς, τὸν δ' οὐ περ ἔχει θράσος ὅς κεν ἴδηται
 ἐγγυς ἐόν, χαλεπὸς δὲ Διὸς μέγαλοιο κεραυνός,
 ὡς ἔπεσ' Ἔκτορος ὅκα χαμαὶ μένος ἐν κονίησι:
 χειρὸς δ' ἐκβαλεν ἔγχος, ἐπ' αὐτῷ δ' ἄσπις ἐάφθη
 καὶ κόρυς, ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ βράχε τεύχεα ποικίλα χαλκῷ. (Hom. *Il.* XIV 414–420).

However, it also bears a strong resemblance to the following passage of Virgil's *Aeneid*,⁵ where Aeneas is compared to a strong oak whose solid tissue is robust against the attacks of the wind:

Ac velut annoso **validam** cum **robore quercum**
 Alpini Boreae nunc hinc nunc flatibus illinc
 eruere inter se certant; it stridor, et altae
 consternunt terram concusso stipite **frondes**;
 ipsa haeret scopulis et quantum vertice ad auras
 aetherias, tantum **radice** in Tartara tendit: (Verg. *Aen.* IV 441–446).

The lexical similarities between both passages quoted above are obvious. However, while the branches of the Virgilian oak are covered with leaves and

³Lebek 1976: 67–69; Rosner-Siegel 1983: 165; Radicke 2004: 169. “The oak is Rome, and Pompey is implicitly compared to the aged state that has grown enervated and is surrounded by other, sturdier woods [...]”. (Fratantuono 2012: 18).

⁴More about the epic background of the oak simile in Lebek 1976: 67.

⁵Roche 2009: 186; Lebek 1976: 67.

its strong roots plunge to the very edge of Tartarus, Lucan's oak is practically rootless (as its roots are almost entirely rotten)⁶ and leafless. Contrary to Virgil's *valida robore quercus*, the roots of Lucan's oak are *nec iam validae*.

By means of this intertextual allusion, Lucan communicates to his reader that Pompey is not an epic hero, but – on the contrary – an anti-hero that lacks basic 'epic' qualities. This manoeuvre is a good example of Lucan's use of the technique called *κατ' ἀντίφρασιν* (analysed thoroughly by Emanuele Narducci), which consists in reversing particular situations found in the hypotext.⁷

The comparison with Aeneas not only exposes Pompey as a rather un-heroic figure but, at the same time, it shows him in a grotesque light. Despite the fact that Pompey lacks the essential heroic qualities, he still aspires to the status of a real-world Aeneas. The fact that he is old – contrary to the Virgilian hero who is in the prime of life – renders him a highly inadequate candidate for this role.

The slow decomposition of the oak's roots, apart from the literal meaning, might also have another, metaphorical one: it might symbolise Pompey's loss of Republican ideals whose champion he considers himself to be. Surrounded by a group of corrupt senators⁸ and, as W. R. Johnson has written, *dazzled by his own fame and by the popularity he zealously courts*,⁹ Lucan's Pompey is morbidly narcissistic. The dead tree symbolises the "dead" statesman¹⁰ as well as his dead morals.¹¹

The lightning, of course, symbolises Caesar whose destructive force, similar to that of a thunderbolt, destroys everything that stands in his way to victory.¹² As Robert Sklenář has observed, the expression *non ... tantum nomen* responds to *stat magni nominis umbra*:¹³

[...] Sed non in Caesare **tantum**
nomen erat nec fama ducis, sed nescia virtus
stare loco, solusque pudor non vincere bello. (I 143–145).

The result of the encounter between the decaying tree and the fierce lightning is more than obvious, therefore Lucan does not need to describe it in express terms.¹⁴ Not only is the initial simile a prelude to the *Pharsalia*, but it is also an important component of the main body of the epic. Judith Rosner-Siegel has

⁶ Thorne 2011: 375.

⁷ Narducci 1979: 77.

⁸ Johnson 1987: 78; Roche 2009: 186–187.

⁹ Johnson 1987: 73. Martin Dinter has called him a *fame-addict* (Dinter 2012: 52).

¹⁰ Sklenář 2003: 104.

¹¹ Deratani 1970: 140.

¹² Rosner-Siegel 1983: 168 ff.; Fantham 1992: 165. More about Lucan's portrayal of Caesar in: Menz 1970.

¹³ Sklenář 2003: 104.

¹⁴ More on the subject of this contrast in: Lebek 1976: 175.

observed that the introductory similes are *programmatic*.¹⁵ Lee Fratantuono has pointed out in his recent study that the oak simile may refer both to Pompey and also to the Roman State.¹⁶

Paul Roche has noticed that the account of the evacuation of Rome alludes to the evacuation of Troy in the *Aeneid* (I 634ff.).¹⁷ While Aeneas does everything to save his family and friends, Pompey – on the contrary – abandons Rome in a cowardly manner:

Si periturus abis, et nos rape in omnia tecum;
sin aliquam expertus sumptis spem ponis in armis,
hanc primum tutare domum. cui parvus Iulus,
cui pater et coniunx quondam tua dicta **relinquor**? (Verg. *Aen.* II 675–678).

[...] Urbem populis victisque frequentem
gentibus et generis, coeat si turba, capacem
humani facilem venturo Caesare praedam
ignavae **liquere** manus. [...] (I 511–514).

The comparison of these passages reveals an important detail: both of them contain the verb (*re*)*linquere*. Through the mouth of Aeneas' wife, Creusa, it expresses nothing more than the anxiety of the desperate woman, whereas through that of Lucan's narrator, it expresses strong criticism. Additionally, it has been inserted in the middle of the expression *ignavae... manus*, which intensifies the effect. Together with the oak simile, this passage gives the reader a clear signal that Pompey is not a hero but a common braggart and should not be taken seriously.

The oak simile returns with double force in the third book of the poem.¹⁸ Caesar is marching on Massilia. The progress of his army, however, is physically impeded by an ancient oak grove which – as it soon turns out – has served the local tribes as a shrine for frightening, occult practices. Caesar scoffs at the superstitious fear of his troops who are terrified of the revenge of the barbarian gods (III 429–431) and he takes the sin of cutting down the grove upon himself (*credite me fecisse nefas*, III 437).

The deforestation scene is not entirely a product of Lucan's own invention but, as Vincent Hunnink reminds, it has grown out of an established epic tradition.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it contains some innovative elements. Firstly, the Massilian

¹⁵Rosner-Siegel 1983: 167–168.

¹⁶Fratantuono 2012: 18.

¹⁷Roche 2009: 318.

¹⁸Rosner-Siegel 1983: 175–176; Ahl 1976: 156; Loupiac 1992: 48; Narducci 1979: 110; Rowland 1969: 107; Masters 1992: 27–28; Green 1994: 221; Augoustakis 2006: 364; Saylor 2003: 381.

¹⁹Hunnink 1992: 182.

oaks do not fall immediately after being cut down, but they remain standing for a moment as they are sustained by the surrounding trees:

[...] propulsaque robore denso
sustinuit se silva cadens. [...] (III 444–445).

This brings about the remembrance of the oak which sustains itself under its own weight.

Another detail that links the grove with the oak, and thus with Pompey, is the fact that, as Fratantuono has written, *the sacred grove is another place of shadow*,²⁰ which is immediately associated with the expression *nominis umbra*. It is, therefore, the symbol of what is old and obsolete. At the same time, however, it symbolises a particular established order which is being abruptly destroyed.²¹

Although the single tree and the grove have a lot in common, there is one key difference between them, namely that in the case of the oak, Lucan describes it as being old and decayed, while in the case of the grove, he goes one step further and depicts the ancient trunks as being bloodstained.²² Hunink argues that Lucan alludes here to the ancient practice of human sacrifice which, though obsolete in Rome, was still practiced in Gaul.²³

However, I will risk a speculation that the human sacrifice mentioned by Lucan in this passage might be a subtle, yet very graphic metaphor for the deaths of the Roman citizens who died during the previous civil conflicts, beginning with the legendary murder of Remus²⁴ and ending in the recent war between Marius and Sulla. The strange *prodigia* which take place in this barbarian shrine might symbolise the spectres of Roman history that haunt the decaying Republic.

If this is the case, then the grove may symbolise not only Pompey, but also the Roman Republic as a whole. It would appear, therefore, that Lucan treats this grove as a *sui generis* displacement or substitute of Rome and the Capitoline. If the Massilian *locus horridus* is a sophisticated metaphor for Rome, it shows Rome not as an ideal place, but as one tainted by barbaric savagery.

If such a reading is correct, then it would mean that Lucan considers the fall of the Republic as the natural consequence of its past (and present) conduct. This is not the first instance in the *Pharsalia* when Lucan underlines the fact that Rome has never ceased to sacrifice its own citizens (e.g. I 95–97, II 64 ff.).²⁵ The

²⁰ Fratantuono 2012: 111. Fratantuono argues that “no mention of shadow in Lucan’s epic can be far removed from the thought of Pompey and all he represents”.

²¹ In the Roman tradition, sacred groves were associated with long tradition and with *mos maiorum*. They were also, as Dunstan Lowe has observed, *potentially sacred*. (Lowe 2011: 101–104).

²² Fantham 2011: 531.

²³ Hunink 1992: 172–173.

²⁴ Green 1994: 82–105. On the connection of Caesar and Augustus with Romulus see Scott 1925.

²⁵ Bernstein 2011: 275–276.

bloodstained bark of the trees mirrors the bloodstained walls of the young city of Rome, mentioned in the beginning of the *Pharsalia*:

fraterno primi maduerunt sanguine muri. (I 95).

Thus, the name and the apparently pro-citizen political shape of the Republic is in fact only a façade, just like Pompey's obsolete prestige.

The "murdered" trees are, therefore, associated both with Pompey (through the oak simile) and with the Roman State, polluted with fratricidal conflicts (symbolised by the theme of human sacrifice). These two threads of associations, inevitably, lead to Pompey's political profile, and especially to his past, to whose inglorious epoch at Sulla's side Lucan often alludes. Therefore, the symbol of the grove becomes a double-edged sword. Pompey is the second Remus,²⁶ the heir of the dishonourably murdered brother, but at the same time he is the heir of the dishonourable "fratricide", Sulla.

Apart from the passages in the *Pharsalia* such as this one, where Lucan underlines Pompey's Sullan past by means of sophisticated hints and allusions, there are also some instances where he talks openly about Pompey as a diligent pupil of Sulla.²⁷ For example, when during the battle at Dyrrachium, Pompey spares the lives of a group of Caesar's troops in an act of misdirected *pietas*,²⁸ Lucan mocks him for being less efficient than his predecessor, and thus handing over Rome to a tyrant:

[...] **Felix** et libera regum
Roma, fores, iurisque tui, vicisset in illo
si tibi **Sulla** loco. [...] (VI 301–303).

In this obviously ironic exclamation, Lucan is playing around with the arrogant²⁹ *cognomen* of the infamous dictator. With the help of the same "echo-technique", the narrator mocks Pompey's equally megalomaniac *cognomen* (*nota*

²⁶For Lucan's use of the myth of Romulus and Remus see Masters 1992: 116–123; Green 1994: 203–233.

²⁷"[...] et docilis Sullam vicisse magistrum" (I 326). The fact that Lucan particularly underlines the Sullan origin of Pompey's political career was already noticed by the seventeenth-century editors of Lucan (*M. Annaeus Lucanus De Bello Civili, Cum Hug. Grotii, Farnabii notis integris & Variorum selectiss. Accurante Corn. Schrevelio*, Lugd. Batav. et Roterod., Ex Officina Hackiana, 1669, p. 11); Bagnani 1955: 30. Giorgio Bagnani cites Cicero, who in a letter to Atticus expresses his distrust for Pompey as a potential pursuer of *Sullanum regnum* (Cic. *Att.* VIII 11. 2); Bernstein 2011: 275, n. 53.

²⁸Although some scholars interpret Pompey's act as a sign of generosity and *pietas* (see D'Alessandro Behr: 2007: 83), the sarcastic mention of Sulla indicates that this scene may serve to expose Pompey as a hypocrite: on the one hand, he spares the lives of the enemies, but on the other hand, he contributed to the deaths of many more people as Sulla's sideman.

²⁹"Addat etiamnum huic gloriae superbum cognomen Felicem, ipse tamen obsessis in toto orbe proscriptis hac corona Sertorio cessit". (Plin. *Hist. Nat.* 22. 12); Balsdon 1951: 1.

bene, granted to him by Sulla)³⁰, which he consequently associates with the word *umbra* and, in general, with the motif of a shadow.

By means of a very similar technique, Lucan also associates the name of Magnus with either Sulla's boastful *cognomen* or his first name Faustus, thus further reminding the reader about Pompey's past:

[...] nam cernere voltus
et voces audire datur, multosque per annos
dilectus tibi, **Magne**, socer post pignora tanta,
sanguinis infausti subolem mortemque nepotum,
te nisi Niliaca propius non vidit harena. (V 471–475).

At nox felicis **Magno** pars ultima vitae
sollicitos vana decepit imagine somnos. (VII 7–8).

Heu nimium felix aeterno nomine Lesbos,
sive doces populos regesque admittere **Magnum**,
seu praestas mihi sola fidem. [...] (VIII 139–141).

[...] feriam tua viscera, **Magne**,
malueram soceri: rapimur quo cuncta feruntur.
Tene mihi dubitas an sit violare necesse,
cum liceat? Quae te nostri fiducia regni
huc agit, infelix? [...] (VIII 521–525).

These subtle, yet sarcastic hints may be reminiscent of the following passage of Seneca's *De clementia*, where a true leader (*pater patriae*) is opposed to the owners of vane *cognomina*, such as Magnus or Felix:³¹

Hoc, quod parenti, etiam principi faciendum est, quem appellavimus Patrem Patriae non adulatione vana adducti. Cetera enim cognomina honori data sunt; **Magnos et Felices** et Augustos diximus et ambitiosae maiestati quicquid potuimus titulorum congegimus illis hoc tribuentes; Patrem quidem Patriae appellavimus, ut sciret datam sibi potestatem patriam, quae est temperantissima liberis consulens suaque post illos reponens. (Sen. *De clem.* I 14, 2).

Interestingly, the criticism of boastful *cognomina* reaches back to Plautus and his *Miles gloriosus*. In the following passage, where Pyrgopolinices rejoices at the mention of his *cognomentum*, Plautus most probably mocks the ridiculous and often rather inadequate names assumed by Roman generals and statesmen:

PYRG. Adeat, si quid volt.
PAL. Si quid vis, adi, mulier.
MIL. Pulcher, salve.
PYRG. Meum **cognomentum** commemoravit. di tibi dent quaecumque optes (Plaut. *Mil.* 1037–1038).

³⁰ Plut. *Pomp.* 13. 4. For more on this subject see: Feeney 1986.

³¹ More on this subject in Balsdon 1951.

The fact that Lucan's Pompey resembles the figure of *miles gloriosus* has already been noticed by scholars. W. R. Johnson points out that *with the exception of the speech to his troops before Pharsalus [...], Pompey is presented as miles gloriosus, now bellowing of his pre-eminence, now whining in resentment and self-pity.*³² This means that Lucan's attitude to Pompey is not only very critical, but, at the same time, actually, quite sarcastic.

The *Pharsalia* contains two scenes where Pompey is depicted as being asleep (III 8–35, VII 7–25).³³ During the first sleeping scene, Pompey has a vision of his dead wife, Julia. Scholars have already noticed that this passage contains substantial allusions to Propertius' *El.* IV 7, in which the ghost of Cynthia visits her lover in a dream:³⁴

Inde soporifero cesserunt languida somno
membra ducis; diri tum plena horroris imago
visa caput maestum per hiantes Iulia terras
tollere et accenso furialis stare sepulchro (III 8–11).

The motif of a dream in itself is part of a long literary tradition.³⁵ However, the fact that the *Pharsalia* contains two sleeping scenes, both of which are connected with Pompey, can be attributed to Lucan's specific strategy mentioned by Hunnink,³⁶ which consists in associating Pompey with night and darkness and Caesar with daylight and action. The aim of this strategy would be to underline Pompey's sluggishness and contrast it with Caesar's demonic vitality.³⁷ In addition, as Fabio Stok has noticed, Lucan alters the traditional motif, as Pompey falls asleep in broad daylight.³⁸

Apart from this long-term effect aiming at underlining Pompey's senility, there is also an instantaneous, comic one. The very association of the ageing Pompey with the young and passionate Propertius is enough to make the reader laugh. The striking contrast, however, between the furious spectre of Julia and the drowsy, old Pompey turns out to be even more comic. This episode resembles one particular scene from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* where the ghost of the murdered Clytemnestra attempts to waken the drunken Erinyes (Aesch. *Eum.* 94–39) who, incidentally, also fall asleep during daytime.

The possible Greek hypotext of this scene has already been recognized as

³² Johnson 1987: 80.

³³ Morford 1996: 77; Stok 1996: 35.

³⁴ Hübner 1984: 236–237; Sannicandro 2010: 50–52; Fratantuono 2012: 16, 21–22.

³⁵ Stok 1996: 37.

³⁶ Hunnink 1992: 169. *The visions serve a different purpose from the traditional epic one: they are necessary to the structure of the poem, and they are essential to its rhetoric in being par excellence devices for the manipulation of color.* (Morford 1996: 75).

³⁷ Hunnink 1992: 169; Stok 1996: 35.

³⁸ Stok 1996: 38.

being at least parodic.³⁹ In spite of the fact that for a long time scholars have been very sceptical about Lucan's use of the Greek sources,⁴⁰ the recent article of Annemarie Ambühl has revealed some similarities between certain passages of the *Pharsalia* and those of Euripides.⁴¹

It can be stated that they are much too obvious to be attributed to mere coincidence, or to the poet's lecture of the Roman hypertexts founded upon these works. Therefore, notwithstanding the significance of Lucan's obvious hypotexts such as Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,⁴² we cannot exclude the possibility that he made use of the works of Greek authors more often than we can imagine.

If, in the first sleeping scene, Lucan is indeed alluding to *The Eumenides*, it would mean that his sophisticated, intertextual game with Aeschylus might go deeper than it could seem at the first glance. The mention of the Eumenides may reinforce the hypothesis that Lucan is alluding to the third part of Aeschylus' trilogy. Moreover, while in his possible Greek hypotext the Erinyes are completely drunk, in Lucan's Roman hypertext they are bursting with energy:

[...] Vidi ipsa tenentes
Eumenidas, quaterent quas vestris lampadas armis (III 14–15).

What Lucan does here is to associate Pompey's drowsiness with the drunkenness of the Erinyes in *The Eumenides*. While Pompey remains drugged with his own delusions, the band of notorious literary drunks turns out to be perfectly sober. The Roman readers of the *Pharsalia* (who, in all probability, were connoisseurs of Greek and Latin literature) would immediately pick the meaning of this grotesque comparison.

Paradoxically, while Aeschylus' Erinyes are useless to Clytemnestra because they are drunk and cannot pursue Orestes, Pompey is useless to Julia because his mind is so imbued with delusions of grandeur that he cannot prevent the Roman nation from destroying itself:

Clytemnestra	demands that			
		The Erinyes	fight	but they don't because they are drunk
		Pompey	not fight	but he does because he is "drunk" with delusions
Julia	demands that			

³⁹ Lebeck 1971: 134; Pyplacz 2009: 110. More on parody in the *Pharsalia* (elsewhere in the poem) in: Dinter 2012: 43–44.

⁴⁰ Pichon 1912: 217.

⁴¹ Ambühl 2010: 36.

⁴² For more about Lucan's relationship with Ovid see Keith 2011: 111–132, Fantham 1992: 14–17, Malamud 2003, Papaioannou 2005, Matthews 2008.

Pompey's second dream in the beginning of the seventh book illustrates these delusions. He dreams about the applause given to him by the Romans in his own theatre. Not only is Pompey a "showman", as Matthew Leigh⁴³ has branded him, but, and above all, he actually believes in the illusion of his own show:⁴⁴

At nox felicitis **Magno** pars ultima vitae
sollicitos vana decepit imagine somnos.
Nam Pompeiani visus sibi sede theatri
innumeram effigiem Romanae cernere plebis
attollique suum laetis ad sidera nomen
vocibus et plausu cuneos certare sonantes;
qualis erat populi facies clamorque faventis
olim, cum iuvenis primique aetate triumphi,
post domitas gentes quas torrens ambit Hiberus
et quaecumque fugax Sertorius inpulit arma,
vespere pacato, pura venerabilis aequae
quam currus ornante toga, plaudente senatu,
sedit adhuc Romanus eques: seu fine bonorum
anxia mens curis ad tempora laeta refugit,
sive per ambages solitas contraria visis
vaticinata quies magni tulit omina planctus,
seu vetito patrias ultra tibi cernere sedes
sic Romam Fortuna dedit. Ne rumpite somnos,
castrorum vigiles, nullas tuba verberet aures (VII 7–25).

The "Sullan" adjective *felix* reminds the reader thanks to whom Pompey has ascended to such a prosperity, and thus prevents him from sympathizing too much with the fate of the doomed general.

In contrast with the first sleeping scene, this time Lucan refers to the historical tradition.⁴⁵ Werner Rutz has observed that Pompey's second dream stems from the biography written by Plutarch.⁴⁶ In Plutarch's version Pompey dreams that he decorates the statue of Venus with war booty:

Καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐθάρρει, τὰ δὲ ὑπέθραττεν αὐτὸν ἢ ὄψις, δεδοικότα μὴ τῷ γένει τῷ Καίσαρος εἰς
Ἀφροδίτην ἀνήκοντι δόξα καὶ λαμπρότης ἀπ' αὐτοῦ γένηται [...].
(Plut. *Pomp.* 68. 2).

Lucan, however, says nothing about the statue, as he prefers to concentrate on portraying the symptoms of Pompey's mental departure from reality.⁴⁷ The expression *vana... imagine*, rhetorically underlined by the poet,⁴⁸ serves the same

⁴³ Leigh 1997: 114.

⁴⁴ Ormand 1994: 47.

⁴⁵ Morford 1996: 81–84; Stok 1996: 50–51.

⁴⁶ Rutz 1963: 335; Stok 1996: 51–52.

⁴⁷ For Lucan's underlining Pompey's vanity see Lintott 1971: 500–501, Johnson 1987: 72.

⁴⁸ Stok 1996: 53.

purpose. The narrator's final request to the guards not to wake up their leader, is reminiscent of Plutarch's observation that Pompey was woken up by a sudden tumult in his camp.⁴⁹ It sounds rather sarcastic in the context of the contents of the general's dream.

Scholars offer three possible ways of interpretation of this scene (and of the previous one), that is: a psychological one, that reflects Pompey's unconsciousness of his own fate, a prophetic one that foretells Pompey's doom, and, finally, a symbolical one assuming that Fortune reveals to the sleeping Pompey what he cannot see while he is awake.⁵⁰ There is, however, also a fourth possibility, namely that the dreams serve to expose Pompey's weaknesses that eventually lead to his fall, i.e., his obtuseness and senility, which render him an inadequate leader (the first dream), and his exaggerated vanity (the second dream).

According to Martin Helzle, Pompey uses many more past tenses than Caesar, who – on the contrary – prefers future tenses.⁵¹ Helzle explains this with the fact that Pompey's successes lie in the past rather than in the present or the future,⁵² while Caesar is constantly heading towards his future victory. The more Pompey indulges in his delusions, the more grotesque he becomes.

The final, tragicomic spectacle takes place in the eighth book, which opens with the description of the flight of the defeated Pompey from the Thessalian battlefield. The narrator "quotes" the thoughts of Pompey, who would now gladly turn the clock back in order to avoid fame which has become his curse:⁵³

[...] Cunctis ignotus gentibus esse
 mallet et obscuro tutus transire per urbes
 nomine; sed poenas **longi Fortuna favoris**
exigit a misero, quae tanto pondere famae
 res premit adversas fatisque prioribus urguet (VIII 19–23).

Not without sarcasm does the narrator say that Pompey must now pay the price for having been favoured by Fortune for so many years. Incidentally, these words, too, evoke a remembrance of Sulla, who was known to have a blind faith in Fortune.⁵⁴ Lucan's Pompey, however, is no longer *felix*, nor is he *fortis*. He has become *miser*, both in the mental sense and in the physical one as well. His feeble body and deranged mind are overwhelmed by the weight of excessive

⁴⁹ Καὶ πανικοί τινες θόρυβοι διέττοντες ἐξάνεστησαν αὐτόν. (Plut. *Pomp.* 68. 2).

⁵⁰ Stok 1996: 58–59.

⁵¹ Helzle 2010: 538.

⁵² Helzle 2010: 538.

⁵³ Dinter 2012: 58.

⁵⁴ "Atque illi felicissimo omnium ante civilem victoriam numquam super industriam fortuna fuit, multique dubitavere, fortior an felicius esset." (Sallust. *Jug.* 95. 4). For more about Sulla's faith in fortuna see: Balsdon 1951.

splendour. Even in the face of danger, Pompey is incapable of thinking about anything else than his fame and glory.⁵⁵

Although, as John Henderson has written, Caesar is *a recycling of Sulla*,⁵⁶ the “Sullan” adjectives systematically associated with the person of Pompey prove that it is Pompey, rather than Caesar, whom Lucan depicts as a much slower, less brave and even less clever version of the infamous dictator. However, as far as Caesar’s character and ambitions are concerned, Henderson is clearly right.

It may be said that Sulla is indeed omnipresent in the *Pharsalia*, however, not as a Caesar *avant la lettre*,⁵⁷ but as the quicker, smarter and brighter predecessor of Pompey. This contrast renders the former demonic, and the latter, ridiculous. The analysis of these techniques has also shown that it is not only Caesar that associates his rival with the infamous dictator (which he does as part of his political propaganda⁵⁸), but it is Lucan himself (disguised as the narrator) who links Pompey with Sulla by means of witty irony and sophisticated allusion.

Pompey’s addiction to prestige, aggravated by senility, is the result of his Sullan “education”. According to Plutarch, the dictator who was very fond of his young friend, did not hesitate to make homages to him in public:

Σύλλας μέντοι καὶ Πομπήιον ἐκ νέου μὲν ἤρην ὑπεξανιστάμενος αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποκαλυπτόμενος ἐπιόντι, καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις νέοις πράξεων ἡγεμονικῶν μεταδιδούς ἀφορμάς, ἐνίους δὲ καὶ παροξύνων ἄκοντας, ἐνέπλησε φιλοτιμίας καὶ ζήλου τὰ στρατεύματα: καὶ πάντων ἐκράτησε βουλόμενος εἶναι μὴ μόνος ἀλλὰ πρῶτος καὶ μέγιστος ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ μεγάλοις. Plut. *Princ. ger. reip.* 806e).

Lucan portrays Pompey in the last phase of his life, as a grotesquely presumptuous old man that has grown from the young favourite of the mad dictator. Ironically, as time goes by, Pompey rests on his laurels, thus regressing to the early years of his career, when the honours bestowed on him by Sulla were inadequate to his actual merit.

Such a grotesque image of Pompey as a *fame-addict*⁵⁹ neurotically clinging to his privileged position coincides with what Caesar writes about his rival in his *Commentarii de bello civili*:⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Feeney 1986: 240. Feeney’s ironic reading of the expression *immensum nomen* seems more than correct. “Scilicet immenso superest ex nomine multum” (VII 717).

⁵⁶ Henderson 2010: 445.

⁵⁷ Henderson 2010: 446.

⁵⁸ Lucan’s Caesar calls Pompey *dux Sullanus* (*cum duce Sullano gerimus civilia bella*, VII 307) to motivate his troops before the battle of Pharsalus.

⁵⁹ Martin Dinter’s translation of Lucan’s *famae petitor* (I 131), Dinter 2012: 52. See also Hardie 2012: 180, Sklenář 2003: 103–104.

⁶⁰ Lintott 1971: 494; Roche 2009: 125–126.

Ipse Pompeius, ab inimicis Caesaris incitatus, et quod **neminem dignitate secum exaequari volebat**, totum se ab eius amicitia averterat et cum communibus inimicis in gratiam redierat [...] (Caes. *Bel. civ.* I, 4).

Lucan subtly echoes this line at the very beginning of his epic:

Tu, nova ne veteres obscrent acta triumphos
et victis cedat piratica laurea Gallis,
Magne, times; te iam series ususque laborum
erigit inpatiensque loci fortuna secundi;
nec quemquam iam ferre potest Caesarve priorem
Pompeiusve parem. [...] (I 121–126).

The similarity between these passages is very conspicuous. Despite the fact that it is extremely difficult to ascertain if, and if so, to what extent, Lucan used Caesar's *Commentarii*,⁶¹ nonetheless it is beyond any doubt that both authors underline the same feature of Pompey's character.

In the eighth book, when Lentulus advises the defeated Pompey to seek military alliance with Ptolemy XIII, he flatters the senile leader, at the same time mocking the young age of the Egyptian king:⁶²

Sceptra puer Ptolemaeus habet tibi debita, Magne,
tutelae commissa tuae. Quis **nominis umbram**
horreat? Innocua est aetas. [...] (VIII 448–450).

Lentulus flatters Pompey's weakest point, that is, his obsession with the greatness of his name. Therefore, he contrasts Pompey's *cognomen* with the supposed *nominis umbra* of Ptolemy. This adulating speech brings about the remembrance of the parasite Artotrogus paying equally false and exaggerated compliments to his patron Pyrgopolinices in the opening scene of *Miles gloriosus*:

PYR. Sed ubi Artotrogus hic est? ART. Stat propter virum
fortem atque fortunatum et forma regia;
tum bellatorem – Mars haud ausit dicere
neque acquirerare suas virtutes ad tuas (Plaut. *Mil.* 9–12).

D. C. Feeney has correctly interpreted Lentulus' perverse question *Quis nominis umbram horreat?* as being *crammed with irony*,⁶³ for it is not Ptolemy, but Pompey, whose name is actually a *nominis umbra*.⁶⁴ On the same principle the

⁶¹ Pichon 1912: 58; Radicke 2004: 34; Merli 2005.

⁶² Ahl 1976: 173.

⁶³ Feeney 1986: 241.

⁶⁴ Esposito 1996: 83–84; Radicke 2004: 447.

expression *innocua est aetas*, though originally used in reference to the young pharaoh, is more adequate to Pompey whom Gian Biagio Conte has aptly named *a person in decline, affected by a kind of military and political senility*.⁶⁵ When Pompey's *deathstiny*⁶⁶ is sealed at the Alexandrian court (*adsensere omnes sceleris*, VIII 535), the narrator asks sarcastically:

[...] tanti, Ptolemaem, ruinam
 nominis haud metuis, caeloque tonante profanas
 inseruisse manus, impure ac semivir, audes? (VIII 550–552).

During the last moments of his life Pompey strives desperately to save his prestige and popularity. His only concern now is to prevent his image of a stoic wiseman from being corrupted by a grimace of despair:⁶⁷

[...] Ut vidit comminus enses,
 involvit voltus atque, indignatus apertum
 fortunae praebere, caput; tum lumina pressit
 continuitque animam, nequas effundere voces
 vellet et **aeternam** fletu corrumpere **famam**.
 Sed, postquam mucrone latus funestus Achilles
 perfodit, nullo gemitu consensit ad ictum
 respexitque nefas, seruatque immobile corpus,
 seque probat moriens atque haec in pectore volvit:
 “saecula Romanos numquam tacitura labores
 attendunt, aevumque sequens speculatur ab omni
 orbe ratem Phariamque fidem: nunc **consule famae** (VIII 613–624).

As Philip Hardie has observed, instead of the ridiculous motto *consule famae*, a real Stoic wiseman would rather say *consule virtuti*.⁶⁸

Pompey's dying words are symptomatic of his deluded mind, though doomed to perish, he still calls himself *felix*:

[...] Spargant lacerentque licebit,
 sum tamen, o superi, felix, nullique potestas
 hoc auferre deo. Mutantur prospera vita,
 non fit morte miser. Videt hanc Cornelia caedem
 Pompeiusque meus: tanto patientius, oro,
 claude, dolor, gemitus: gnatus coniunxque peremptum,
 si mirantur, amant.” Talis custodia **Magno**
 mentis erat, ius hoc animi morientis habebat (VIII 629–636).

⁶⁵ Conte 1999: 447.

⁶⁶ Masters 1992: 103; Henderson 1998: 169.

⁶⁷ Malamud 2003: 33; Dinter 2012: 59–60.

⁶⁸ Hardie 2012: 186.

Here, too, the “Sullan” adjective⁶⁹ stands near Pompey’s own *cognomen*, Magnus, both long unfounded and ridiculous in their hollow inadequacy.⁷⁰ Moreover, as Johnson has noticed, even the prospect of imminent death does not stop Pompey from contemplating his future fame.⁷¹ In this context, the expression *custodia ... mentis* evidently has an ironical hue: it suggests that Pompey is entirely absorbed by the task of embellishing his image for the posterity.

The scene of beheading also contains a strongly ironic element: the narrator’s description of the old man’s face is so adulatory that it seems suspicious:

permansisse decus sacrae venerabile formae
irataque deis faciem, [...] (VIII 665–666).

[...] illa verenda
regibus hirta coma et generosa fronte decora
caesaries [...] (VIII 679–681).

The elderly Pompey is suddenly described as beautiful and full of *decus*, and at the same time, as inspiring awe and admiration. Such a depiction carries some resemblance with Plautus’ portrayal of Pyrgopolinices:

[...] PYRG. Ne magis sim pulcher quam
sum,
ita me mea forma habet sollicitum. [...] (Plaut. *Mil.* 1087–1088).

However, while Pyrgopolinices’ boasts about his own beauty, come out of his own mouth, Lucan’s ‘unreliable’ narrator speaks of Pompey as if he were expressing his hero’s thoughts.⁷²

The scene of Pompey’s beheading resembles the beheading of Agamemnon in Seneca’s tragedy:⁷³ Septimius, who cuts off Pompey’s head, turns out to be an inept executioner (VIII 671–672). Several long moments pass until the head of the unfortunate general is practically severed from his body:

[...] Nam saevus in ipso
Septimius sceleris maius scelus invenit actu,
ac retegit sacros scisso velamine voltus
semianimis Magni spirantiaque occupat ora
collaque in obliquo ponit languentia transtro.

⁶⁹ Bartsch 1997: 83.

⁷⁰ Pompeius’ name of ‘Magnus’ is an anachronism, a reproach, a promise which he has outlived and can no longer fulfil. (Feeney 1986: 139–140).

⁷¹ Johnson 1987: 79–80.

⁷² For Lucan’s inconsistent narration and the ‘fractured voice’ of his narrator see Masters 1992: 87ff.; Masters 1994: 151–177.

⁷³ Tarrant 1976: 341.

Tunc nervos venasque secat nodosaque frangit
 ossa diu; **nondum artis** erat **caput** ense rotare.
 At, postquam trunco cervix abscisa recessit,
 vindicat hoc Pharius, dextra gestare, satelles (VIII 667–675).

Armat bipenni Tyndaris dextram furens,
 qualisque ad aras **colla** taurorum popa
 designat oculis antequam ferro petat,
 sic huc et illuc impiam librat manum.
 Habet, peractum est. Pendet exigua male
caput amputatum parte et hinc trunco cruor
 exundat, illinc ora cum fremitu iacent.
 Nondum recedunt: ille iam **exanimem** petit
 laceratque corpus, illa fodientem adiuvat.
 Uterque tanto scelere respondet suis:
 est hic Thyestae natus, haec Helenae soror (Sen. *Ag.* 897–907).

The lexical similarities between both passages are quite strong. Both accounts contain the same, or at least, very similar expressions. While the coincidence of the names of body parts may be the natural consequence of the character of the description, the other similarities are by no means a coincidence. Firstly, both executions are crimes (*scelera*) and, secondly, they are performed very hastily: Agamemnon’s head is “badly” amputated (*male amputatum*), while Lucan’s Pompey is murdered “without sufficient skill” (*nondum artis*). Moreover, as R. J. Tarrant has noticed, both Lucan and Seneca call the murderers of their heroes *semivir*.⁷⁴

[...] tanti, Ptolemaee, ruinam
 nominis haut metuis, caeloque tonante profanas
 inseruisse manus, impure ac **semivir**, audes? (VIII 550–552).

Haurit trementi **semivir** dextra latus,
 nec penitus egit: vulnere in medio stupet (Sen. *Ag.* 890–891).

It is widely known that the relation between Caesar and Pompey in the *Pharsalia* is similar to the one between Achilles and Agamemnon in Homer’s *Iliad*.⁷⁵ Moreover, as Matthew Leigh has recently pointed out, Pompey had been associated with Agamemnon many times during his lifetime.⁷⁶ He was especially proud of his Eastern campaigns, and partly because of that he compared himself to Agamemnon.⁷⁷

⁷⁴Tarrant 1976: 341.

⁷⁵Von Albrecht 1970: 275–276; Green 1991: 232.

⁷⁶Leigh 2009: 242. Cic. *Att.* VII 1. 2, Dio XLII 5. 3–5.

⁷⁷Leigh 2009: 242.

When Julius Caesar seduced his wife, Mucia, Pompey bitterly called him 'Aegisthus':

Nam certe Pompeio et a Curionibus patre et filio et a multis exprobratum est, quod cuius causa post tres liberos exegisset uxorem et quem gemens Aegisthum appellare consuesset, eius postea filiam potentiae cupiditate in matrimonium recepisset (Suet. *Iul.* 50, 1).

Interestingly, Plautus's Pyrgopolinices also boasts of his exotic military conquests (Plaut. *Mil.* 1 ff.). In addition, he experiences a similar situation as Pompey and Agamemnon: he is cheated and betrayed by his lover, Philocomasium.

Therefore, it turns out that, on the one hand, the execution scene in the *Pharsalia* quite evidently resembles that in Seneca's *Agamemnon*. On the other hand, however, the narrator's exaggerated praises of the old man's physical beauty look very suspicious against the background of Lucan's portrayal of Pompey as an old and deranged *miles gloriosus*. Therefore, the beheading scene, though apparently full of pathos, is indeed a bizarre collage consisting of tragic and comic elements. It is as full of inconsistencies and *vix fidelis* as Lucan's whole portrayal of Pompey.⁷⁸

Immediately after the execution, Pompey's head is carried to Ptolemy and subsequently mummified (VIII 679–691). Thus, Pompey's dream of the *aeterna fama* is perversely fulfilled: the immortality he achieves is of a purely physical nature, as if the blind Fortune (as blind as Pompey's superstitious belief in her) misunderstood Pompey's dying wish. His efforts not to corrupt his face with a grimace of despair yield the desired results, but also in the purely mechanical sense.

Pompey's countenance, though uncorrupted by tears, assumes a dreadfully artificial expression; as artificial as his privileges and power. As a result of mummification, it becomes drastically transformed into a, grotesque, *merely human*⁷⁹ mask.

[...] Sic fatus opertum
detexit tenuitque caput. Iam languida morte
effigies habitum noti mutaverat oris.
Non primo Caesar damnavit munera visu
avertitque oculos; voltus, dum crederet, haesit (IX 1032–1036).

The scene where Caesar receives this macabre gift follows the Medusa excursus. In effect, Pompey's head, petrified with venom, molds together with the venomous head of the dead Gorgon into one, terrifying whole, the monstrous *facies mortis* of the decapitated Roman Republic.⁸⁰ The bizarre grimace on Pom-

⁷⁸ I have borrowed this expression from Kirk Ormand (Ormand 1994: 49).

⁷⁹ Fantham 1992(a): 110.

⁸⁰ Malamud 2003: 32; Dinter 2010: 190.

pey's disfigured face mirrors the grotesque deformation of his character, and also – metonymically – the decay of the Republican *ancien régime*.⁸¹

Feeney and A. W. Lintott argue that Pompey becomes worthy of his *cognomen* in the hour of his death.⁸² However, it turns out that particular passages of Lucan's account of Pompey's last moments are actually loaded with irony.⁸³ If the greatness of Pompey is really *vindicated by death*,⁸⁴ then why does Lucan underline so much his hero's concern about maintaining his face handsome even after death, which results in exposing Pompey's extreme vanity and thus inevitably evoking comic associations? And, secondly, why does he continuously mock his inadequate *cognomen*?

The actual *intentio textus* becomes evident in the beginning of the ninth book, where Pompey's spirit floats in the air above his own pyre. This scene adds to the bitterly grotesque portrayal of the senile, narcissistic general (IX 1–18):⁸⁵ his ghost is so huge that it cannot fit into what is left of his body⁸⁶ so it springs upwards in an act of self-proclaimed apotheosis:

At non in Pharia manes iacuerе favilla
nec cinis **exiguus tantam** conpescuit umbram:
prosiluit busto semustaque membra relinquens
degeneremque rogam sequitur convexa Tonantis (IX 1–4).

This grotesque ghost illustrates Pompey's pathologically high self-esteem and his endless delusions of grandeur. This is the ghost of the real-life miles gloriosus.

Scholars have already discovered that this scene alludes to Cicero's famous *Somnium Scipionis* (Cic. *De re publ.* 6.).⁸⁷ Fabio Stok provides a detailed comparison of both texts,⁸⁸ so I will not investigate this problem any further. I will only point out that the association of Pompey, recently executed in Africa, with Scipio Maior Africanus, who defeated Hannibal on the same continent, considerably intensifies the grotesque effect.

The exaggeratedly bombastic style of this account produces *bathos* instead of *pathos*.⁸⁹ This contrast between Scipio's military virtue and Pompey's military decay is striking. Against the background of Africanus' victory at Zama,

⁸¹ More about Lucan's use of intricate metonymy in: Hübner 1974. More about Lucan's vision of the decay of the Republic in: Brisset 1964: 41–50.

⁸² Lintott 1971: 502; Feeney 1986: 241.

⁸³ Johnson 1987: 79–81; Ormand 1994: 49; Bartsch 1997: 83.

⁸⁴ Feeney 1986: 241.

⁸⁵ Johnson 1987: 83.

⁸⁶ Seewald 2008: 35.

⁸⁷ Stok 1996: 64–73.

⁸⁸ Stok 1996: 64–73.

⁸⁹ Johnson 1987: 83.

Pompey appears as an elderly *miles gloriosus*. In addition, Lucan adds fuel to the fire by making his narrator exult in the praises of the greatness of Pompey's name.

It is a truism that Lucan's Pompey represents the Roman Republic in the last phase of its existence. Pompey's descent into old age mirrors the twilight of the Republican Rome. As he grows older, his name and privileges become a bizarre relic. Exactly in the same way, the corrupt and decaying Republic becomes gradually reduced to a mere word, that is, to its (already anachronic) name.

It is also a truism that both *Magnus* and *res publica* become *magnorum nominum umbrae*. Both Pompey and the Republic grow old and senile, however – though they are near death – neither of them dies of natural causes. While Pompey is physically beheaded by Septimius, the Republic is metaphorically decapitated by Caesar. The powerful motif of Medusa's head joins the physical execution of Pompey with the political one of the Republic.

The interesting thing about Lucan's Pompey is that in the *Pharsalia* he is depicted as a senile man, and Caesar as an energetic youth, while in 48 BC his historical prototype was actually 58 years old, which means that he was only six years older than Caesar. It seems that, on the one hand, Lucan needs an elderly and senile Pompey so as to use him as a metonym for the 'senile' Roman Republic. On the other hand, an old Pompey has a much greater literary potential than a younger one would have. His advanced age allows Lucan to make the most of the ridiculous flaws of his (anti-)hero and depict him as a quasi-comic character.

Lucan's Pompey is a highly intertextual figure. Now he has the ambition of becoming an epic hero, now an elegiac one, but unfortunately he does not stand up to the roles to which he aspires. As he is unable to emulate his literary predecessors, he ends up as their parody. Lucan depicts Pompey as a man in the winter of his life,⁹⁰ when he has become a ridiculous, self-obsessed old man. He is right the opposite of an epic hero. Instead of a real-life Aeneas or Agamemnon, he has become a grotesque, real-life Pyrgopolinices.

Lucan's portrayal of Pompey abounds with dark humour. The poet bargains every opportunity of basking in his hero's failures to vindicate his fame. In effect, Pompey functions not as much as the representative of the decaying Roman Republic, but rather, and above all, as its dark-witty caricature. On the other hand, Lucan not only ridicules the faults of the Roman State and its demented representative citizen, but also, by means of literary techniques that are proper to comedy and satire, he challenges the literary paradigm of an epic hero.

⁹⁰Frye 1973: 223.

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FAMAE PETITOR. LUCAN’S PORTRAYAL OF POMPEY

Summary

In spite of the fact that Lucan’s sympathies are apparently with the Republicans, his attitude to Pompey, which emerges from the *Pharsalia*, turns out to be rather critical. Moreover, this criticism actually comes very close to ridicule. Lucan depicts Pompey as a senile and narcissistic leader who dwells on his past success and lives in the world of his own fantasies. Trapped in the vicious circle of his delusions of grandeur, he is rather grotesque than majestic. The harder he tries to enhance his public image, the more pathetic he becomes both in the eyes of his friends and in those of his enemies. The effects of his efforts are, therefore, quite contrary to their purpose. On the one hand, the figure of the senile and deluded Pompey is the caricature of the decaying Roman Republic, whose degeneracy it obviously mirrors. On the other hand, however, Lucan’s grotesque anti-hero is the exact opposite of archetypal epic characters such as Virgil’s Aeneas. Willing yet unable to emulate his literary predecessors, he functions as the caricature of the literary paradigm of a standard epic hero.