

POMPEY AS *LUDIBRIUM PELAGI* IN LUCAN: A HORATIAN
REMINISCENCE

by

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ABSTRACT: The literary representation of Pompey in Lucan's epic is strongly connected to the idea of the crumbling *res publica*. The poet reinforces this connection by using the phrase *ludibrium pelagi* (VIII 710) to describe the Roman general's decapitated body, thus pointing to a similar phrase in Horace's ode I 14, where the image of a ship rolling in rough seas symbolizes the dangers threatening the *res publica* as a result of civil war.

Following the trend prevalent in his day, in the composition of his epic *De Bello Civili* Lucan does not restrict himself to the adoption of models strictly associated with the epic, but incorporates elements in his work that are drawn from a number of other literary genres. The influence of Horace on Lucan has received ever increasing attention in recent years¹. In this article I shall be investigating a case which has not yet been closely examined by scholars. More specifically, I shall attempt to demonstrate that Lucan, by referring to Pompey's headless body after it was thrown into the sea as *ludibrium pelagi* (VIII 710), aims to allude to Horace's famous ode I 14, thus facilitating his broader poetic purposes.

The murder and beheading of Pompey on the coast of Egypt, where he had fled following his defeat at Pharsalus, was a subject which understandably moved the Romans. It is worth noting that Vergil's description in the *Aeneid* of Pyrrhus beheading Priam recalled Pompey's fate to the minds of the readers, as already observed by Servius², and undoubtedly this had been exploited by Lucan in his

¹ See recently D. GROSS, *Plenus litteris Lucanus: Zur Rezeption der horazischen Oden und Epoden in Lucans Bellum Civile*, Rahden/Westf. 2013 (Litora Classica 3); cf. also, among others, I. BORZSÁK, *Lucan und Horaz*, ACD XIV 1978, pp. 43–49; M. PASCHALIS, *Two Horatian Reminiscences in the Proem of Lucan*, Mnemosyne XXXV 1982, pp. 342–346.

² Serv. ad Verg. *Aen.* II 557: “iacet ingens litore truncus: **Pompei tangit historiam**, cum ‘ingens’ dicit, non ‘magnus’”.

own description of Pompey's death³. It is only natural that Lucan should show great application in his description of the particular subject in his epic⁴, a subject which is in keeping with the emphasis placed on *exitus illustrium virorum*⁵ at the time and is approached in an intensely rhetorical manner that elicits *pathos*.

In his description Lucan refers to the Roman general's headless body which has been thrown into the sea as *ludibrium pelagi*:

pulsatur harenis,
carpitur in scopulis hausto per vulnera fluctu,
ludibrium pelagi, nullaque manente figura
una nota est Magno capitis iactura revulsi⁶.

(VIII 708–711)

A similar expression is to be found in the poet's mention of Pompey's catasterism, where the general's spirit is seen to be mocking the *sui ludibria*⁷ *trunci*:

³ See e.g. E. NARDUCCI, *Il tronco di Pompeo (Troia e Roma nella Pharsalia)*, Maia XXV 1973, pp. 317–325; IDEM, *La provvidenza crudele: Lucano e la distruzione dei miti augustei*, Pisa 1979 (Bibliotheca di Studi Antichi 17), pp. 43–54; IDEM, *Ideologia e tecnica allusiva nella Pharsalia*, ANRW II 32, 3 (1985), pp. 1545–1547; IDEM, *Lucano: Un'epica contro l'impero: Interpretazione della Pharsalia*, Roma–Bari 2002 (Percorsi 34), pp. 111 ff.; A. ROSSI, *The Aeneid Revisited: the Journey of Pompey in Lucan's Pharsalia*, AJPh CXXI 2000, pp. 586 f.; F.R. BERNO, *Un truncus, molti re. Priamo, Agamennone, Pompeo (Virgilio, Seneca, Lucano)*, Maia LVI 2004, pp. 79–84; G. CHIESA, *La rappresentazione del corpo nel Bellum Civile di Lucano*, Acme LVIII 2005, pp. 17 f.; M. ERASMO, *Mourning Pompey: Lucan and the Poetics of Death Ritual*, in: C. DEROUX (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XII*, Bruxelles 2005 (Collection Latomus 287), p. 345; G. PETRONE, *La 'fragile fortuna' di Priamo e Pompeo. Uno schema tragico d'interpretazione*, Maia LX 2008, pp. 51–63.

⁴ On Lucan's literary treatment of Pompey's death, see e.g. E. PARATORE, *Lucano*, Roma 1992 (Filologia e critica 68), pp. 73–84; P. ESPOSITO, *La morte di Pompeo in Lucano*, in: G. BRUGNOLI, F. STOK (eds.), *Pompei exitus. Variazioni sul tema dall'Antichità alla Controriforma*, Pisa 1996 (Testi e studi di cultura classica 15), pp. 75–123; J.-Ch. DE NADAI, *Rhétorique et poétique dans la Pharsale de Lucain. La crise de la représentation dans la poésie antique*, Louvain–Paris 2000 (Bibliothèque d'Études Classiques 19), pp. 262–271; NARDUCCI, *Lucano: Un'epica...* (n. 3), pp. 331–335; M. MALAMUD, *Pompey's Head and Cato's Snakes*, CPh XCVIII 2003, esp. pp. 32–39; ERASMO, *Mourning...* (n. 3), pp. 344–360.

⁵ On *exitus illustrium virorum* and their popularity in the Imperial period, see, for instance, F.A. MARX, *Tacitus und die Literatur der exitus illustrium virorum*, Philologus XCII 1937, pp. 83–103; A. RONCONI, *Exitus illustrium virorum*, SIFC XVII 1940, pp. 3–32; cf. M. SEEWALD, *Studien zum 9. Buch von Lucans Bellum Civile, Mit einem Kommentar zu den Versen 1–733*, Berlin–New York 2008 (Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft, N.F. 2), pp. 135 f.

⁶ All citations from Lucan's epic follow the edition of D.R. SHACKLETON BAILEY, *M. Annaei Lucani De Bello Civili libri X*, Stuttgartiae–Lipsiae² 1997.

⁷ For a possible allusion to spectacles through the word *ludibria* here, cf. M. ERASMO, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome*, Columbus 2008, p. 121: "From a semiotic perspective, Pompey was an audience to his own audience of events on earth, watching himself watching events of his murder unfold, watching his corpse being decapitated and abused (now referred to as a spectacle: *ludibria*), watching Cordus' hasty funeral and the cremation of his remains from which his soul arose".

illic postquam se lumine vero
implevit, stellasque vagas miratus et astra
fixa polis, vidit quanta sub nocte iaceret
nostra dies risitque sui **ludibria** trunci.

(IX 11–14)

It is also worth noting that the same noun was used by Pompey to refer to his own person in the speech he gave addressing his soldiers prior to the crucial battle at Pharsalus, in which he asked them to fight so that he should not be made *ludibrium soceri* in case of defeat:

Magnus, nisi vincitis, exul,
ludibrium soceri, vester pudor, ultima fata
deprecor ac turpes extremi cardinis annos,
ne discam servire senex.

(VII 379–382)

The irony of these lines is evident. The word *exul* refers the readers to the end of Book II, where Pompey abandons Italy (cf. II 725–730: “pelagus iam, Magne, tenebas/ non ea fata ferens quae cum super aequora toto/ praedonem sequerere mari: lassata triumphis/ descivit Fortuna tuis. cum coniuge pulsus/ et natis tososque trahens in bella penates/ vadis adhuc ingens populis comitantibus **exul**”)⁸, and, at the same time, to Aeneas⁹; cf. also VII 377: “cum prole et coniuge supplex”. Thus, Pompey as *exul* – forced by Caesar, the storm, to escape his homeland – really has become *ludibrium soceri* and, by implication, *ludibrium pelagi / venti*.

Lastly, the noun *ludibrium* is also found one more time in Lucan’s epic, in lines X 25–28, where, however, it is not directly connected to Pompey, but to the fate of Alexander the Great’s body should *Libertas* restore the world to itself:

nam sibi Libertas umquam si redderet orbem,
ludibrio servatus erat, non utile mundo
editus exemplum, terras tot posse sub uno
esse viro.

Generally, the ‘spectacular’ elements of Lucan’s epic are elucidated by M. LEIGH, *Lucan: Spectacle and Engagement*, Oxford 1997 (Oxford Classical Monographs).

⁸ Cf. also the occurrence of the word *exul* some lines earlier, in the simile that likens Pompey to a bull: “pulsus ut armentis primo certamine taurus/ silvarum secreta petit vacuosque per agros/ **exul** in adversis explorat cornua truncis/ nec redit in pastus nisi cum cervice recepta/ excussi placuere tori, mox reddita victor/ quoslibet in saltus comitantibus agmina tauris/ invito pastore trahit, sic viribus impar/ tradidit Hesperiam profugusque per Apula rura/ Brundisii tutas concessit Magnus in arces” (II 601–609).

⁹ Cf. Verg. *Aen.* III 11 f.: “feror **exsul** in altum/ cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis”. On the Vergilian model and the contrasts and affinities between Pompey and Aeneas in Lucan’s lines II 728 ff., see e.g. E. FANTHAM, *Lucan, De Bello Civili, Liber II*, Cambridge 1992 (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics), p. 220.

Even in this case, however, there is an indirect connection: Lucan likes to compare the absence of a significant grave for Pompey with the grand tomb of another Magnus, Alexander the Great¹⁰. The presence of the word *ludibrium* in these two instances makes the contrast all the clearer: the poet claims that if there was *Libertas* in the world, then the posthumous fate of the two men would have been reversed, with Alexander the Great's body suffering the fate of that of Pompey's, since the former is portrayed as an *exemplum* of the despotic monarchy which is strongly denounced by the poet.

The fact that Lucan refers to Pompey's sea-tossed body with the phrase *ludibrium pelagi* easily recalls to the reader's mind Horace's use of the word *ludibrium* in *Carm.* I 14:

tu nisi ventis
debes **ludibrium**, cave.

(Hor. *Carm.* I 14, 15 f.)

Horace's famous ode describes a ship which has already suffered considerable damage in earlier storms and is now attempting, yet again, to set sail in dangerous seas. Riddled with disappointment and disgust, the lyric poet warns it of the great dangers that lie ahead and calls on it to be careful and seek shelter in a calm harbour, so to avoid being mocked (*ludibrium*) by the winds. Even in ancient times, this ode was interpreted according to the well-established symbolism of the state as a ship¹¹ and Quintilian presented it as a typical example of allegory, with the ship symbolizing the *res publica*, the storms and tempests civil war and the harbour peace and concord¹²:

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. ERASMO, *Mourning...* (n. 3), p. 344; F. GALTIER, *Un tombeau pour un grand nom: le traitement de la dépouille de Pompée chez Lucain*, in: O. DEVILLERS, S. FRANCHET D'ESPÉREY (eds.), *Lucain en débat. Rhétorique, poétique et histoire. Actes du Colloque international, Institut Ausonius (Pessac, 12–14 juin 2008)*, Bordeaux 2010 (Études 29), pp. 198 f.; S. TZOUNAKAS, *The Dialogue between the Mytileneans and Pompey in Lucan's De Bello Civili (8,109–158)*, *Minerva* XXV 2012, p. 160.

¹¹ On the long-established allegory of the ship of state, see e.g. J.M. MAY, *The Image of the Ship of State in Cicero's Pro Sestio*, *Maia* XXXII 1980, pp. 259–264; F. MAIER, *Die Metapher des ‚Staatsschiffes‘. Elemente der Tradition in der Sprache des Alltags. Zu Alkaios 46a D, Horaz c. I 14 u.a.*, in: J. GRUBER, F. MAIER (eds.), *Humanismus und Bildung. Zukunftschancen der Tradition. Beiträge zu Bildungstheorie und Didaktik der Alten Sprachen II: Interpretationen*, Bamberg 1991 (Auxilia 28), pp. 78–94; R. MAYER, *Horace, Odes, Book I*, Cambridge 2012 (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics), p. 136 with relevant bibliography.

¹² On this ode and its various interpretations, some of which, however, are critical of the political interpretation espoused by Quintilian, see e.g. W.S. ANDERSON, *Horace Carm. I.14: What Kind of Ship?*, *CPh* LXI 1966, pp. 84–98; R.G.M. NISBET, M. HUBBARD, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes, Book I*, Oxford 1970, pp. 178–188; G. DAVIS, *Ingenii cumba? Literary Aporia and the Rhetoric of Horace's O navis referent (C.I.14)*, *RhM* CXXXII 1989, pp. 331–345; D.A. WEST, *Horace Odes I. Carpe Diem. Text, Translation and Commentary*, Oxford 1995, pp. 64–71; G. CALBOLI, *O navis*,

Allegoria, quam inversionem interpretantur, aut aliud verbis, aliud sensu ostendit, aut etiam interim contrarium. Prius fit genus plerumque continuatis tralationibus, ut “O navis, referent in mare te novi/ fluctus: o quid agis? fortiter occupa/ portum”, totusque ille Horati locus, quo navem pro re publica, fluctus et tempestates pro bellis civilibus, portum pro pace atque concordia dicit (Quint. *Inst.* VIII 6, 44).

It is a well-known fact that in Lucan’s epic Pompey’s image is depicted in such a way as to represent and echo the crumbling Roman *res publica*¹³. The poet liked to imply that the two fates were indissolubly connected, thus presenting the Roman general’s elimination in a way that signalled the arrival of a monarchy in Rome. A characteristic example is Cato’s eulogy of Pompey (IX 190–214), which evolves into a funerary speech for the *res publica*¹⁴. As one of the better known poems in earlier Latin literature that could be interpreted as allegorical of the dangers threatening the *res publica* in the form of civil war, this particular ode by Horace offers valuable material in this direction. It seems that Lucan interprets Horace’s ode in the same way as Quintilian does; he appears fully aware of the possible strong symbolism of Horace’s poem and by his apposite allusion

referent in mare te novi / fluctus (zu Horazens *carm. I 14*), Maia L 1998, pp. 37–70; P. PAOLUCCI, *Tre vettori per l’interpretazione politica di Hor. Carm. I, 14*, GIF LI 1999, pp. 23–40; R.W. CARRUBBA, *The Structure of Horace’s Ship of State: Odes 1, 14*, Latomus LXII 2003, pp. 606–615; O. KNORR, *Horace’s Ship Ode (Odes 1.14) in Context: A Metaphorical Love-Triangle*, TAPhA CXXXVI 2006, pp. 149–169; P. KRUSCHWITZ, *Fluctuat nec mergitur: Überlegungen zu Horaz’ Ode I, 14*, Hyperboreus XIII 2007, pp. 151–174; MAYER, *Horace...* (n. 11), pp. 133–137.

¹³ See e.g. O.S. DUE, *An Essay on Lucan*, C&M XXIII 1962, esp. p. 112; J. BRISSET, *Les idées politiques de Lucain*, Paris 1964 (Collection d’Études Anciennes), pp. 125 f.; F.M. AHL, *The Pivot of the Pharsalia*, Hermes CII 1974, pp. 307 ff.; IDEM, *Lucan: An Introduction*, Ithaca–London 1976 (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 39), pp. 157 ff.; J. MASTERS, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan’s Bellum Civile*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 103–106; C. WICK, *M. Annaeus Lucanus, Bellum Civile, Liber IX, Kommentar*, München–Leipzig 2004 (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 202), pp. 69 f.; S. TZOUNAKAS, *Echoes of Lucan in Tacitus: The Cohortations of Pompey and Calgacus*, in: C. DEROUX (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XII*, Bruxelles 2005 (Collection Latomus 287), p. 412. More generally, for the representation of Pompey in Lucan’s epic, see mainly W. RUTZ, *Lucan 1964–1983*, Lustrum XXVI 1984, pp. 164–169, where the relevant bibliography of the years 1964–1983 is given; W.R. JOHNSON, *Momentary Monsters: Lucan and his Heroes*, Ithaca–London 1987 (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 47), pp. 67–100; V. RUDICH, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization*, London–New York 1997, esp. pp. 156–169, 171 f.; LEIGH, *Lucan...* (n. 7), esp. pp. 110–157; S. BARTSCH, *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan’s Civil War*, Cambridge MA–London 1997, pp. 73–100; NARDUCCI, *Lucano: Un’epica...* (n. 3), pp. 279–367; F. D’ALESSANDRO BEHR, *Feeling History: Lucan, Stoicism, and the Poetics of Passion*, Columbus 2007, esp. pp. 76–112, 135–138; C. VESTER, *(Mis)Remembering Magnus in Lucan’s De Bello Ciuili*, in: C. DEROUX (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XIV*, Bruxelles 2008 (Collection Latomus 315), pp. 324–338; R. UTARD, *Pompée sous le regard de Cornélie: pour quelle image du héros?*, in: DEVILLERS, FRANCHET D’ESPÈREY (eds.), *Lucain...* (n. 10), pp. 179–191; B. MINEO, *Le Pompée de Lucain et le modèle livien*, in: DEVILLERS, FRANCHET D’ESPÈREY (eds.), *Lucain...* (n. 10), pp. 255–266.

¹⁴ On this passage, see S. TZOUNAKAS, *Cato’s Laudatio Pompei in Lucan’s De Bello Civili*, in: S. TZOUNAKAS (ed.), *Praises of Roman Leaders in Latin Literature*, Nicosia 2014, pp. 191–221.

to this work by way of the phrase *ludibrium pelagi*, which connects Pompey with the *res publica* ship threatened by civil war, he facilitates his poetic and political aims within his literary portrayal of the defeated general. Thus, Lucan's broader attempt in his epic to connect Pompey with the *res publica* is efficiently constructed here and in a manner which can easily be identified by his readers.

This possibility could be further reinforced with additional indications. It is worth mentioning that Lucan has already introduced the *topos* of the ship of state into his poem from lines I 498–504, where he compares Rome, terrified by the rumour of Caesar's arrival, to a shipwreck:

qualis, cum turbidus Auster
reppulit a Libycis immensum Syrtibus aequor
fractaque veliferi sonuerunt pondera mali,
desilit in fluctus deserta puppe magister
navitaque et nondum sparsa compage carinae
naufragium sibi quisque facit, sic urbe relicta
in bellum fugitur.

This passage is important for the interpretation of lines VIII 708–711 discussed above. In his commentary on Book I, ROCHE notes that Lucan's line I 500: "fractaque veliferi sonuerunt pondera mali" may amplify details at Hor. *Carm.* I 14, 3–6: "nonne vides, ut/ nudum remigio latus/ et **malus** celeri **saucius** Africo/ antemnaeque **gemant**"¹⁵, a similarity which further supports the view that Lucan has taken this particular ode into consideration and exploited its possible political allegory.

In this simile from Book I, by underlining the abandonment of the ship by its *magister*, Lucan inverts the usual emphasis upon the helmsman in the traditional allegory of the ship of state¹⁶. Thus he artfully prepares the ground for the depiction of Pompey as *ludibrium pelagi / venti / soceri*, since Pompey, who is implicitly identified with the *magister* in question, appears to put himself at the mercy of sea and wind, and by extension, of the storm that is Caesar¹⁷. He becomes *naufragus* (cf. VIII 311–313: "quod si nos Eoa fides et barbara fallent/ foedera, vulgati supra commercia mundi/ **naufragium** Fortuna ferat") and thus he contributes to the shipwreck of the state¹⁸.

¹⁵ P. ROCHE, *Lucan, De Bello Ciuili, Book I, Edited with a Commentary*, Oxford 2009, pp. 310 f.

¹⁶ See ROCHE, *Lucan...* (n. 15), p. 310.

¹⁷ On Caesar's frequent association with storm imagery in Lucan's epic, see e.g. T.P. TORGERSON, *Refractions of Rome: The Destruction of Rome in Lucan's Pharsalia*, Diss. Cornell University 2011, pp. 267 f.: "Lucan strongly associates Caesar with stormy weather, most notably in the lightning simile (I 151–157) and in the famous passage in Book 5 where Caesar attempts to cross the Adriatic during a nocturnal storm (V 504–677)".

¹⁸ It's worth mentioning that both Pompey and Caesar are presented as *naufragi* (and also as capable of contributing to the shipwreck of the state), but while Pompey is *ludibrium pelagi*, Caesar

This is not the only time in Lucan's epic that Pompey is portrayed as a ship's captain in an extraordinary use of that particular *topos*. The poet's words are highly indicative in lines VII 123–127, where, just as in the passages mentioned above, the poet again effectively echoes the atmosphere of Horace's ode I 14. Here a reluctant Pompey, urged by his supporters to hasten his confrontation with Caesar at Pharsalus, is explicitly likened to a sailor who lets go off the helm and abandons his ship to the mercy of the elements¹⁹:

Sic fatur et arma
permittit populis frenosque furentibus ira
laxat et ut victus violento navita Coro
dat regimen ventis ignavumque arte relicta
puppis onus trahitur.

Horace's ode is also an unusual realization of the particular *topos*, since one of the key elements of the allegory of the ship of state – a helmsman – is missing. Thus, the reference to Horace's ode is indeed an indirect way of linking Pompey to the ship itself, i.e. to *res publica*.

Let us now turn to another point that makes the comparison with Horace's ode all the clearer. Referring to the ship he is describing, Horace notes that though it boasts about its lineage and name, these can be of no use to it: “quamvis Pontica pinus,/ silvae filia nobilis,/ iactes et genus et nomen inutile” (Hor. *Carm.* I 14, 11–13). The ship's *nomen inutile* is in perfect accordance with Lucan's emphasis on Pompey's *nomen* (Magnus) as well as with his programmatic thesis that at the start of the civil war the general was but a shadow of a great name, as is characteristically stated in line I 135: “stat magni nominis umbra”²⁰.

To conclude, Lucan makes skilful use of the allegory found in Horace's ode and implies that the distress and fear felt on the part of the lyric poet for the fate of the *res publica* ship had already been confirmed by Pompey's vanquishment.

remains *felix naufragus* (cf. V 698 f.: “hinc usus placere deum, non rector ut orbis/ nec dominus rerum, sed felix naufragus esses?”).

¹⁹ For Pompey as *gubernator rei publicae*, cf. also VII 85 f.: “ingemuit rector sensitque deorum/ esse dolos et fata suae contraria menti” and VII 110: “res mihi Romanas dederas, Fortuna, regendas”; on this depiction, see e.g. M. RAMBAUD, *L'apologie de Pompée par Lucain au livre VII de la Pharsale*, REL XXXIII 1955, pp. 264–266; G. PETRONE, *I prospera fata di Pompeo in Lucano*, in: T. BAIER (ed.), *Götter und menschliche Willensfreiheit: Von Lucan bis Silius Italicus*, München 2012 (Zetemata 142), p. 84.

²⁰ On the programmatic role of this particular phrase of Lucan, see especially D.C. FEENEY, *Stat magni nominis umbra: Lucan on the Greatness of Pompeius Magnus*, CQ XXXVI 1986, pp. 239–243. Since *Libertas* is presented in a similar way at II 301–303: “non ante revellar/ exanimem quam te complectar, Roma; tuumque/ **nomen**, Libertas, et inanem persequar **umbram**”, this verbal similarity allows Lucan to implicitly connect Pompey with Rome and *Libertas*; cf. e.g. AHL, *The Pivot...* (n. 13), p. 307; IDEM, *Lucan...* (n. 13), p. 158; D.B. GEORGE, *Lucan's Cato and Stoic Attitudes to the Republic*, ClAnt X 1991, p. 253; A. ERSKINE, *Cato, Caesar and the Name of the Republic in Lucan, Pharsalia 2.297–303, Scholia VII 1998*, pp. 118–120.

The latter is thus presented as the pivotal point of transition from Republic to Principate and, consequently, sufficiently justifies the epic dimension of Lucan's chosen subject²¹.

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