



# A Lucan Reader

Selections from *Civil War*

Susanna Braund

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## Selections from *Civil War*

Susanna Braund



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*Series Editor:* Ronnie Ancona  
*Volume Editor:* Laurie Haight Keenan  
*Contributing Editor:* Timothy Beck  
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**A Lucan Reader**  
**Selections from Civil War**

Susanna Braund

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# Preface

I am delighted to have been offered the opportunity to share my passion for the poetry of Lucan by Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers. Lucan is not often read by students at the advanced level and almost never at the intermediate level. There are reasons for this, apart from fashion. His Latin can be very difficult and the articulation of his ideas sometimes seems downright perverse. But whether his Latin is really more difficult than any other author of the post-Augustan period is debatable. And to understand how and why he narrates—or refuses to narrate—the story of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey is to gain an important insight into early imperial poetry. It is my fervent hope that the brief selection from Lucan's *Civil War* offered in this volume will provoke students to study this amazing poem in greater depth.

I here express my gratitude to Ronnie Ancona for supporting my unexpected proposal to produce a volume on Lucan and for her ongoing help during production. Laurie Haight Keenan at the Press has also been most helpful. Elaine Fantham, Vincent Hunink, Corby Kelly, and Toph Marshall have all assisted in different ways. Two dear friends have made special contributions. Victoria Pagán, whose understanding of imperial literature and of the needs of teachers and students alike is unparalleled, read the whole manuscript at very short notice and made suggestions large and small that improved the book significantly. My largest debt of gratitude is to Jo Wallace-Hadrill for producing the total vocabulary—a task requiring, and receiving, the most painstaking attention to detail. Without Jo's contribution the sheer joy of writing this book might have been overwhelmed by the challenge of generating the vocabulary list. I knew I needed to find a special person for this role and I count myself fortunate that Jo was happy to undertake it.



It is my final pleasure to dedicate this book to John Henderson, with whom I first read Lucan, to the memory of Charles Tesoriero, who was a fellow enthusiast for Lucan's *Erichtho*, and to all my students, past, present, and future.

SUSANNA BRAUND  
Bowen Island, British Columbia

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# Introduction

## ∞ *Lucan's life and times*

Lucan is an intriguing figure. He moved in court circles from a young age and was a prolific poet. He seems to have enjoyed the favor of the emperor Nero, two years his elder, for a while, but was later in effect silenced. Finally he joined a conspiracy to overthrow Nero but was compelled to commit suicide at the age of 25.

Marcus Annaeus Lucanus was born in 39 CE at Corduba (modern Córdoba), Spain, into a wealthy and prominent family. The rhetorician and historian Seneca the Elder was his grandfather and the Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger, later tutor to the young Nero, was his father's brother. Lucan was raised at Rome and received an education typical for the sons of the elite, consisting of the study of literature and rhetoric (public speaking). He may also have studied Stoic philosophy with a freedman of Seneca. Nero invited him into his circle of close friends and gave him prominence in Roman public life with the bestowal of the positions of quaestor and augur, even though Lucan was below the minimum age for the quaestorship. Lucan reciprocated with a eulogy of the emperor that he recited at the Neronia, the quinquennial games established by Nero in 60 CE. But in 64 CE Nero banned Lucan from public recitation of his poetry and from practicing advocacy in the law-courts, thus in effect removing him from the public eye. We do not know the reason for this rift. Our sources personalize the matter with stories of Nero's jealousy of Lucan's manifest literary abilities. But there may have been political reasons for Nero's action, perhaps connected with Seneca's enforced retirement from public life in 62 CE. In any case, early in 65 CE Lucan joined the so-called "Pisonian conspiracy" that planned to replace Nero with Calpurnius Piso; the biographer Suetonius describes Lucan

as the “standard-bearer” of the conspirators. But the plot was exposed and the leading players were either executed or forced to commit suicide. Lucan chose to commit suicide in April 65 CE, a fate shared by the end of 66 CE by his father and uncle too. The account of Lucan’s suicide provided by the historian Tacitus (*Annals* 15.70) has him reciting some lines from one of his own poems as his last words.

The accession of Nero in 54 CE was celebrated by many as a new golden age, redolent of the reign of Augustus, and literature appears to have been revitalized under the patronage and encouragement of the emperor, who had artistic interests and literary ambitions himself. According to our sources, Lucan contributed to this flowering of poetry with prolific productivity. Although his epic poem on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey is the only poem of his to survive, we have fragments of his *Journey to the Underworld*, *Tale of Troy*, *Orpheus*, and epigrams, and we know by title alone of his *Eulogy of Nero*, *Address to Polla* (his wife), ten books of occasional poetry, *Saturnalia*, *Medea* (a tragedy), fourteen books of pantomime libretti, a poem *On the Burning of Rome*, and *Letters from Campania* (probably in verse) as well as prose orations.

It seems reasonable to regard his epic poem, *Civil War*, as his major achievement. The poem has generated controversy and scholarly dispute concerning its title and its political position. Many scholars have called it *Pharsalia*, on the basis of some lines from Book 9 where Lucan links Caesar’s immortality with his own (980–86). He promises to Caesar that “future ages will read me and you” and that “our Pharsalia shall live” for ever.

But it seems clear that he here refers to the battle of Pharsalia as won by Caesar and as recorded by Lucan in his poem. Certainly, no surviving manuscript gives *Pharsalia* as the title, while the majority of manuscripts have *De bello ciuili*, “On the Civil War.” Some scholars prefer to use the title *Bellum Ciuile*, simply “Civil War.” It is even imaginable to think of the opening line of the poem as its title, *Bella . . . plus quam ciuilia*, “wars worse [literally, “more”] than civil wars,” given that many poems in antiquity were known by their opening words.

Lucan's political position in relation to Nero and the Principate is just as intractable. Some scholars have pointed to Lucan's participation in an attempted political coup against Nero (the "Pisonian conspiracy") and have retrojected Lucan's hostility towards Nero. On this view, Lucan's flattery of Nero at the opening of the poem must be heavily ironic (see 1.33–45 in this volume) and marked by doublespeak. This interpretation is fueled by the discomfort that modern western culture experiences when confronted with extravagant panegyric. However, many other societies have generated praise addressed to rulers that is similarly effusive, or even more effusive—the English and French courts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, or some modern Arab monarchies. It is certainly possible to take Lucan's praise of Nero as the expected tribute by a poet to the autocrat who held absolute power in the Roman state. There are certainly plenty of analogues from within Roman culture—the praise offered to Octavian (not yet Augustus) by Virgil in his *Georgics* and to Augustus by Horace in his *Odes* (although some critics are as skeptical of the message there as they are of Lucan's attitude here) as well as the eulogies to later emperors composed by poets such as Statius and Martial.

Some have read Lucan as a "Republican" because of his participation in the Pisonian conspiracy and because of his condemnation of Caesar, who inaugurated one-man rule at Rome when he assumed the dictatorship in the early 40s BCE. Although this view of "Lucan the Republican" is understandable at the zenith of his popularity in the anti-monarchical and revolutionary climates of seventeenth century England and eighteenth century France, it involves a profound misunderstanding of Roman politics in the first century CE. The Principate was a fact by the time that Lucan was writing and it is clear that the aim of the conspirators was not to restore the Republic but to replace Nero with another emperor who would treat the Roman elite with more dignity and respect.

To read Lucan's hostility towards Caesar as a manifestation of Republican or even anti-Neronian sentiment is also too simplistic. Although Nero was certainly a "Julian" emperor in his descent from

Augustus and through him from Julius Caesar, Augustus' great-uncle and adoptive father, he may not have identified closely with Julius Caesar. Rather, it is possible that he identified with the Pompeian party through his (blood) ancestor Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, who is picked out for favorable treatment by Lucan. Domitius, who was Nero's great-great-grandfather, appears twice in the poem, in Book 2 when he displays a noble bearing on his surrender to Caesar and in Book 7 when his death receives possibly the most heroic treatment of any in the poem. Since other accounts depict Domitius' behavior in much less favorable terms, it is clear that Lucan sought to present Nero's ancestor positively. In short, to my mind there is no reason to posit any growing discontent with either Nero or the Principate. Rather, Lucan seems to have flourished under Nero until late in 64 or early in 65 CE when he decided to join the conspiracy; we can never know whether his reason was simply Nero's ban or broader political issues. The issue of Lucan's ideological stance remains the most contentious issue in the interpretation of his poem. The clearest account of the problem is still that of Frederick Ahl in *Lucan: An Introduction* (Ithaca and London, 1976) 35–61.

Lucan chose as his topic for his epic poem the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. Below I shall outline the events of the civil war, discuss Lucan's choice of genre, give an outline of the poem, analyze its scope and structure, and discuss its literary dimensions, including Lucan's relationship with his predecessors in the genre, particularly Virgil. Topics include Lucan's handling of the gods and the supernatural, the marked Stoic dimension of the poem, the three protagonists and the other characters, the strategies he adopts to maximize the horror of his subject-matter and, finally, the characteristics of his Latin. After a protracted lack for appreciation of Lucan's achievement and years of scholarly neglect, happily there is now an abundance of excellent scholarship to enhance our reading of Lucan. I have selected a few items for the bibliography, which appears at the end of the Introduction.

## ∞ *The civil war between Caesar and Pompey*

Lucan chose to compose his epic poem about events from relatively recent history—the civil war between Caesar and Pompey that started when Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BCE. The civil war set in motion a sequence of events that led to the supremacy of Octavian, Julius Caesar’s heir and adoptive son, who had himself proclaimed Augustus in 27 BCE. Augustus is usually regarded as the first emperor, or *princeps*, and he made every attempt to keep the succession within his family. At his death in 14 CE he was succeeded by his stepson, Tiberius, who ruled until 37 CE. He in turn was succeeded by Gaius, whose nickname was Caligula, the son of Germanicus, Tiberius’ nephew and adoptive son. Gaius ruled for just four years before he was murdered and replaced by his uncle Claudius, who ruled 41–54 CE, until he was allegedly poisoned by his wife Agrippina in her machinations to make her son Nero emperor. With Nero’s death in 68 CE, the so-called Julio-Claudian dynasty came to an end.

The civil war of 49–45 BCE can only be understood through events that led up to it—as Lucan himself understands very well, supplying a lengthy consideration of its causes at the beginning of Book 1 of his poem. Analysis of the background events usually begins in 60 BCE, following Sir Ronald Syme, the great Roman historian, in his crucial book, *The Roman Revolution*, first published in 1939 and still in print. The year 60 BCE saw an informal coalition, often called the “First Triumvirate,” between Julius Caesar, just returned from a successful campaign in Spain, with the millionaire Marcus Crassus and the brilliant general Gnaeus Pompeius, Pompey the Great, who had recently returned from his conquest and political reorganization of the Near East. The collaboration was sealed by the marriage of Caesar’s daughter Julia to Pompey the next year and as consul in 59 BCE Caesar was able to ratify the coalition’s legislation as well as set up a five-year command in Gaul for himself. The command was not only a vehicle for his military ambitions, both in terms of the glory that came from conquest and the power that came from the loyalty of troops bound more to their individual commander rather than to

the Roman state. It also brought him immunity from prosecution, which was a major concern for any Roman who had held high office. In Roman Republican political life, it was absolutely normal for political enemies to take their revenge via prosecution, but this could happen only once the individual had returned to private status. Since anyone who rose to the highest positions had inevitably made many enemies on the way, the fear of prosecution was very real.

The coalition weathered some bumpy moments to be consolidated in 56 BCE at a meeting at Luca (modern Lucca) with the violent installation of Pompey and Crassus as consuls for the next year. The consuls used their position to protect themselves with five-year commands in Spain and Syria respectively and extended Caesar's command of Gaul into the year 50 BCE, a measure designed to give him uninterrupted power until it was legal for him to stand for the consulship again. But the coalition did not last that long.

In 54 BCE the bond between Caesar and Pompey was weakened by the death of Julia in childbirth and in 53 BCE Crassus was killed by the Parthians at the battle of Carrhae. In 52 BCE, after months of anarchy, Pompey became sole consul, a constitutionally unprecedented position. He used his power to enact measures, some of which appeared to support Caesar's position but others of which clearly undermined it. His shift away from Caesar and back towards what we might call the senatorial party was marked by his marriage to Cornelia, daughter of one of the traditionalists.

Caesar had nearly been out-manuevered by Pompey, but not quite. In 50 BCE he persuaded Curio, one of the tribunes, to veto the legislation that would jeopardize his position, by paying off Curio's massive debts. As the year progressed, civil war seemed more and more inevitable. When in December Curio proposed the motion to the Senate that both Pompey and Caesar should give up their provinces and armies, support was overwhelming. However, the consul Marcellus dismissed the Senate without implementing the motion and a few days later, in response to a rumor that Caesar was invading Italy, entrusted the defense of Italy to Pompey. In the first few days of 49 BCE, the new consul Lentulus overrode the veto of the new tribunes

Antony and Cassius who were now acting for Caesar, had the Senate declare a state of emergency, and started the process of replacing Caesar as governor of Gaul. This gave Caesar the pretext he needed to act: he could claim that he was defending the tribunes and their rights.

So in January 49 BCE Caesar crossed the Rubicon, which was the boundary between his province of Cisalpine Gaul and Italy. In response to his rapid advance down the east coast of Italy, Pompey and the Senate withdrew from Rome to Brundisium and in March sailed across to Epirus, leaving Italy in Caesar's control (Books 1–2). Caesar entered Rome, seized the Treasury, and then went to Massilia where he began to besiege the city (Book 3) and moved on to Spain, where he defeated Pompey's generals (Book 4). Meanwhile in Africa his lieutenant Curio was defeated and killed by King Juba, an ally of Pompey (Book 4). Caesar returned to Rome in December to be elected consul and in January crossed to Epirus (Book 5) and faced Pompey at Dyrrachium (Book 6). Pompey then moved east to Thessaly and the two armies met in the battle of Pharsalia on 9 August 48 BCE, where Caesar inflicted a resounding defeat on Pompey (Book 7). Pompey fled with the remnants of the Senate (other senators went directly to Africa with Cato and Pompey's son Gnaeus) and was killed on his arrival in Egypt on 29 September (Book 8). Caesar arrived in Alexandria three days later (Books 9–10), waged war against Ptolemy XIII and in the spring of 47 BCE established Cleopatra as ruler. In the summer he returned to Rome, but in December crossed over to Africa to deal with the Pompeian forces that had mustered there under Pompey's father-in-law Scipio. Caesar finally took Thapsus after besieging it for four months. Soon afterwards, Cato the Younger, one of the Pompeian leaders, committed suicide at Utica. As a result of his victory Caesar was voted dictator for ten years and he returned to Rome to celebrate a fourfold triumph. But the war was not yet over. Before the end of 46 BCE he had to go to Spain to face the troops that Pompey's sons had assembled there. Caesar ended the brief campaign with his victory at the battle of Munda on 17 March 45 BCE. Caesar then returned to Rome where he remained until his assassination in March 44 BCE.



Our sources for the events of the civil war include Caesar's own commentaries on the *Civil War* (three books) as well as accounts written by his officers, the *Alexandrian War* covering 48–47 BCE, the *African War* on the events of 47–46 BCE, and the *Spanish War* on the campaign that climaxed with the battle of Munda; the narratives written in Greek by Appian in the second century CE (*Civil Wars* Book 2) and by Dio Cassius in the early third century CE (*Roman History* Books 41–43); and the relevant *Lives* by Plutarch (also in Greek, written in the late first and early second century CE), most obviously those of Pompey, Caesar, and Cato the Younger. The sources available to Lucan included Caesar's account and the narrative written by Livy as part of his monumental history of Rome, *From the Foundation of Rome*; unfortunately, these books of Livy do not survive. Since Lucan could assume his audience's familiarity with the events of the civil war, and since his choice of genre was epic poetry not prose historiography, he did not feel any need to provide relentless detail. In fact, he at times omits, minimizes, amplifies, and even invents incidents and minor characters. A good example of this is the appearance of Cicero in Pompey's camp at the battle of Pharsalia (Book 7): we know from Plutarch that Cicero was not present, but dramatically it makes good sense to deploy him as the spokesman of the Senate. Another example is Lucan's account of the assassination of Pompey in Book 8, where a comparison with the cluttered but probably more reliable account by Plutarch demonstrates clearly Lucan's tendency towards simplification for dramatic effect.

### ☞ *Lucan's choice of genre*

Lucan chose to write an epic poem in the long-established hexameter meter. This decision sets some parameters for our judgment of his achievement. He is not inviting comparison with the writers of historiographical narrative. Rather, his models are his predecessors in the epic genre, above all, Virgil, whose *Aeneid* was an instant success when the emperor Augustus published it after Virgil's death in 19 BCE. In fact, the poem was so esteemed that it immediately became a set-text for Roman schoolboys and a text against which

any subsequent epic poet was forced to measure himself. Virgil's achievement in the *Aeneid* is often regarded as the high point of Latin literature, after which there could only be decline. That attitude explains the labels "Golden" and "Silver" that have been applied to Augustan and post-Augustan literature respectively. But instead of constructing an acme and subsequent decline, it is more valuable to consider how the preeminence of the *Aeneid* inspired subsequent poets to define themselves and their projects differently—a topic explored brilliantly by Philip Hardie in his book *The Epic Successors of Virgil* (Cambridge, 1993). As I proceed to indicate some of the characteristics of Lucan's poetry, including manifestations of his deliberate differences from Virgil, I intend to make the case for reading Lucan on his own terms and for valuing his achievement as one of the most original poets produced by Rome.

### ∞ *Epic and the theme of civil war*

When we think of Greco-Roman epic poems, Greek mythological epics such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and *Argonautica* immediately come to mind. In Latin literature, Virgil's *Aeneid* too arguably belongs in that category, in that it deals with events in the distant past before the foundation of Rome, although Virgil forges strong links between past and present. Against that backdrop, Lucan's decision to tackle the relatively recent civil war looks like an innovation. But there was a strong tradition of historical epic at Rome, starting with the earliest Latin epics, Naevius' *Punic War* (written in the Saturnian meter) and Ennius' *Annals* (written, like the Homeric epics, in the dactylic hexameter), composed in the late third century BCE and second century BCE respectively. The fragments of poems on the civil wars written under the emperor Augustus and during the first century CE that survive demonstrate that historical epic was still alive and that the topic was considered viable. More than that, such poems seem to have been comfortable depicting the involvement of the gods in the action. It turns out that one of Lucan's chief innovations was not his choice of recent history but his dispensing with the expected divine machinery (as Denis Feeney shows in Chapter 6 of *The Gods in Epic* [Oxford, 1991]).

## ∞ *Outline of the poem, contextualizing the excerpts in this volume*

Lucan starts by stating the theme of his poem, the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, expressing his regret about Rome's embroilment in civil war, but declaring that everything was worthwhile to have Nero as emperor (1.1–45). After asking Nero to inspire his poetry, he analyzes various causes of the civil war: the inevitable collapse of mighty structures, the impossibility of sharing power at Rome, the death of Crassus, and the death of Julia (Caesar's daughter and Pompey's wife). He devotes most attention to the personalities of the two leaders, introducing similes in which Pompey is compared to a massive old oak tree and Caesar is compared to a lightning-bolt (1.67–157). After a brief tirade against Rome's luxury and immorality, Lucan finally begins his narrative of the civil war. Caesar advances to the Rubicon and after being halted for a moment by a vision of Rome personified, crosses into Italy (1.183–228). He advances through Italy and is joined by his supporter Curio, the previous year's tribune, now fleeing from Rome in fear for his life. After scenes depicting Caesar as a commander and a catalogue of his troops, a standard feature of epic, Lucan portrays the panic at Rome at the (false) reports of Caesar's imminent invasion (1.486–504). The rest of Book 1 is devoted to the supernatural: terrible prodigies and portents, an unsuccessful purification of the city and prophecies of doom, an astrologer's prediction of civil war, and finally a prophecy of the events of the civil war delivered by a Roman matron in a frenzy.

Book 2 commences with an old man's lengthy recollections of the previous civil wars, between Marius and Sulla, and then introduces the grim Stoic moralist Cato the Younger, the third protagonist in the poem, who will take over as leader after Pompey's death. Cato is depicted first in conversation with Brutus, the future assassin of Caesar, and then renewing his marriage-vows with Marcia in a simple, rather bleak ceremony designed to show his austerity. Lucan then narrates Pompey's withdrawal from Rome to Campania and Caesar's unstoppable advance through Italy, including the surrender

of Corfinium and with it Pompey's general Domitius Ahenobarbus (an ancestor of Nero), who is spared by Caesar. Unable to inspire his troops, Pompey withdraws to Brundisium, pursued by Caesar, who tries to blockade him. Pompey's fleet manages to escape and Caesar is welcomed into the city.

Book 3 starts with Pompey's voyage to Epirus, during which his dead wife Julia appears to him as a Fury and vows to hound him forever (3.8–35). Back in Italy, Caesar marches to Rome and ransacks the Treasury. After a catalogue of Pompey's troops, Lucan shifts the focus to Massilia in Gaul for the rest of the book. Refused access to Massilia, Caesar begins a siege, cutting down a sacred grove in the process (3.399–445). Then his troops attack the city from the sea and Lucan delivers his first battle narrative: his sea-battle is a display of his interest in violent and strange deaths.

The setting of Book 4 is Spain, Illyria, and Africa. In Spain, Caesar takes on Pompey's generals near the town of Ilerda. After Caesar experiences flood and famine and the Pompeians thirst and after an incident of fraternization that ends in a massacre, the Pompeian troops surrender. In Illyria on the Adriatic shore Pompeian troops are besieging Caesar's general Antonius. The Caesarian troops attempt to escape on rafts, but one raft is trapped and those on board commit mutual suicide (i.e., they make a pact to kill one another) rather than be captured. Caesar's lieutenant Curio arrives in Africa, where he is told the story by a local of the fight between Hercules and Antaeus. He defeats the Pompeian commander but is himself defeated and killed by Pompey's ally King Juba.

Much of Book 5 is occupied by incidents that do not advance the narrative. First Lucan devotes a long passage to the consultation of the Delphic oracle in Greece by Appius, one of the Pompeian leaders. Then Caesar quells a mutiny among his troops. After going to Rome to be invested as dictator, he crosses with his troops across the Adriatic from Brundisium to Epirus, even though it is past the sailing season. Once he has arrived there and camped at Dyrrachium, he sends for his remaining forces in Italy to join him; because they delay, he attempts to cross back to Italy in a small boat. Lucan devotes the rest of the book to a narrative of the storm at sea that Lucan

presents as a contest in which Caesar defiantly challenges the gods to overwhelm him. He does not make the crossing but he survives the elements and returns safely to his troops in Epirus. Book 5 ends with a touching episode in which Pompey decides to send his beloved wife Cornelia to the island of Lesbos for safety.

Book 6 starts with conflict between Caesar and Pompey: Pompey seizes Dyrrachium but is besieged by Caesar. As it attempts to break through Caesar's rampart, Pompey's army is driven back by the heroic efforts of one man, Scaeva. This is Lucan's version of another standard element in epic (like the catalogue in Book 1), the *aristeia*, or celebration of the "best exploits" of a single warrior. Eventually Pompey breaks out and Caesar heads for Thessaly, with Pompey in pursuit. The rest of the book is devoted to Thessaly, starting with an extended geographical description, displaying Lucan's learning and rhetorical skill. The night before battle Pompey's son Sextus consults the terrifying witch Erichtho about the outcome. Lucan provides a brilliantly atmospheric narrative of Erichtho's necromancy (literally "corpse-divination"), in which she selects a corpse to revive so that it can deliver a prophecy (6.624–53). The focus is on Erichtho's terrifying magic rites and her power to command the forces of the Underworld and not on the prophecy, which is vague.

Book 7 is devoted to the battle of Pharsalia. It starts with Pompey's dream and with his troops demanding battle. Against his better judgment, he concedes. An account of portents heightens the tension. Caesar delivers an inspiring speech to his men, in contrast with Pompey, whose battle-speech ends with a picture of defeat. Lucan then reflects on the devastating effect of the battle on his own times, again heightening tension. Once the battle begins, Lucan punctuates his narrative with authorial interventions expressing horror. He focuses on very few individuals—only Brutus (Lucan urges him to wait to kill Caesar) and Domitius, the ancestor of Nero who featured in Book 2 and whose death receives elaborated treatment here. Lucan expresses the difficulty of narrating individual deaths in civil warfare (7.617–37) and then narrates Pompey's dignified departure from the battlefield (7.647–82). Caesar captures Pompey's camp (7.728–46), but his troops have nightmares when they lie down to sleep, with

Caesar experiencing everyone else's nightmares and more. But the next morning he takes breakfast on the battlefield and commands that the dead be left unburied, for which Lucan remonstrates with him (7.760–811). After a grisly description of the birds and beasts devouring the corpses, Lucan addresses Thessaly, imagining future finds of relics of the battle.

The focus of Book 8 is Pompey and his death. First he flees fearfully and is reunited with Cornelia in a scene that moves everyone, including Pompey, to tears. As Pompey sails away, he sends his ally King Deiotarus to seek assistance from the Parthians, who were Rome's arch-enemies: this probably fictitious episode shows Pompey's lapse in judgment. In a meeting of the Senate in exile, Pompey urges that they take refuge in Parthia, but his proposal is defeated by a more powerful speech advocating refuge in Egypt with Ptolemy. Pompey bows to this and sets sail for Egypt. At the Egyptian court, the eunuch Pothinus successfully makes the case for the assassination of Pompey and a task force is dispatched to meet him. This moves Lucan to express his outrage at Ptolemy's intervention in Rome's civil war. His narrative of Pompey's murder brings out Pompey's thoughts of dying honorably along with Cornelia's desperate devotion to her husband (8.542–636). Lucan expresses horror that Pompey's head is cut off and embalmed (8.663–88). Book 8 concludes with the humble burial of Pompey's body by a loyal follower on the shore and Lucan's curse of Egypt.

Book 9 opens with the apotheosis of Pompey. Cato, who is the main character of the book, then assumes command and takes Pompey's forces to Africa. Once Cornelia has joined him there, Cato delivers a funeral oration for Pompey (9.190–217). The troops mutiny, declaring their devotion to Pompey alone, but Cato shames them into staying the course. He sets sail to King Juba, losing some of his ships in another storm at sea. Lucan takes the opportunity to include geographical and mythological material relevant to Africa. Cato leads his troops across land through the hazards of Libya—heat, wind, and thirst—to the temple of Jupiter Ammon where he declines to consult the oracle because of his Stoic outlook. Lucan now devotes more than three hundred lines to a narrative of the

snakes that afflict Cato's army and the cure offered by the local people. Book 9 closes with the episode of Caesar's visit to the decayed site of Troy, during which Lucan promises immortality to Caesar (9.961–99), before he travels on to Egypt where he is presented with Pompey's head and weeps feigned tears.

The incomplete Book 10 starts with Caesar's visit to the tomb of Alexander the Great and Lucan's invective against Alexander. When Ptolemy and Cleopatra vie for Caesar's favor, it is Cleopatra who succeeds. She invites Caesar to a luxurious banquet that is described lavishly by Lucan. During the banquet Caesar hears theories about the source of the Nile. Meanwhile the eunuch Pothinus plots to seize power by assassinating Caesar and Cleopatra; his task force surrounds the palace. Caesar barricades himself in, but manages to resist the onslaught. At this moment of extreme danger, Caesar is inspired by the thought of his soldier Scaeva, who single-handedly resisted the Pompeian army in Book 6. At this point, our text breaks off, curiously at the same point as Caesar's narrative of the civil war in his commentaries.

### ☞ *The scope and structure of the poem*

The poem breaks off partway through Book 10. Was it unfinished at the time of Lucan's death in 65 CE or was part of the text lost at a very early stage? Speculation about this and about the scope and structure of the poem has produced very different interpretations. Possible end-points proposed include the suicide of Cato after the battle of Thapsus in 46 BCE, the assassination of Caesar in 44 BCE, the battle of Philippi in 42 BCE, and the battle of Actium in 31 BCE. Given that in ten books Lucan has covered the events of just twenty months, Cato's suicide offers the most plausible solution and would have been viable in an epic of twelve or sixteen books; the other theories require a much longer poem. This solution has the advantage of literary coherence: Cato is introduced in the extant text as the third protagonist; after Pompey's death, he is immediately depicted as the leader of the senatorial faction; and his Stoicism and suicide would have reprised prominent themes in the poem.

It is clear that the consultation of the witch Erichtho in Book 6 is designed as an inversion, or perversion, of Aeneas' visit to the Sibyl in Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. That suggests that Lucan may have planned a poem in twelve books as a challenge to the supreme position occupied by the *Aeneid*. At the same time, once we note that other post-Virgilian epics reject the twelve-book model—for example, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in fifteen books and (after Lucan) Silius' *Punic Wars* in seventeen books—it becomes less necessary to postulate a twelve-book poem. In any case, Lucan's method of composition is more episodic than Virgil's and more closely resembles the structure of Ovid's epic poem. Given the importance of virtuosic rhetorical display in the early empire, it is easy to imagine the performance of excerpts in Nero's court—such as the entire necromancy episode that concludes Book 6 or Caesar's visit to Troy from Book 9.

### ∞ *The role of the gods, Fate, and Fortune*

Earlier epic deploys anthropomorphized deities as main movers of plot—just think of the interventions by Juno and Venus in Virgil's *Aeneid*, or the involvement in human life by the gods who appear in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Lucan's decision to abandon the traditional divine machinery is, then, very marked. And it was not for shortage of possibilities. He could easily have made Venus Caesar's champion, since she was claimed as his ancestor through Aeneas, and Hercules the supporter of the Pompeians; we are told that the passwords at the battle of Pharsalia were "Venus Victorious" (*Venus Victrix*) and "Hercules Unconquered" (*Hercules Inuictus*) respectively. Instead, we find only vague references to "the gods." He replaces the divine apparatus with the Stoic concepts of Fate and Fortune. The Stoics regarded Fate (*fatum* or *fata*) as destiny, as the fixed, immutable order of the world. Fortune they regarded as a fickle and capricious power capable of elevating or destroying any individual. On a Stoic reading of Lucan's poem, it was a fact and an act of Fate that Caesar was victorious and that Nero consequently became emperor (1.33), but it was Fortune who presided over Caesar's rise (e.g., 1.225–27) and Pompey's fall (e.g., 7.665–68). One important consequence of



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