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A MACABRE PARALLEL.
A READING OF LUCAN'S *PHARSALIA* 1, 1–7

It is widely known that there is a fair amount of common ground between Lucan's poem and the writings of his uncle Seneca the Younger, not only as regards the younger author's political and philosophical outlook¹, but also the style of his poetry and his use of the Latin language². Scholars have thus discovered many similarities between the *Pharsalia* and Seneca's works, including his tragedies. For example, it has been found that Lucan alludes to his uncle's tragedies – *Oedipus* and *Thyestes* in particular – in the most crucial parts of his epic, using Senecan motifs to convey his message³.

Another important similarity between these two poets consists in their use of particular rhetorical devices. Being the son and grandson of the celebrated teacher of rhetoric Seneca the Elder, they were naturally inclined to incorporate the achievements of prose into poetry. Although Quintilian abhorred what he saw as poor imitations of Seneca because he thought that they “defamed” Seneca the Elder⁴, he did have a few good

¹ Cf. H. D i e l s, *Seneca und Lucan* (Berlin, 1886). For Lucan's stoicism see: O. S t e e n D u e, *Lucain et la Philosophie*, in M. D u r r y (ed.), *Lucain* (Vandoeuvres–Genève, 1970), 210–214; B. M. M a r t i, *The Meaning of the Pharsalia*, *AJPh* 66, 4 (1945), 352–376; M. C o l i s h, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden–New York–København–Köln, 1990), 253; C. W i e n e r, *Stoische Doktrin in Römischer Belletristik. Das Problem von Entscheidungsfreiheit und Determinismus in Senecas Tragödien und Lucans Pharsalia* (München und Leipzig, 2006); E. P a l e i t, *War, Liberty, and Caesar. Responses to Lucan's Bellum Ciuile, ca. 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2013), 49; W. S c h u b e r t, *Seneca the Dramatist*, in G. D a m s c h e n, A. H e i l (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Seneca* (Leiden–Boston, 2014), 73–93, at 73–74; J. T r a c y, *Lucan's Egyptian Civil War* (Cambridge, 2014), 129.

² Cf. H. D i e l s, *Seneca und Lucan*.

³ Cf. E. N a r d u c c i, *Lucano. Un'epica contro l'impero. Interpretazione della "Pharsalia"* (Roma–Bari, 2002), 54–74.

⁴ Cf. Ex industria Senecam in omni genere eloquentiae distuli, propter vulgatam falso de me opinionem qua damnare eum et invisum quoque habere sum creditus. Quod accidit mihi dum corruptum et omnibus

words to say about Seneca the Younger, adding the proviso that Lucan's epic should be imitated by rhetoricians rather than by poets: *Lucanus ardens et concitatus et sententiis clarissimus et, ut dicam quod sentio, magis oratoribus quam poetis imitandus* (Quint. *Inst.* 10, 90).

Partly because of his rhetorical inheritance and partly because of his particular taste for expressiveness – which he shared with his uncle Seneca the Younger⁵ – Lucan readily employed rhetorical, metrical and other devices in order to render the language of his poetry more vivid and as passionate as possible⁶. This is precisely why Quintilian referred to him as being *ardens et concitatus*.

As Matthew Leigh has observed, the poet's choice of a sublime topic requires him to use sublime language⁷. Henry Day for his part adds that the sublimity of Lucan's endeavour consists in *presenting the unrepresentable*⁸. The Roman Civil War was unrepresentable not only because – in Lucan's view – it was a disgraceful episode in the history of Rome, but also because the actual telling of such a story would require a remodelling of the traditional paradigm of epic poetry.

The most fundamental changes include the reduction of the *apparatus divinus* to an absolute minimum, which has led some scholars to conclude that Lucan was an atheist or even – as Robert Sklenář would have it – a nihilist⁹. In addition, the 'traditional' gods – whom Lucan depicts as being weak and fragile – reflect the deplorable moral condition of Rome as a political entity¹⁰. There being no place for a classical *apparatus*

vitiis fractum dicendi genus revocare ad severiora iudicia contendo: tum autem solus hic fere in manibus adulescentium fuit. Quem non equidem omnino conabar excutere, sed potioribus praeferrere sinebam, quos ille non destiterat incessere, cum diversi sibi conscius generis placere se in dicendo posse quibus illi placerent diffideret. Amabant autem eum magis quam imitabantur, tantumque ab illo defluebant quantum ille ab antiquis descenderat. Foret enim optandum pares ac saltem proximos illi viro fieri. Sed placebat propter sola vitia, et ad ea se quisque dirigebat effingenda quae poterat: deinde cum se iactaret eodem modo dicere, Senecam infamabat. (Quint. *Inst.* 10, 125–127).

⁵ Cf. D. S l a v i t t (ed.), *Seneca. The Tragedies* (Baltimore–London, 1995), vol. 2, xxxvii.

⁶ Cf. M. v o n A l b r e c h t, *A History of Roman Literature. From Livius Andronicus to Boethius* (Leiden–New York–Köln, 1997), vol. 2, 920; H. D a y, *Lucan and the Sublime. Power, Representation and Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge, 2013), 89.

⁷ Cf. H. D a y, *Lucan and the Sublime...*, 87.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹ Cf. R. S k l e n á ř, *Nihilistic Cosmology and Catonian Ethics in Lucan's "Bellum Civile"*, *AJPh* 120, 2 (Summer, 1999), 281–296, at 294–295; I d e m, *The Taste for Nothingness. A Study of Virtus and Related Themes in Lucan's "Bellum Civile"* (Ann Arbor, 2003), *passim*.

¹⁰ *Omne nefas superi prima iam voce precantis
concedunt carmenque timent audire secundum.*
(Luc. *Phars.* 6, 527–528).

Cf. R. G o r d o n, *Lucan's Erictho*, in M and M. W h i t b y, P. H a r d i e (edd.), *Homo Viator (Studies for J. Bramble)* (Bristol, 1987), 231–241, at 234; N. L é v i, *La Pharsale de Lucain: un monde sans providence?*, *BAGB* 2006, 2, 70–91; J. P y p l a c z, *El motín de la tierra. La "maquinaria divina" ctónica en la "Farsalia"*, *CPhil* 18, 2015, 65–78, at 69.

*divinus*¹¹ in a represented world dominated by chaos¹², the poet has invented a bizarre substitute in the shape of a kind of ‘anti-Olympus’ consisting of the witch Erichtho and the two mythical monsters Antaeus and Medusa¹³.

Apart from applying changes of this kind to his epic, Lucan also attempts to deal with his ‘unpresentable’ subject and subject matter by means of other literary manoeuvres such as significant mythological intertextual allusions in which the *Pharsalia* abounds¹⁴. Apart from Virgil, who is Lucan’s main point of reference¹⁵, one of the authors whose voices echo in his poem is, of course, Seneca the Younger. Themes from tragedies written by the latter often underlie important passages in the *Pharsalia*¹⁶.

The aim of this paper is to ascertain – by means of close reading – whether the Senecan allusions which are to be found in lines 1. 1–7 (that is, in the first section of the proem of the *Pharsalia*)¹⁷ are part of some major literary pattern that possibly also extends to other books of the epic, or whether they have been used just once, as a one-off device that is part of the poet’s sophisticated repertoire of artistic expression.

Lucan alludes to Seneca at the very beginning of his epic, where he expresses his absolute disapproval of the Civil War:

Bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos
 iusque datum **sceleri** canimus, populumque potentem
 in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra
 cognatasque acies, et rupto foedere regni
 certatum totis concussi viribus orbis
 in commune **nefas**, infestisque obvia signis
 signa, pares aquilas et pila minantia pilis.
 (Luc. *Phars.* 1. 1–7)

Not only is the language used in this passage highly emotional, but the choice of words immediately brings to mind the vocabulary of Senecan tragedies – *Thyestes* in

¹¹ Cf. F. A h l, *The Shadows of a Divine Presence in the “Pharsalia”*, *Hermes* 102, 2 (1997) 567–590, at 568.

¹² Cf. J. M a s t e r s, *Poetry and civil war in Lucan’s “Bellum Civile”* (Cambridge, 1992), 65; Ch. M a r t i n d a l e, *Redeeming the Text. Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge, 1993), 53; J. W i l d b e r g e r, *Quanta sub nocte iacet nostra dies* (Lucan. 9, 13f.) – *Stoizismen als Mittel der Verfremdung bei Lucan*, in Ch. W a l d e (ed.), *Lucan im 21. Jahrhundert* (München–Leipzig, 2005), 56–88, at 73; M. L a p i d g e, *Lucan’s Imagery of Cosmic Dissolution*, *Hermes* 107, 3 (1979), 344–370.

¹³ Cf. J. P y p ł a c z, *El motín de la tierra....*, 71–77.

¹⁴ Cf. E. N a r d u c c i, *Ideologia e tecnica allusiva nella “Pharsalia”*, *ANRW* 2, 32, 3 (1985), 1538–1564.

¹⁵ Cf. E. N a r d u c c i, *La provvidenza crudele. Lucano e la distruzione dei miti augustei* (Pisa, 1979); J. M a s t e r s, *Poetry and Civil War...*; S. C a s a l i, *The Bellum Civile as an Anti-Aeneid*, in P. A s s o (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Lucan* (Leiden, 2011), 81–110; J. P y p ł a c z, *When Legends Come Alive. A Reading of Lucan’s “Pharsalia”* (Kraków, 2015).

¹⁶ Cf. E. N a r d u c c i, *Lucano. Un’epica contro l’impero...*, 54–74.

¹⁷ For the composition of the proem see: Ch. S a y l o r, *Lucan and Models of the Introduction*, *Mnemosyne* 52, 5 (Oct., 1999), 545–553, at 545.

particular¹⁸. The following passage does not come from *Thyestes*, but from *Agamemnon*, with which it is thematically connected:

Nec hactenus Fortuna maculavit patrem,
 sed maius aliud ausa commisso **scelus**
gnatae nefandos petere concubitus iubet.
 Non pavidus hausit dicta, sed cepi **nefas**.
 Ergo ut per omnis liberos irem parens,
 coacta fatis gnata fert utero gravi
 me patre dignum. Versa natura est retro:
 auo parentem, pro **nefas**, patri virum,
 Gnatis nepotes miscui – nocti diem.
 (Sen. *Ag.* 28–36)

The lexical similarities between both passages are quite obvious, as are the differences. Seneca's Atreus mentions the unnatural, incestuous relationships that exist between the members of his closest family (*versa natura est retro*), while Lucan's narrator stresses the fact that the Civil War between two Roman factions is equally contrary to the natural order of things, as Rome's sword has turned against her own entrails (*populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*)¹⁹.

In Seneca's *Agamemnon*, the ghost of Thyestes considers the misdeed of his ancestor Tantalus – who made an offering of the flesh of his own son Pelops to the Olympian gods – as the worst possible crime that could be committed. He considers his own action of eating the flesh of his children (albeit unwittingly) in similar terms. Moreover, he even speaks of himself as being the initiator of a new series of family crimes (*cepi nefas*)²⁰. As Antonio Marchetta argues, Thyestes is both victim and perpetrator²¹.

From the ethical point of view, Seneca's expression *coacta ... gnata ... utero gravi* corresponds with Lucan's *cognatasque acies*, alluded to later by Statius in the very first line of his *Thebaid* (*fraternas acies*, *Stat. Theb.* 1, 1)²². Notwithstanding the fact that what the poet actually says is that the leaders of these arrays (*acies*) are formally father-

¹⁸ Cf. A. Schiesaro, *The Passions in Play. "Thyestes" and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama* (Cambridge, 2003), 44. However, the same cluster of words also appears in Sen. *Herc.* 387–388 and *Phaed.* 553–555.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Narducci, *Rhetoric and Epic. Virgil's Aeneid and Lucan's "Bellum Civile"*, in W. Dominik and J. Hall (edd.), *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2007), 382–395, at 388.

²⁰ For the *crux philologorum* as well as other interpretations of this place see: R. J. Tarrant (ed.), *Seneca, Agamemnon* (Cambridge–New York–Melbourne, 1976), 174; O. Zwiernlein; R. Jakob, R. Junge, Ch. Schmitz (edd.), *Lucubrationes philologiae*, Bd. 2: *Seneca* (Berlin–New York, 2004), 223.

²¹ Cf. A. Marchetta, *Vittima e carnefice. L'ambiguità dei ruoli nel Thyestes di Seneca* (Roma, 2010).

²² Cf. D. Vessey, *Statius & "The Thebaid"* (Cambridge, 1973), 61; N. Coffe, *Eteocles, Polynices, and the Economics of Violence in Statius' "Thebaid"*, *AJPh* 127, 3 (Autumn, 2006), 415–452, at 441; R. Ganiaban, *Crime in Lucan and Statius*, in P. A. S. (ed.) *Brill's Companion to Lucan* (Leiden, 2011), 327–344, at 328.

in-law and son-in-law (*cognati*), on a lexical level this expression bears an extraordinary similarity to Seneca's *coacta gnata*:

coacta ... gnata → **cognatasque acies**

Although the compound adjective *cognatas* seemingly merely communicates the fact that Caesar and Pompey are legally related²³, it consists of two parts: the preposition *co-* (*con*) and the noun *gnata*, that is exactly the same two elements which appear in Seneca's expression:

co-acta ... gnata → **co-gnatasque acies**

Despite its linguistic sophistication, this subtle allusion is of a rather macabre nature, as it renders the "tight arrays" of two opposing Roman armies – ready to attack each other and subsequently perish in the turmoil of the Civil War – logically parallel to the children of Thyestes, whose severed limbs were first cooked together in Atreus' cauldron and then found their way into their father's stomach²⁴. The corollary of such a reading is that – in the eyes of Lucan's narrator – the war-torn Roman Republic is engaged in a Thyestean variety of cannibalism, as its people "turn against their own entrails" (*populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, Luc. *Phars.* 1, 2–3).

The allusion in question also functions as a harbinger of the sinister parallel that Lucan proceeds to draw between Caesar and Atreus in the later books of his epic²⁵, where he also makes clear allusions to Seneca's poetic interpretation of the terrible story of Atreus and Thyestes. For example, the expression *commune nefas*, which is also present in the opening lines of the *Pharsalia*, is a hidden quotation from Seneca (*fas valuit nihil / aut commune nefas*, Sen. *Thy.* 139–140)²⁶.

In the final part of the first book, the theme of entrails returns in the account of the prophecy of the Etruscan seer Arruns, who endeavours to foretell the future of Rome by means of extispicy. To his own horror and that of the Roman citizens gathered around, the body of the sacrificial bull shows symptoms of a mysterious disease (Luc. *Phars.* 1, 609–638). When Arruns cuts the beast open, he reveals its horrible secret: another 'head' hidden in its abdomen:

Cor iacet, et saniem per hiantis viscera rimas
emittunt, produntque suas omenta latebras.
Quodque nefas nullis inpune apparuit extis,
ecce, videt capiti fibrarum increscere molem
alterius capitis. [...]
(Luc. *Phars.* 1, 624–628)

²³ Cf. R. S o w e r b y, *The Augustan Lucan*, Translation and Literature 14, 2 (Autumn, 2005), 148–178, at 52.

²⁴ The expression *coacta gnata* also alludes to Seneca's *Oedipus*, whose main character – like Thyestes, who had a sexual relationship with his own daughter Pelopia – is married to his own mother Jocasta. Cf. C. W i e n e r, *Stoische Doktrin in Römischer Belletristik* (München–Leipzig, 2006), 305.

²⁵ Cf. E. F a n t h a m (ed.), Lucan, *de Bello Civili, Book II* (Cambridge, 1992), 208–209; J. P y p ł a c z, *When Legends Come Alive...*, 98, 103, 106–107.

²⁶ Cf. J. P y p ł a c z, *When Legends Come Alive...*, 97.

This massive, head-shaped (*molem / alterius capitis*) tumour which has been growing in the bull's entrails is reminiscent of both the results of the extispicy in Seneca's *Oedipus*²⁷ as well as of the unendurable burden in Thyestes' stomach (*Sentio impatiens onus*, Sen. *Thy.* 1000). In other words, the a head-shaped tumour inside the bull's body in the *Pharsalia*, cleverly associated with the misplaced bovine fetus in *Oed.* 373–376 and with the *onus* inside Thyestes' stomach in *Agamemnon*, would seem to symbolize the metaphorical 'cancer' of fratricidal conflict that is consuming Rome's entrails from within.

Line 626 (*Quodque nefas nullis inpune apparuit extis*) also seems to be somewhat reminiscent of two lines in Seneca's *Thyestes*, where the theme of entrails is also connected with that of *nefas* (*volvuntur intus viscera et clusum nefas / sine exitu luctatur et quaerit fugam*, Sen. *Thy.* 1041–1042). The *nefas* hidden in the entrails of a sacrificial animal echoes the *nefas* concealed in Thyestes' stomach.

Between the extispicy scene and the opening lines of Lucan's poem, which are the main subject of this article, there is yet another link: the motif of a blade cutting through entrails. The opening of the dead animal's body strangely mirrors the suicidal behaviour of Rome that is mentioned by the narrator at the very beginning of the epic (*populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, Luc. *Phars.* 1, 2–3).

The same motif appears in Laelius' terrifying declaration of his unquestioning loyalty to Caesar, whose orders he promises to carry out to the letter²⁸. If told to do so, he will not hesitate to plunge his sword into his brother's heart, his father's throat or even his pregnant wife's abdomen. Significantly, this passage echoes the third line of the epic (*condere me iubeas pleneaque in viscera partu / coniugis, invita peragam tamen omnia dextra*, Luc. *Phars.* 1, 378–380, compare: *in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*).

The theme of pregnancy in Laelius' speech does not seem to be accidental, as it also appears in the passage of *Agamemnon* to which Lucan alludes in the opening passage of the *Pharsalia* (*coacta fatis gnata fert utero gravi*, Sen. *Ag.* 33). At a macabre moment in *Thyestes*, the hapless father becomes 'pregnant' with the corpses of his own sons (*sentio impatiens onus*, Sen. *Thy.* 1000). The dead children return to whence they came – not to the womb of their mother (*genetrix*), however, but into the stomach of their father (*genitor*), which – by a perversion of nature – becomes their tomb.

This passage may also have another hidden meaning. Lucan very often uses the term *patres* to refer to Caesar's opponents in the Senate. At the same time, the word *pater* is also a synonym of the word *genitor*. Caesar, by contrast, is associated with Venus Genetrix, whom he declared to be the ancestral goddess of his family and to whom he dedicated a temple in 46 B.C.²⁹.

²⁷ Cf. P. R o c h e (ed. with a comm.), *Lucan. De Bello Civili, Book I*, Oxford 2009, p. 356; E. N a r d u c c i, *La provvidenza crudele*, 149–152.

²⁸ Cf. M. L e i g h, *Lucan. Spectacle and Engagement* (Oxford, 1997), 206; M. B. R o l l e r, *Constructing Autocracy. Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome* (Princeton–Oxford, 2001), 40; E. P a l e i t, *War, Liberty, and Caesar...*, 118.

²⁹ Cf. A p p. B. C. 2, 102; D. F i s h w i c k, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West. Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Leiden–New York–Köln, 1993), vol. 1. 1, 59.

As Lucan associates Caesar with Atreus³⁰, Pompey almost automatically becomes associated with Thyestes. As the leader of the senatorial faction – the *patres* – and as the main rival of Caesar – who believed himself to be a descendant of Venus Genetrix – Pompey is associated with the unfortunate *genitor*. In this context, the head-shaped tumour hidden in the bull’s abdomen may turn out to have yet another meaning in that – by means of an association with Apis, the sacred bull of Egypt – it might foreshadow Pompey’s beheading, which takes place in Egypt. In the ninth book, Pompey’s son Cnaeus becomes furious with grief and indignation after his father’s death. He expresses a wish to burn his father’s severed head on a pyre made up of statues of Egyptian gods:

Evolvam busto iam numen gentibus Isim
 et tectum lino spargam per volgus Osirim,
 [et sacer in Magni cineres mactabitur Apis]
 suppositisque deis uram caput. Has mihi poenas
 terra dabit: linquam vacuos cultoribus agros,
 nec, Nilus cui crescat, erit; solusque tenebis
 Aegypton, genitor, populis superisque fugatis.
 (Luc. *Phars.* 9, 158–164)

The expression *iam numen gentibus* questions not only Isis’ divine status, but also expresses a deep loathing for the Egyptians as a superstitious nation³¹. Although line 160 is in all probability spurious³², the mention of disinterring the remains of ‘the supposed goddess’ Isis in line 158 clearly indicates that Cnaeus is talking about Isis’ tomb in Memphis³³, where the bull Apis was kept³⁴.

Significantly, Cnaeus refers to Pompey as a *genitor*, as does Erichtho in the sixth book, when she foretells the future to Pompey’s other son Sextus (*ipse canet Siculis genitor Pompeius in arvis*, Luc. *Phras.* 6. 814). Like Seneca’s Thyestes, Pompey is a *genitor* involved in a crime of which he is both the victim and the perpetrator. Thyestes unwittingly consumes the bodies of his own sons, while Pompey – the leader and representative of the *patres conscripti*³⁵ – takes part in a civil war against his own citizens. Pompey thus plays the part of an unfortunate ‘Thyestes’ who becomes the cause of his party’s

³⁰ Cf. A. S c h i e s a r o, *The Passions in Play...*, 44.

³¹ Prमित Chaudhuri writes about Cnaeus’ *anti-Egyptian theomachy*. Cf. P. C h a u d h u r i, *The War with God. Theomachy in Roman Imperial Poetry* (Oxford, 2014), 184.

³² Cf. R. G. M. N i s b e t, *Collected Papers on Latin Literature* (Oxford, 1995), 188–190; C. W i c k (ed.), M. A n n a e u s Lucanus, *Bellum Civile liber IX. Kommentar* (Leipzig, 2004), 59; E. M a n o l a r a k i, *Noscendi Nilum Cupido. Imagining Egypt from Lucan to Philostratus* (Berlin–Boston, 2013), 205. Chaudhuri also omits this line in his commentary to this particular passage of Cnaeus’ speech, cf. P. C h a u d h u r i, *The War with God...*, 184.

³³ Cf. E. M a n o l a r a k i, *Noscendi Nilum Cupido...*, 205.

³⁴ Cf. N. J. S a u n d e r s, *Alexander’s Tomb. The Two Thousand Year Obsession to Find the Lost Conqueror* (New York, 2006), 45.

³⁵ Cf. V. L. H o l l i d a y, *Pompey in Cicero’s “Correspondence” and Lucan’s “Civil War”* (The Hague–Paris, 1969), 62; J. M a s t e r s, *Poetry and Civil War...*, 101.

horrible end (*Genitor en natos premo / premorque natis – sceleris est aliquis modus?*, Sen. *Thy.* 1050–1051).

Like Thyestes' body, which – as Alessandro Schiesaro has observed – has become *a monstrous coffin for his children*³⁶, the Roman Republic – represented by Pompey and the Senate – has become the tomb of its citizens, thus fulfilling the sinister *vaticinium ex eventu* lurking in Lucan's initial allusion to Seneca's *Agamemnon* as well as the prophecy of Arruns, who interprets the ominous result of his rite as the harbinger of an unspeakable evil:

[...] **Non fanda** timemus,
sed venient maiora metu. [...]
(Luc. *Phars.* 1, 634–635)

These lines in turn possibly mirror the following passage of Seneca's *Thyestes*:

[...] Vidit **infandas** domus
Odrysia mensas – fateor, immane est scelus,
sed occupatum; maius hoc aliquid dolor
inveniat. [...]
(Sen. *Thy.* 272–275)

The motif of the perversion of nature, which results in an unnatural, monstrous procreation, reappears in the ninth book of the epic, where the narrator tells the story of Medusa, whose poisonous blood – dripping from her severed head, which Perseus carried on the back of the flying horse Pegasus as he crossed Africa – gave life to the venomous serpents which infest Lybia (*fecundaque nulli / arva bono virus stillantis tabe Medusae / concipiunt*, Luc. *Phars.* 9, 696–698)³⁷.

The posthumous and oxymoronically deadly 'procreation' of the Gorgon's severed head³⁸ is reminiscent of that of Arruns' dead bull, which 'gives birth' to a giant tumour inside its body – or rather of the appearance of that tumour, whose shape resembles a head, this being a foreshadowing of the encounter with Medusa's progeny, which awaits Cato's army in Libya.

This theme of perverted nature not only denounces the Civil War as being something contrary to nature³⁹, but is also a forerunner of all the unnatural horrors that the poet will depict later on in the epic, including the Medusa excursus and the actions of the Thessalian witch Erichtho⁴⁰ – a notorious perverter of nature and creator of false *vates*,

³⁶ Cf. A. Schiesaro, *The Passions in Play...*, 196.

³⁷ Cf. Hes. *Th.* 280–281; Ov. *Met.* 4, 785–786.

³⁸ Cf. M. Warner, *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 2000), 112–113. For Lucan's Medusa excursus see: E. Fantham, *Lucan's Medusa-Excursus. Its Design and Purpose*, MD 29 (1992), 95–119.

³⁹ Cf. Ch. Martindale, *The Epic of Ideas. Lucan's "De bello civili" and "Paradise Lost"*, in E. Schaffer (ed.), *Comparative Criticism* (Cambridge, 1981), vol. 3, 133–156, at 150.

⁴⁰ Cf. E. Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar...*, 5.

whose *ars polluta* (*inque novos ritus pollutam duxerat artem*, Luc. *Phars.* 6, 509)⁴¹ seems to mock the true *ars* as practised by Arruns and established many years earlier by Tages (*sed conditor artis / finxerit ista Tages*, Luc. *Phars.* 1, 636–637)⁴²:

Nec cruor emicuit solitus, sed **volnere** largo
diffusum rutilo dirum pro sanguine virus.
Palluit attonitus sacris feralibus Arruns
atque iram superum raptis quaesivit in extis.
Terruit ipse color **vatem**; nam pallida taetris
viscera tincta notis gelidoque infecta cruore
plurimus asperso variabat sanguine livor.
Cernit tabe iecur madidum, venasque minaces
hostili de parte videt. Pulmonis anhelii
fibra latet, parvusque secat vitalia limes.
(Luc. *Phars.* 1, 614–623)

[...] dum Thessala **vatem**
eligit et gelidas leto scrutata medullas
pulmonis rigidi stantis sine **volnere fibras**
invenit et vocem defuncto in corpore quaerit.
(Luc. *Phars.* 6, 628–631)

The lexical similarities between the two passages quoted above are quite obvious. The fact that they establish a specific allusive relationship between both divination scenes – that of Arruns, that is, the ‘legitimate’ one which is based on real *ars (divinatoria)* and the ‘illegitimate’ one in which the Thessalian necromancer Erichtho makes use of her *ars polluta* – is a strong argument against attributing them to sheer coincidence resulting from Lucan’s manner of using stylistic devices to depict particularly gruesome details (this being a characteristic feature of his particular variety of the sublime)⁴³.

Indeed, the similarity between the Arruns scene and the Erichtho scene does not end there. Erichtho’s invocation to the infernal gods (*Haemonio penetratque in Tartara lingua*, Luc. *Phars.* 6, 694) seem to echo Arruns’ prayer to Jupiter (*si vos satis ore nefando / pollutoque voco*, Luc. *Phars.* 6, 706–707, compare: *inferni venere dei. non fanda timemus*). In the Arruns scene the seer uses the expression *inferni venere dei*, while in the Erichtho scene the witch directly addresses the hellish deities one by one, beginning with the Eumenides and ending with Persephone (Luc. *Phars.* 6, 695–700).

The divination scene in the sixth book takes place the day before the battle of Pharsalus, which – foretold in vague terms by Arruns as *non fanda* – turns out to be fatal for

⁴¹ Cf. K. L u d w i g, *Charakterfokalisation bei Lucan* (Berlin–Boston, 2014), 105.

⁴² Cf. L. F r a t a n t u o n o, *Madness Triumphant. A Reading of Lucan’s “Pharsalia”* (Lanham, MD, 2012), 39.

⁴³ Cf. E. A u e r b a c h, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, transl. by R. M a n h e i m, foreword by J. M. Z i o l k o w s k i (Princeton–Chichester, 1993), 193.

the Roman Republic. Arruns' terrifying expression *venient maiora metu*⁴⁴ – tucked away in the lines of the narrator's sombre lament following the account of the defeat of the Pompeian army by the Caesarians – resounds ominously in the seventh book of the epic:

Advenisse diem qui fatum rebus in aevum
conderet humanis, et quaeri, Roma quid esset,
illo Marte, palam est. Sua quisque pericula nescit
attonitus **maiore metu**. [...]
(Luc. *Phars.* 7, 131–134)

Later on in the same book – which forms the central part of the poem – Lucan's narrator calls the day of the decisive battle the *funus mundi*, that is, the funeral of the world (*inpendisse pudet lacrimas in funere mundi*, Luc. *Phars.* 7, 617), which he understands as the funeral of the Roman Republic as a State of free citizens⁴⁵. By its generalizing character, the expression *funere mundi* also underlines the huge extent of the hecatomb caused by the Civil War, which has taken 'a whole world' of lives⁴⁶.

At the end of the seventh book, Lucan returns to his initial theme of *commune nefas*, but does so in a very inventive way, comparing the battlefield of Pharsalus to a *communis rogas*, that is, to a collective funeral pyre for all those killed in the Civil War (*Communis mundo superest rogas ossibus astra / mixturus*, Luc. *Phars.* 7, 814–815⁴⁷) and – at the same time – combining it with the motif of the *funus mundi*.

Interestingly, the expression *funus mundi* also echoes the fifth line of the first book of the *Pharsalia*, where the narrator says that the war engaged the forces 'of the whole world' (*certatum totis concussi viribus orbis*, Luc. *Phars.* 1, 5). This, together with the exaggerated image of an enormous funeral pyre, also foreshadows the desperate words of Cnaeus, who asks whether Pompey has become the *caput orbis* or has perished together with the Republican cause (*Dic, ubi est, germane, parens; stat summa caputque / orbis, an occidimus Romanaque Magnus ab umbras / abstulit*, Luc. *Phars.* 9, 123–125).

A few lines further on, after his remarks on the *funus mundi*, the narrator mentions the hungry wolves that come to the battlefield in order to feed on the corpses of the Roman soldiers (*non solum Haemonii funesta ad pabula belli / Bistonii venere lupi*, Luc.

⁴⁴ Possibly reminiscent of Virgil's *Aen.* 7. 144 *advenisse diem quo debita moenia condant*.

⁴⁵ Cf. F. D'ALESSANDRO BEHR, *Feeling History: Lucan, Stoicism, and the Poetics of Passion* (Columbus, OH, 2007), 41.

⁴⁶ Cf. N. COFFEE, *The Commerce of War: Exchange and Social Order in Latin Epic* (London, 2009), 147; L. FRATANUONO, *Madness Triumphant...*, 295.

⁴⁷ Compare also:

[...] Congere extremum tuis
natis, Iason, funus ac tumulum strue:
coniunx socerque iusta iam functis habent
a me sepulti; gnatus hic fatum tulit,
hic te vidente dabitur exitio pari.
(Sen. *Med.* 997–1001).

Phars. 7, 825–826). The expression *funesta pabula*, used in reference to these corpses, would seem to be strongly reminiscent of a similar expression used by Seneca (*Lancinat natos pater / artusque mandit ore funesto suos*, Sen. *Thy.* 778–779). The word *pabulum* in turn echoes another place in the same tragedy (*Utrumne saevis pabulum alitibus iacent, / an beluis servantur, an pascunt feras?*, Sen. *Thy.* 132–133)⁴⁸.

Let us note that lines 132–3 of Seneca’s *Thyestes* contain the same motif as lines 7. 825–826 of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, that is, the motif of wild animals feeding on human corpses. Although it is not human beings but wild beasts that feast on the bodies of Pompey’s soldiers, they include wolves, which of course are closely connected with the history of Rome, as it was the Capitoline She-Wolf that saved the lives of Romulus and Remus. The dead soldiers at Pharsalos can therefore be seen as her mythical ‘children’, while the She-Wolf herself can be seen as a Thyestes figure⁴⁹.

The Thyestean context of this passage is further ‘enhanced’ by the presence of vultures (*Numquam tanto se volture caelum / induit*, Luc. *Phars.* 7, 834–835), which also have a connection with the myth of Romulus. The narrator’s remark that the sky is covered by a large flock of these birds is also clearly reminiscent of the messenger’s words in *Thyestes* (Sen. *Thy.* 784–788) – as well as of the macabre image of a dark cloud formed by smoke issuing forth from the corpses of Thyestes’ sons as they are being cooked by Atreus:

[...] Piceos ignis in fumos abit;
 et ipse fumus, tristis ac nebula gravis,
 non rectus exit, seque in excelsum levat –
 ipsos penates nube deformi obsidet.
 (Sen. *Thy.* 772–775)

This passage also bears a slight resemblance to a passage in Seneca’s *Oedipus*, a play from which the *Pharsalia* draws its inspiration in many ways⁵⁰ (*incestam domum / vertam et penates impio Marte obteram*, Sen. *Oed.* 645–646).

Lexical echoes of the introductory lines of the *Pharsalia* make their appearance not only in the second half of the seventh book, where Lucan depicts the gruesome aftermath of the battle of Pharsalus, but are also present in the first half of that book. The first of these echoes resounds in the speech which Caesar makes to his soldiers (compare: *populumque potentem / in sua victrici conversum viscera dextra*, Luc. *Phars.* 1, 2–3):

⁴⁸ A similar passage is also to be found in Seneca’s three other tragedies, (*feras volucresque pascens*, Sen. *HerF.* 1208; *numquid immanis ferae / morsu peremptus pascis Idaeas aves?*, Sen. *Tro.* 566–567; *feris / avibusque saevis quas Cithaeron noxius / cruore saepe regio tinctas alit*, Sen. *Phoe.* 255–257). Cf. J. F i t c h (ed.), *Seneca’s “Hercules Furens”* (Ithaca–London, 1987), 429.

⁴⁹ Cf. J. P y p ł a c z, *When Legends Come Alive...*, 85.

⁵⁰ Cf. E. N a r d u c c i, *Lucano. Un’epica contro l’impero...*, 51–74; A. Ambühl, *Thebanos imitata rogos (BC 1,552). Lucan’s “Bellum civile” und die Tragödien aus dem thebanischen Sagenkreis*, in Ch. W a l d e (ed.), *Lucan im 21. Jahrhundert* (München–Leipzig, 2005), 261–294.

Vestri cura movet; nam me secura manebit
 sors quaesita manu: fodientem **viscera** cernet
 me mea, qui nondum **victo** respexerit hoste.
 (Luc. *Phars.* 7, 308–310)

In this passage, Caesar would appear to consider committing suicide if he were to be defeated by the Pompeians, as he becomes overwhelmed by a strong bout of anxious despair⁵¹. However, in the context of the murder of Caesar, which perhaps – as Berthe Marti suggests – was to be related in the concluding section of the *Pharsalia*⁵², these words may also be treated as a *vaticinium ex eventu* concerning Caesar’s assassination. They may also echo the ominous words with which Caesar challenges the revenge of the Gallic gods in the third book (*iam nequis vestrum dubitet subvertere silvam / credite me fecisse nefas*, Luc. *Phars.* 3, 436–437). There, almost like Mozart’s Don Giovanni, who mocks the ghost of the *Commandatore* by inviting it to supper, Caesar mocks the barbaric deities by challenging them to take vengeance on him for the *nefas* of destroying the holy grove.

In both of the speeches that he makes to his troops – one in the third book (given just before committing the *nefas* of deforestation) – and one in the seventh book (given just before committing the *nefas* of destroying the Roman Republic) – Caesar clearly marks the difference between himself (*me fecisse*; compare: *nam me... manebit*) – a man doomed to perish because of his *nefas* – and his soldiers (*nequis vestrum*; compare: *vestri cura movet*), whose lives, he claims, he holds dearer than his own.

The word *subvertere* used in line 3. 436 – interpreted by Jamie Masters as an allusion to Lucan’s “subversion” of his Virgilian hypotext by reusing and rearranging the subject matter of the *Aeneid*⁵³ – most probably alludes not so much to a purely artistic subversion as to Caesar’s actual subversion of the Republican *ancien régime* and his pursuit of kingship. What is more, the deforestation scene itself, which is based on the ancient tradition of *rex nemorensis*, clearly alludes to Caesar’s monarchic ambitions⁵⁴.

If Caesar’s suicidal talk is indeed a sinister prophecy with a double meaning – and there are strong indications that it is, as Lucan has been found to use a particular kind of

⁵¹ Cf. A. A m b ü h l, *Krieg und Bürgerkrieg bei Lucan und in der Griechischen Literatur. Studien zur Rezeption der Attischen Tragödie und der Hellenistischen Dichtung im “Bellum Civile”* (Berlin–München–Boston, 2015), 1857.

⁵² Cf. E. M a l c o v a t i, *Lucano* (Brescia, 1947), 58; B. M a r t i, *La structure de la “Pharsale”*, in *Entretiens Hardt 15 (Lucain)* (Genève, 1970), 3–49, at 5; S. M. S c h r e i n e r, *Präsentationstechniken von Gewalt, Aggression und Grausamkeit im Supplementum Lucani des Thomas May. Mit vergleichenden betrachtungen zur Continuation of the Subject of Lucan’s Historical Poem*, *Classica Cracoviensia* 10 (2006), 165–184, at 168.

⁵³ Cf. J. M a s t e r s, *op. cit.*, 27.

⁵⁴ Cf. C. M. C. G r e e n, “The Necessary Murder”. *Myth, Ritual, and Civil War in Lucan, Book 3*, *ClAnt* 13, 2 (Oct., 1994), 203–33; I d e m, *The Slayer and the King. “Rex Nemorensis” and the Sanctuary of Diana*, *Arion* 7, 3 (Winter, 2000), 24–63; J. P y p ł a c z, *When Legends Come Alive...*, 103–104.

oracula mortis technique in his epic⁵⁵ – then this would mean that the plausibility of Marti’s hypothesis about the composition of the *Pharsalia* – dealing with its division into tetrads and the possible contents of a hypothetical final part that was probably never completed – would seem to be quite strong.

Caesar’s speech ends with a terrifying order to destroy every part of the Pompeian army. This time, Caesar’s soldiers are to aim for the heart:

Sive quis **infesto** cognata in pectora ferro
 ibit, seu nullum violarit **volnere** pignus,
 ignoti iugulum tamquam **scelus** inputet hostis.

(Luc. *Phars.* 7, 323–325)

In its turn, this passage strongly resembles the following lines of Seneca’s *Thyestes*:

non aliter Atreus saevit atque ira tumet,
ferrumque gemina caede perfusum tenens,
 oblitus in quem fureret, **infesta** manu
 exegit ultra corpus, ac pueri statim
pectore receptus ensis in tergo exstitit;
 cadit ille et aras sanguine extinguens suo
 per utrumque **vulnus** moritur. CHO: O saevum **scelus**!

(Sen. *Thy.* 737–743)

The lexical similarities between both passages are quite impressive, especially in view of the fact that they are also thematically connected. While the first of these passages forms part of the villain’s own speech, the second is part of the messenger’s account of the *nefas* which the villain actually commits: Caesar orders his soldiers to do to the vanquished Pompeians what Atreus does to one of his nephews.

The present analysis has shown that the opening lines of the *Pharsalia* are much more than just a conventional *proemium* and that the initial allusion to Seneca’s *Thyestes* is something more than a mere intertextual ornament, as it carries a very important message that gives unity to the several parts of the epic as well as establishing Caesar’s status as the main villain of the whole story, which – as Randall Ganiban observes – is based on a poetic of *nefas*⁵⁶.

Notwithstanding their sophistication, the lexical and thematic allusions to Seneca’s tragedies – *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* in particular – most probably serve to instruct the audience right at the beginning of the poem about the narrator’s political views and his moral assessment of Caesar’s *nefas*. Lucan does this by drawing a parallel between the physical murder committed by Atreus and the metaphorical “murder” of the Republic committed by Caesar, which ultimately results in the deaths of countless Roman citizens.

⁵⁵ Cf. J. F. M a k o w s k i, *Oracula Mortis in the “Pharsalia”*, CPh, vol. 72, nr 3 (Jul., 1977), 193–202.

⁵⁶ Cf. R. T. G a n i b a n, *Statius and Virgil. The Thebaid and the Reinterpretation of the Aeneid* (Cambridge, 2007), 204.

This parallel begins with an initial lexical allusion to *Agamemnon* that Lucan's audience would have found subtle, yet quite legible: the *cognatae acies* of the Roman soldiers who are involved in a fratricidal conflict are reminiscent of Seneca's expression *coacta gnata*, which is used to refer to Thyestes' past incestuous relationship with his own daughter Pelopia, which has forever tainted his family with sin⁵⁷.

Like the offspring of Thyestes, who are doomed to perdition because of their father's sacrilege (*avo parentem, pro nefas, patri virum, / gnatis nepotes miscui – nocti diem*, Sen. *Ag.* 35–36), the Roman citizens who are involved in the sacrilege of civil war are doomed to perdition because of Caesar's sacrilegious attack on the Republic. His violation of the Patria – which he commits by crossing the Rubicon⁵⁸ – is morally as abhorrent as Thyestes' rape of his own daughter⁵⁹ and – like that action – results in a *commune nefas*⁶⁰.

At the very beginning of his epic, Lucan associates the *commune nefas* of the Civil War with the gruesome legend of Atreus and Thyestes (rewritten by Seneca in *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes*). By means of a stream of persistent intertextual allusions, Caesar's victory over the Republic at Pharsalus – which ends in the appalling spectacle of wild beasts attacking the corpses of the dead Pompeian soldiers – becomes reminiscent of the horrific feast of Thyestes.

Although Julius Caesar is constantly fashioned as an Atreus figure in the *Pharsalia*, the role of Thyestes varies. Lucan initially attributes it to Pompey (as the *pater patriae* or *genitor*), then sometimes to the Roman Republic and sometimes to the animals which are symbols of Rome, that is, wolves and vultures (As Eleni Manolaraki has shown, the motif of vultures – or rather Thracian cranes that “curiously reemerge as vultures” – comes from *Thyestes*)⁶¹.

The gory aftermath of the battle of Pharsalus – dubbed the *funus mundi* by the narrator – also resembles a gigantic Thyestes-style hecatomb. Lucan achieves this effect partly by making the most of the adjective *funestus* – a word that is strongly associated with the expression *ore funesto*, used by Seneca to refer to the mouth of Thyestes, who has become a living tomb for his sons (Sen. *Thy.* 779).

The opening lines of the *Pharsalia* have thus turned out to be much more than a mere proem. Lucan has charged them with strong and clearly legible allusions to Seneca's version of the myth of Thyestes, thus transforming the prologue into a highly intertextual *vaticinium ex eventu*, every word of which bears a piece of one and the same

⁵⁷ Cf. R. J. Tarrant (ed.), Seneca, *Agamemnon*, p. 176.

⁵⁸ Cf. E. Fantham (ed.), Lucan, *De Bello Civili, Book II*, 27; L. Fratantuono, *Madness Triumphant...*, 102.

⁵⁹ Cf. P. J. Davis, *The Shifting Song. The Chorus in Seneca's Tragedies* (Hildesheim–Zurich–New York, 1993), 171.

⁶⁰ Cf. E. Fantham (ed.), Lucan, *De Bello Civili, Book II*, 27.

⁶¹ Cf. E. Manolaraki, *Noscendi Nilum Cupido...*, 73–5, 78; J. Pypłacz, *When Legends Come Alive...*, 86.

message – that at Pharsalos the Roman Republic will become the living tomb of its own citizens, that is, the children of Rome.

These allusions, on the other hand, have proved to extend way beyond the prologue. They resound in various parts of the *Pharsalia* – mostly in the seventh book, which is the turning point of the whole epic, as it is there that the *cognatae acies* of Roman citizens slaughter one another, thus providing a gruesome meal of human corpses for vultures and wolves – animals which have an iconic significance for Rome. In Lucan's eyes, the battle of Pharsalus is a symbolic *coena Thyestis* during which the Republic – like the mythical Thyestes – becomes the tomb of its sons.

A MACABRE PARALLEL. A READING OF LUCAN'S *PHARSALIA* 1, 1–7

SUMMARY

The present article gives a rough outline of Lucan's use of alliteration by attempting to discover the most important functions of this particular rhetorical device in the *Pharsalia*. For the sake of clarity, the instances of alliteration that are found in the *Pharsalia* are divided into three groups: 'pure' (of one and the same consonant), 'mixed' (of two or more consonants) and 'combined' (accompanied by other rhetorical devices). Lucan's use of alliteration is shown to extend far beyond the achievement of an instantaneous sound effect at the level of a single line or even a single passage. In several cases, alliteration is used as a means of association in order to allow the poet to connect passages that would seem to have nothing in common. This in turn leads to the conclusion that Lucan's compositional scheme – based on allusions and association – is present even at the level of the phoneme.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

Lukan, Farsalia, Seneka, Thyestes, Atreus, Republika, Cezar, *nefas*, wnątrznoci, morderstwo, uczta, aluzja, *funus mundi*

KEYWORDS:

Lucan, Pharsalia, Seneca, Thyestes, Atreus, Republic, Caesar, *nefas*, entrails, murder, feast, allusion, *funus mundi*

