

LUCAN'S *DE INCENDIO URBIS*, *EPISTULAE EX CAMPANIA* AND NERO'S BAN

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The *De Incendio Urbis* and the *Epistulae ex Campania* would probably tell us a great deal about Lucan, if they survived. Unfortunately, we have only the title and a brief two-line synopsis of the former, and only the title of the latter. This is very scant information, yet important enough to offer some help in drawing conclusions which may be of great significance in establishing details of Lucan's biography.

The information about the *De Incendio Urbis* is to be found in Vacca's *Life* of Lucan, and in Statius' *Genethliacon Lucani* (*Silvae* 2.7.60–61). For the *Epistulae* Vacca is our only testimony. Here is the sum total of evidence for the *De Incendio Urbis* and the *Epistulae ex Campania*. Firstly, Vacca: *Prosa oratione in Octavium Sagittam et pro eo, de incendio urbis, epistolarum ex Campania*.¹ These three items, the Octavius Sagitta orations, the *De Incendio Urbis* and the *Epistulae ex Campania* are the very last works of Lucan mentioned by Vacca in his account.

¹ This and all other references to Vacca and the Suetonian *Life* of Lucan are taken from Carl Hosius' edition of Lucan, Leipzig, 1913, 332–36, and the line numbers referred to are those in Hosius' pagination. Henceforth they will be cited as *Vacca* and *Suetonius*. The date of Vacca is uncertain. A. Rostagni argued in *Suetonius: De Poetis e Biografi Minori* (Turin 1944) 176–78 that the *Vacca Life* preceded a first century A.D. edition of Lucan. But no first century writer would talk about the gladiatorial games Lucan gave as quaestor as *more tunc usitato munus gladiatorium* (*Vacca* 335.14–15). It would be safer to infer that Vacca was writing after the abolition of gladiatorial games during the sixth consulate of Honorius, in A.D. 404 (Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* 2.1124, cf. Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, 2nd revised edition [New York 1960] 56). Further, Vacca does not list the *Adlocutio ad Pollam* among Lucan's works extant in his own day. It is clear from Statius *Silvae* 2.7 (written between A.D. 89 and 94 at the outermost limits) that the *Adlocutio* was extant at the end of the first century and that Lucan's wife Polla was still alive then. A writer well disposed towards Lucan, as Vacca is, would scarcely have omitted this item from his list if he was a contemporary.

No further comment is added. The passage from Statius runs as follows:

dices culminibus Remi vagantis
infandos domini nocentis ignes.

Vacca poses a problem immediately. His definitive *prosa oratione* obviously refers to the Octavius Sagitta orations. But does it also include the *De Incendio Urbis* and the *Epistulae ex Campania*? Rose and McGann thought so.² They began with the assumption that the *epistulae* were in prose. Since, then, the first and last items were in prose, it was natural that they should conclude that the middle item was also prose. This line of argument is tenuous, since it is based on the assumption that the epistles were in prose. Rose even goes so far as to suggest that they were written in imitation of Seneca's *Epistulae ad Lucilium*.³ There is, however, no compelling reason to make any such assumption, since verse epistles had been written by Horace and Ovid. We might add that the title of Lucan's collection shows less similarity to that of Seneca than to Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Since the assumption that the epistles were in prose is the lynch-pin of both Rose's and McGann's arguments, we must obviously retrace our steps.

One important point of logic that Rose and McGann establish, however, is this: if either the *De Incendio Urbis* or the *Epistulae* can be shown to be prose or poetry, the other will be the same.⁴ But Vacca simply does not provide enough information to answer the question one way or the other. The crucial and conclusive argument must be made from Statius, and it is focussed on the *De Incendio Urbis*.

I. The Genethliacon Lucani

Statius' poem in Lucan's honor is very carefully structured. The opening thirty-five lines provide the praises of Lucan's poetic genius, and the honor which he has bestowed upon his native Spain. The concluding twenty-nine lines are a kind of apotheosis of the poet, and

² K. F. C. Rose, "Problems in the chronology of Lucan's career," *TAPA* 97 (1966) 379-96 (hereafter cited as *Rose*); cf. M. J. McGann, *CQ* 7 (n.s.) (1957) 126-28. For Rose's discussion of the *Epistulae* see *Rose* 386.

³ *Rose* 391.

⁴ *Rose* 386, note 20 and McGann, *op. cit.*, 126 f.

a *consolatio* to his soul. The central, and, for our purposes, most important segment of the poem—lines 36–106—gives an account of Lucan's achievements. His praises are sung through the mouth of the Muse Calliope, whom Statius depicts as standing above the infant Lucan and prophesying the poetic heights he will attain. She is joyful upon seeing the child—so much so that she abandons her grief for Orpheus.

Calliope's opening words (41–42) tell us the reason for her ecstasy:

puer o dicite Musis
longaevos transiture vates . . .

He is a child dedicated to the muses, destined to surpass the long-lived poets of the past. His genius, she continues, will bear comparison with that of Homer and Apollonius, and surpass that of her own Orpheus:

non tu flumina nec greges ferarum
nec plectro Geticas movebis ornos,
sed septem iuga Martiumque Thybrim
et doctos equites et eloquente
cantu purpureum trahes senatum. (43–47)

This is extravagant praise indeed. She then proceeds to list the works with which Lucan will achieve this Orphean tour-de-force: the *Iliacon*, the *Catachthonion*, the *Laudes Neronianae*, the *De Incendio Urbis*, the *Adlocutio ad Pollam* and the *Pharsalia*.⁵ At line 73, Calliope refers back to Lucan's achievement:

⁵ Here and elsewhere I refer to Lucan's epic as *Pharsalia*, rather than *Bellum Civile* for reasons I have argued in detail elsewhere ("Pharsalus and the *Pharsalia*," *Classica et Mediaevalia*, publication pending). Although *De Bello Civili* is the title in most MSS, Statius, our earliest authority for Lucan's work, refers to the epic as *Pharsalica Bella* (*Silvae* 2.7.66) and Lucan's own words in 9.985 ff. seem to be referring to the epic by the title *Pharsalia*. Postgate, in his edition of book 7 (Cambridge 1917) xc, argues that *vivet Pharsalia nostra* does not mean "my tale of Pharsalia shall live," it means "the memory of Pharsalia in which you and I, Caesar, have a share, shall never die." Of course Postgate is right in saying that the *nostra* means "our" rather than "my." Yet it is vital to remember that 9.980–86 (Lucan's dedication to Caesar and reminder of the importance of the role of the poet in recording men and cities which would otherwise be forgotten to the world) takes place as Caesar walks among the ruins of Troy—the descendant of Aeneas who has just, in Lucan's opinion, annihilated the republic at the battle of Pharsalus. The destroyer of the New Troy stands in the ruins of the Old. The Old Troy needed Homer to keep its memory alive, the New Troy needs Lucan. The descendant of Aeneas has become a new Achilles, who destroyed the republic, as surely as Achilles destroyed Troy. At 9.990–99, Caesar, ironically, vows to rebuild

haec primo iuvenis canes sub aevo.

Canes is the key word here. It definitely suggests that the works she has mentioned are all *poetry*. Line 81 confirms this impression:

nec solum dabo carminum nitorem.

If, as Rose and McGann—not to mention Mozley—maintain, the *De Incendio Urbis* was a prose declamation, probably unpublished, it is strange that Calliope should mention it at all in this context, as she stands over the infant Lucan and prophesies the heights of poesy he will attain.⁶ What is more, the *De Incendio Urbis* stands in the precise center of her account: at lines 60–61 of a narrative extending from 40–81. Calliope is not noted for her enthusiasm for prose declamations elsewhere, and would hardly adduce one—much less an unpublished one—as testimony to the credentials of a poet who was to surpass Orpheus. Further, since Statius does not mention all of Lucan's known works of poetry, we can scarcely argue that Calliope was trying to bolster slim credentials.⁷ Oddly enough, Rose also maintains that the *Adlocutio ad Pollam* was in prose. Since Polla was Lucan's wife, this suggestion says little for Lucan's imagination as a lover, and even less for Polla's ability to stir some response from her husband's prolific Muse.⁸

In conclusion, then, if the *Adlocutio ad Pollam* and the *De Incendio Urbis* were not poetry, there is no logical reason for their inclusion here by Statius. If they were unpublished, it is even less likely that

the Old Troy, if its ghosts will help him complete his present undertaking . . . Eleven lines after this prayer, Caesar is presented with the head of Pompey. Given the conscious juxtaposition of Troy and Pharsalus, the head of Pompey, like the head of Priam, becomes the symbol of the end of an era. And Pompey is the representative of the last of the New Troy as surely as Priam is of the last of the Old. In such a context, Pharsalia is more than a mere battle—as Housman sees it in his note on 985–86 (*M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis Libri Septem* [Oxford 1927]). It is the tale of the fall of Rome as surely as the *Iliad* is the tale of the fall of Troy. To return to Postgate for a moment: we might well argue that what Lucan means is "Pharsalia, your achievements and my account of them, will live."

⁶ Cf. Mozley, in volume 1 of the Loeb *Statius* (London 1928) note on *Silvae* 2.7.60–61.

⁷ *Vacca* 336 lines 17–22 lists the remainder: the *Saturnalia*, the ten books of *Silvae*, the unfinished tragedy *Medea*, fourteen *Salicae Fabulae*, *Epigrammata* (or according to others *hippasmata*, *dramata*, *acroamata*, *aragmata*, *alia poemata*, *hypomnemata*), the Octavius Sagitta orations, and the *Epistolae ex Campania*. *Suetonius* (p. 333, line 5) adds to this list a *carmen famosum*, which may or may not be the same as the *De Incendio Urbis*.

⁸ *Rose* 391.

Statius would have mentioned them in his tribute to the dead poet. Further, such a suggestion is in conflict with Vacca's statement that the *De Incendio Urbis* was extant in his own day. In short, there is no reason to assume that the items mentioned by Calliope are not *all* poetry. On the contrary, one can only wonder why the idea was ever suggested.

We must return for a moment to Vacca; it should be clear now that when Vacca defines the Octavius Sagitta orations as prose works, he is singling them out as the *only* surviving prose works of Lucan. For if the *De Incendio Urbis* is poetry, there is no possibility of extending Vacca's definitive *prosa oratione* to include the *Epistulae ex Campania*. Thus Rose's desire to see these "letters" as imitations of Seneca's epistles to Lucilius is without foundation. If Lucan was imitating anyone, Ovid would be a more likely candidate. For the *Epistulae ex Campania* must have been verse. The possibility that Lucan had Ovid in mind is further suggested by the fact that the letters are *from* a certain place rather than *to* a certain person or group of people. But Ovid's epistles were written from banishment, in an attempt to compensate for his mysterious *carmen et error*. There is no suggestion that Lucan was ever banished from Rome, even though Vacca, Tacitus and Dio tell us of a ban imposed upon recitations of his poetry and—though only in Vacca—appearances in the law-courts. We will return to this problem later.⁹

II. The Content of the *De Incendio Urbis*

Our only evidence as to what Lucan said in the *De Incendio Urbis* is the two-line synopsis in Statius' *Genethliacon* 60–61:

dices culminibus Remi vagantis
infandos domini nocentis ignes.

Culminibus Remi clearly refers to Rome, and leaves us in no doubt that Statius is referring to a poem on the fire of Rome, the *De Incendio*

⁹ The evidence for the ban is to be found in Tacitus, *Annales* 15.49: *famam carminumque eius premebat Nero prohibueratque ostentare, vanus aemulatione*. Cf. Vacca, 335–36 lines 24 ff.: *ediderat . . . et tres libros quales videmus. Quare inimicum sibi fecit imperatorem. Quo ambitiosa vanitate, non hominum tantum, sed et artium sibi principatum vindicante, interdictum est ei poetica, interdictum est etiam causarum actionibus*. Cf. Dio 62.29.4 and Suetonius 332 lines 10 ff. Suetonius does not specifically mention a ban, but rather a time when friendly relations between poet and emperor broke down.

Urbis. Precisely why Statius refers to Rome as the city of Remus is unclear. Perhaps it is merely *metri causa*.¹⁰ This is the only passage in either Statius or Lucan where Rome is so called. The fact that the *ignes* are *nefandos* strongly suggests that the fire was caused by some criminal action, and the genitive *domini nocentis* makes no sense unless we take it as an indication of the source of the fire. *Domini nocentis* also implies that the fire was caused by a guilty master, a guilty emperor—Nero. The import of the lines is clear: either Lucan or Statius thought Nero was responsible for the burning of Rome, the great conflagration of July 64.¹¹

If it is Statius rather than Lucan who is suggesting Nero's culpability, we must interpret the couplet in some such way: "You will tell of the fire of Rome—a fire actually caused by the criminal actions of Nero." The sense is just about plausible, if somewhat forced. There is another instance in Calliope's catalog where Statius interpolates his—Calliope's, if you like—comment:

ingratus Nero dulcibus theatris
et noster tibi proferetur Orpheus. (58–59)

This couplet refers to the *Laudes Neronianae* and the *Orpheus*. If the *Laudes* can be dated to A.D. 60 it is most unlikely that Lucan would have called Nero *ingratus* at this point in his career.¹² It is clearly

¹⁰ Several writers, notably Propertius, Catullus and Juvenal, refer to Rome as the city of Remus. The usual explanation is that it is merely *metri causa*, and this may, of course, be right. It is interesting to note, however, that Juvenal's expression *turba Remi* is particularly apt in *Satire* 10.73, and possibly more than a mere substitute for Romulus in the context. Juvenal is talking about the constantly changing affections of the Roman populace: they adore Sejanus—*adoratum populo caput* (62)—but when Tiberius orders him put to death, they quickly adjust to the new situation (66–72). The crowd *sequitur fortunam ut semper et odit damnatos* (74–75). If fortune had smiled on Sejanus rather than Tiberius, they would have acted in much the same way (74–77). There is the possible hint that Romulus and Remus are one and the same to the ordinary people. It's who feeds them that counts (78–81). Other passages where the names of Romulus and Remus are confused are Propertius 2.1.23; 4.1.9; 4.6.80. Cf. Catullus 58.5.

¹¹ For a recent assessment of the evidence on the fire see J. Beaujeu, *L'incendie de Rome en 64 et les chrétiens*, Collection Latomus 49 (Brussels 1960) and the reviews of this study by Piganiol (*REL* 38 [1960] 449–50) and van Son (*Mnemosyne* 15 [1962] 211–12). Cf. Marrou, *REA* 67 (1965) 580; Townend, *JRS* 51 (1961) 244–45; Baldson, *CR* 11 (1961) 301 and Heubner, *Gymnasium* 68 (1961) 479–81. In general it seems unlikely that Nero set fire to the city.

¹² *Rose* 386 ff. Cf. Statius' later remarks at *Silvae* 2.7.100, 104 and 116–19, where Statius' own attitude to Nero is clearly expressed.

Staius' (Calliope's) epithet for Nero and either refers to the emperor's later treatment of Nero, or to the fact that Nero was not popular with the crowds in the theater.

Yet the reference to the *Laudes* and *Orpheus*, unlike the references to all the other poems in Calliope's catalog, makes no pretence of being a synopsis of content. Calliope's *noster . . . Orpheus* (59) will be *brought forth* (*proferetur tibi*). He, like Nero, is the subject of the poem. But in no way does Calliope hint at *what is actually said* in the poem. Contrast the oblique and impersonally phrased *proferetur tibi* with the *dices* introducing the description of the *De Incendio Urbis* at 60. A glance at other second person future forms gives fairly convincing proof that they are used by Calliope when she wishes to introduce the general outline of what Lucan said in a poem. Compare the summary of the *Pharsalia* at 64-72:

mox coepta generosior iuventa
albos ossibus Italis Philippos
et Pharsalica bella *detonabis*
convulsum ducis inter arma divi,
libertate gravem pia Catonem
et gratum popularitate Magnum.
tu Pelusiaci scelus Canopi
deflebis pius et Pharo cruenta
Pompeio dabis altius sepulchrum.

This is a succinct summary of the high points of the *Pharsalia*. Calliope's only personal intervention comes in the word *pius*, which, one should note, is her attitude to Lucan, not to the *content* of the poem. Similarly the description of the *Iliad* and the *Catachthonion*:

ludes Hectora Thessalosque currus
et supplex Priami potentis aurum
et sedes *reserabis* inferorum. (55-57)

Also the *Adlocutio ad Pollam*:

hinc castae titulum decusque Pollae
iocunda *dabis* adlocutione. (62-63)

In other words, every other poem of Lucan's that is mentioned here is summarized, apart from the *Laudes* and the *Orpheus*, and is introduced by a second person verb which purports to give a synopsis of the

subject of the work. The outline of all these seems to be a fair approximation to the known or suspected content, and there is no reason to doubt that the same holds true of the *De Incendio Urbis*.

If this is the case, the *De Incendio Urbis* was a poem about the fire of the city in which Lucan accused Nero of responsibility. Such a work would have been intolerably offensive to the emperor, not only because of the widespread rumor that he was guilty of causing the fire, but because Lucan was, supposedly, his friend and protégé.¹³ Such a damning accusation from one so close would have given greater plausibility to the rumor; the political consequences must have been very damaging to Nero. Precisely what steps Nero took against Lucan after the *De Incendio Urbis* we do not know. Some time towards the end of 64 or the beginning of 65, however, Nero placed a ban on Lucan's appearances in the law-courts and upon further recitations of his poetry.¹⁴ Conventionally, this ban is associated with the appearance of the *Pharsalia*, which either excited Nero's jealousy or angered him by its content. While both of these factors may have been operative, Nero could hardly have ignored the *De Incendio Urbis*, for even the mildest of emperors would surely have found it necessary to take steps against the author of such a work. If a modern scholars are right, and Nero was not responsible for the fire, the *De Incendio Urbis* in itself would have been sufficient motivation for Nero to silence Lucan.

The *De Incendio Urbis* can hardly have been published much before the end of July 64, and the closer it is dated to the actual fire, the more savage Nero's retaliation would have been. If it was published during Lucan's lifetime, it might be best to date it to some point in the middle of August 64, and certainly not much later than September. If it was not published during Lucan's lifetime, then we must assume that Statius' apparently chronological listing of Lucan's works is inaccurate.¹⁵

¹³ See note 11 above, especially Beaujeu, where the evidence is discussed in detail. For Lucan as Nero's friend, see *Suetonius* 332.9-11, where Lucan is said to have been attached to Nero's *cohors amicorum*. Cf. *Vacca* 335.19-21.

¹⁴ See note 9 above.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the chronological listing of Lucan's works in the *Genethliacon Lucani*, see *Rose* 386 ff. *Rose's* arguments are convincing on all counts except one. He argues on the basis of *Silvae* 2.7.62-66 and 102-104 that Statius thinks of the *Pharsalia* "as being composed, or of parts being published in the last months of Lucan's life."

Since Statius is our earliest source of biographical evidence for Lucan we should be cautious about such a suggestion, since Statius knew Lucan's wife, Polla, and is unlikely to have made an error in a poem written to her.

III. Lucan the politician

If my thesis is correct, why do none of our ancient sources connect the *De Incendio Urbis* with the ban? The answer is not hard to find, and we must now come to terms with it. First, let us look at Tacitus.

Throughout Tacitus' treatment of Lucan, there is a distinct atmosphere of hostility towards the poet. He mentions none of Lucan's works at all. When he describes Lucan's entry into the Pisonian conspiracy, he mentions his name side by side with that of the consul-designate Plautius Lateranus, and uses the opportunity to contrast the genuine idealism of Lateranus with the *propriae causae* of personal animosity which motivated Lucan.¹⁶ In other words, Tacitus is very eager to play down any possibility that genuine republican sympathies moved Lucan to do what he did. It was no doubt the débacle following the detection of the conspiracy that encouraged Tacitus to think this way. The rumor that Lucan had incriminated his own mother, Acilia, in a vain effort to save his own life would have made any pretense of high principle on his part shabby and hypocritical. And Tacitus clearly believed that Lucan did accuse his mother.¹⁷ Whether the rumor is true or not is, at this stage, irrelevant. The fact that Tacitus believed it made it hard for him to take Lucan's political ideals seriously.

His reason for so doing is the fact that the *Pharsalia* is mentioned by Statius after the *Adlocutio* and the *De Incendio Urbis*. In the next sentence Rose concludes: "Thus the *De Bello Civili* started to appear after July 64." This is going too far. All we may safely infer from these lines of Statius is that Lucan was working on the *Pharsalia* at the time of his death. Since the *Pharsalia* was the high point of Lucan's career, and since he was, presumably, working on it at the time of his death, Statius is quite justified in mentioning it last *even if* parts of it were written and published prior to July 64. It is also worth noting that, in his précis of the *Pharsalia*, Statius refers to events of the last four books *only*. The reference made to Cato is the only element in Statius' account which might conceivably refer to a point earlier than book 6.

¹⁶ *Annales* 15.49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 56. Cf. Suetonius 333.11-15.

Suetonius shares with Tacitus an unfavorable attitude to Lucan. For both writers, while they have little good to say about Nero, are scarcely generous to Lucan either. Both Tacitus and Suetonius tend to regard the quarrel between Lucan and Nero as a literary feud. Suetonius is, of course, rather more extreme in this instance than Tacitus. His whole portrait of Nero in his *Life of Nero* is founded on his vision of the emperor as the insane and jealous artist. In his account of Nero's murder of Britannicus, for instance, Suetonius insists that Nero killed the young prince *no less* because of envy of his superior voice than through fear of his popular appeal (*Nero* 33). While Nero may indeed have been envious of Britannicus' musical abilities, we should surely hesitate before believing that this fact—which may or may not be a fact—motivated Nero as much as the potential threat that Britannicus posed to his own security as emperor.

Similarly, Suetonius in his *Life of Lucan* sarcastically suggests that Lucan accused Acilia of complicity in the Pisonian plot in order to regain Nero's affections: *sperans impietatem sibi apud parracidam principem profuturam*. While it is quite possible that Lucan did, in fact accuse his mother, the idea that his reasoning was "You're a parricide; look, I'm trying to be a parricide too" is absurd. Yet again, Suetonius tells us that Lucan manifested hostility towards Nero in words and in actions *to such an extent that* (*adeo ut*) he quoted a half-line of Nero's poetry while thunderously relieving himself in a public latrine.¹⁸ Writers who, like Suetonius, or Tacitus for that matter, were ill-disposed towards Lucan, had a fondness for attributing the most absurd possible motives to both the poet and his emperor. If there existed only Tacitus' and Suetonius' accounts of Lucan, and no extant work, we would not have a reason in the world to suspect that Lucan wrote an epic which is not only anti-imperial, but which regarded the fall of the republic as a catastrophe of gigantic dimensions—an unmitigated disaster whose consequences surpassed those of Cannae.¹⁹

The apolitical Lucan, however, is not confined to Tacitus and Suetonius. If critics hostile to the poet have gone to some pains to belittle

¹⁸ Suetonius 332–33.

¹⁹ *Pharsalia* 1.30–32; 7.305–14; 7.385–459 and 632–46, and especially 7.799 ff. where the implication is made that Caesar is worse than Hannibal, just as Pharsalus is worse than Cannae. Cf. my article "Pharsalus and the *Pharsalia*" (above, note 5).

his political ideas and significance, so have his friends. While Suetonius revels in the interchange of hostilities between Nero and Lucan, Vacca very carefully omits or glosses anything which Lucan may have said or done which smacks of political action. And Vacca is favorably disposed towards Lucan. There is no suggestion in Vacca's *Life* that Lucan did anything to offend Nero and bring about the ban. In other words, Vacca goes to considerable pains to present Lucan as the injured innocent. It was Nero's jealousy of Lucan's acclaim which brought about the ban, a jealousy which grew over a period of years. Although Vacca tells us that Lucan joined the Pisonian conspiracy, he describes him as a victim of youthful ardor and the trickery of Piso—*deceptus a Pisone*.²⁰ There is no mention of the incrimination of Acilia at all. As far as Vacca is concerned, it was Lucan's brilliance as a poet which antagonized Nero, and nothing else.

Both friend and foe share one point of view in common: the rivalry of Nero and Lucan was purely literary. Among modern scholars, Rose echoes a similar judgment. Nero's ban, he tells us, should be viewed "in the context of the increasing tension, in the second half of Nero's reign, between the Stoic circles, led by Seneca, and the less earnest literary group led by Petronius."²¹

But was Lucan such a purely literary threat to Nero's vanity? Certainly not, if my thesis on the *De Incendio Urbis* is correct. This poem stood on the very borderline of poetry and political pamphleteering, and constituted a tangible political offense which the emperor could scarcely ignore. More important still, it accounts for the rather unusual nature of the ban, which covered not only Lucan's poetic activities, but his pleading in the law-courts. If Nero had wished to prevent Lucan from receiving applause and credit for his poetic talent, this second part of the ban would have been utterly unnecessary.

²⁰ *hoc factum* (i.e., the ban) *Caesaris iuvenili aestimans animi calore speransque ultionem a coniuratis in caedem Neronis socius adsumptus est, sed parum fauste. Deceptus est enim a Pisone et consularibus aliisque praetura perfunctis illustribus viris: dum vindictam expetit in mortem inruit* (Vacca 336.2-7). Cf. Tacitus, *Annales* 15.49.

²¹ Rose 384. It seems odd to see the tension between Stoic and Epicurean literary cliques as motivation for the ban. No doubt such tensions may have existed, in an academic sense. But (a) the ban covered activities in the law-courts, (b) Petronius fared no better than Seneca—or Lucan for that matter—in the aftermath of the conspiracy, although there is nothing to suggest that he was involved in the plot.

For activity in the law-courts was, in Rome, a mark of the up-and-coming politician. The severity of Nero's ban suggests that Nero detected some degree of political hostility on the part of Lucan which made it necessary to silence him completely. For this ban would have annihilated both Lucan's poetical and political career.

Lucan's credentials as a growing political force at Rome should not be underrated. In addition to holding an influential priesthood, he had also been honored with a quaestorship at an unusually early age, reaching the first step on the *cursus honorum* before the age of twenty-five.²² Given the wealth of the Annaei, the influence of Seneca, and, at first, the favor of Nero, Lucan had a highly promising career in public life before him. There is no reason to assume that this young senator planned the life of a poet pure and simple, any more than did Silius Italicus. Further, Lucan seems to have enjoyed a position of esteem among his fellow senators, if Statius' *Genethliacon* is any guide. Statius hyperbolically compares him to an Orpheus who brought the whole of Rome under his spell (*Silvae* 2.7.43-47).

This is not all. The more desperate among the members of the senatorial opposition admitted Lucan to their plot to assassinate Nero. They would not have done so had they not felt that Lucan was reliable as a potential conspirator. A conspirator must take some care when approaching others; he must be sure of his man before he runs the risk of admitting him. Given Lucan's background, and the fact that he had been a friend of Nero, there might indeed be some question as to his disposition even after the ban. Yet clearly, even if he was not exactly *paene signifer* of the Pisonian conspiracy, as Suetonius declares, he enjoys a remarkable prominence in the accounts which have survived.²³

²² For Lucan's quaestorship and augurate, see *Vacca* 335.14-16 and *Suetonius* 332.9-11. Rose argues (394 note 35) that no-one other than members of the imperial family was advanced to public office more than a year before the legal age of 25. This would mean that December 5th, 62 is the earliest probable date for Lucan to have taken office—if we allow for the possibility that, under normal circumstances, a man might take the quaestorship in his twenty-fifth year rather than on achieving the age of 25. Cf. T. Mommsen *Staatsrecht*³ 1.572-74, 576.

²³ *Suetonius* 333.5-6: *ad extremum paene signifer Pisonianae coniurationis extitit*. Cf. Tacitus, *Annales* 15.49. *Vacca* (above, note 20) studiously plays down Lucan's role in the plot.

Nero clearly did not take Lucan's political activities as lightly as did Tacitus and Suetonius. Nor should we. His only surviving work is brimming with political fervor, and is focussed upon the battle of Pharsalus, where, in Lucan's opinion, Rome lost her freedom.²⁴ It is all very well to argue, as Bruère does, that Lucan's explosive denunciations of his own day in book 7 are a "striving for bravura effect."²⁵ This is begging the question. They would scarcely have pleased Nero if he ever saw them. It may be rhetoric, but it is very *dangerous* rhetoric. If Lucan is trying to please Nero he is setting about it in a most unorthodox manner. To argue that the portrayal of Domitius Ahenobarbus is a sop to Nero is also a moot point. History records the name of only one senator on the Pompeian side who died at Pharsalus, Domitius Ahenobarbus, and Domitius is the only genuine corpse that Lucan supplies us in book 7, despite his protests about the heaps of Metelli strewn across the plain.²⁶ It may well be that he had no further information on the individual dead at Pharsalus than we do. To put it another way, if there was to be a senator dying in that crucial battle, *it had to be Domitius Ahenobarbus*. We might also note that Lucan makes no attempt to associate the republican hero with his descendant.

²⁴ See above, note 19.

²⁵ R. T. Bruère, "The Scope of Lucan's Historical Epic," *CP* 45 (1950) 230. This deprecation of Lucan's technique does nothing to prove that Lucan did not mean what he said. It argues, rather, that Bruère will not accept Lucan's conclusions as reasonable; for he further describes these passages from 7 as lacking "logic, precision and restraint." In this respect, however, Bruère is amazingly eclectic: when, in 5.479, Lucan describes Antony as contemplating Actium as he crosses from Brindisi to join Caesar in Greece, Bruère argues that this is "confirmatory evidence" (227) of Lucan's intent to extend his epic to Actium. Surely this too lacks logic, precision and restraint.

²⁶ 7.581-85. Caesar, *Bellum Civile* 3.99 mentions only Domitius among the Pompeian dead. None of our other sources contribute any further names. It is also worth noting that while Domitius is suspiciously "clean" in Lucan, his portrait in Caesar is suspiciously black. Caesar never loses a chance to cut at him (*B.C.* 1.6.15-23, 25, 34-36, 56-58; 2.3.18, 22, 28, 32; 3.83 and 99 give an overall sketch of Caesar's attitude to Domitius). Similarly Caesar's treatment of Labienus in 1.15; 2.13, 19, 71 and 87 and generally throughout the *African Wars*. Caesar had personal reasons for disliking both men. We should note, however, that Domitius who was, according to Caesar, commander-in-chief at Massilia (*B.C.* 1.34-36, 56-58; 2.3.18, 22, 28, 32) is not mentioned in this capacity in the *Pharsalia*. In other words, if Lucan had really wanted to make a tribute to Nero, he could have made Domitius the grand hero of the stubborn resistance at Massilia where history would, to some extent, have borne him out. Lucan is using Domitius for his own purposes—and very limited purposes at that.

The writer of book 7 of the *Pharsalia* is clearly a man of strong republican convictions, who took the ideals of the senate very seriously.

IV. The *Pharsalia* and the Ban

Vacca, as we have noted, was very keen to exculpate Lucan from any responsibility for bringing about the ban. Yet he is probably doing so by wilfully suppressing information, since he seems to have more information about Lucan's life than any of our other sources. Most scholars, sensing this, have read between the lines of Vacca's account and suspected that something more than literary rivalry was involved in the quarrel between poet and emperor. While this is, I am sure, true, to base such an argument on Vacca is extremely dangerous, since Vacca is not trying to suggest any such thing. When he talks of Nero's growing jealousy of Lucan, he implies that it came to a head with the publication of *tres libros quales videmus*.²⁷ These three books are usually identified with *Pharsalia* 1-3. Since these books are the last items mentioned before the ban, scholars have inferred that the appearance of the epic is somehow directly related to it.²⁸ Given Vacca's desire to shrug off Lucan's political involvements, it would be natural to assume that what he is trying to tell us is that the appearance of a full-blown epic was too much for the envious emperor.

That *Pharsalia* 1-3 would have triggered Nero into such drastic retaliation is hard to imagine. Although there are definite traces of anti-Caesarian feeling in the opening books, there is nothing which obviously includes Nero.²⁹ Even if the so-called *apotheosis* of Nero in

²⁷ Vacca 335.24-25.

²⁸ So much so, in fact, that some, such as R. Pichon, *Les Sources de Lucain* (Paris 1912) 270-71 and V. Ussani, *RFIC* 29 (1901) find that the *tres libros* must be other than *Pharsalia* 1-3. J. Brisset, *Les Idées Politiques de Lucain* (Paris 1964) 181-82 and *Rose* 384 rightly reject this notion. Rose's argument that "no-one would publish individual books of a historical epic out of chronological sequence" is far from conclusive, however. Given a well-structured outline, it is possible, though admittedly unlikely. But Rose is quite wrong in seeing 4-6 as less anti-Caesarian than 1-3 (*Rose* 387). In fact, as I have argued elsewhere ("Curio and Hercules," *Latomus*, forthcoming), book 4 contains the first unequivocal slash at the Caesars in general which must include Nero (821-24).

²⁹ Even Nigidius Figulus' comments at 1.669-72 (especially 670—*cum domino pax ista venit*) do not necessarily include Nero. Lucan, no doubt, had in mind the famous remark (recorded by Suetonius, *Augustus* 94) which Nigidius made when Augustus was born, to the effect that the ruler of the world was now born: *dominum terrarum orbi natum*.

1.33-65 is satirical, as I believe it is, the satire is carefully couched beneath a veil of flattery and *double-entendre*. Besides, such satire as there is has a more humorous than political bent—a wicked touch of the amusingly grotesque rather than vicious invective. It is not fully apparent until later books that to be taken as the sole muse of an epic describing the destruction of Roman freedom is an honor of a dubious sort.³⁰ It is not until book 4 that we find the first remark which is *unquestionably* detrimental to Nero:

ius licet in iugulos nostros sibi fecerit ense
Sulla potens, Mariusque ferox et Cinna cruentus,
Caesareaque domus series . . . (821-23)

The epithets, *potens*, *ferox* and *cruentus*, come in ascending order of horror, only to be capped by the Caesars; not just the first, but the whole line of Caesars.

Sensing this problem, that they must find something rather stronger than 1-3 to provoke Nero's drastic retaliation, some scholars have suggested that Vacca's *tres libros* are not 1-3 but others. In other words, they insist on looking for something that would give Nero adequate offense, ignoring the fact that Vacca is not trying to suggest any such thing.³¹ They are stretching a point for no good reason and wreaking havoc with the chronology of the *Pharsalia*.

In the first place, if the ban was imposed shortly after the publication of the *tres libros*, these books cannot have been published before December 5th, 62, which is the earliest probable date for Lucan to have

³⁰ 1.63-66, where Nero is taken as sole muse of the epic, rather than Apollo. Much of the epic is set in a background of desolation: e.g., the ruins of Scipio's camp in 4.658-60 (so also Carthage, *ibid.* 584-86). Similarly Delphi is defunct to all intents and purposes, revived only briefly by the religious expert Appius Claudius Pulcher (see especially 5.111-27). The Troy which Caesar arrives at in 9.950 is virtually non-existent. Finally the Rome and Italy of Lucan's own day are desolate (7.385-408). Cf. 1.24 ff. and my article "Curio and Hercules" (above, note 28) and L. Thompson and R. T. Bruère's useful article in *CP* 63 (1968) 1-21 (particularly 6 ff.). It is also worth noting that the scholiast in the *Adnotationes Super Lucanum* tells us in his comment on 5.113 that when Nero consulted the oracle at Delphi it replied *parricidis non respondeo* whereupon Nero ordered its closure. Cf. the same scholiast's comments on 5.139 and 178; also the *Commenta Bernensia* on 5.113. Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*, especially 411A ff., discusses the obsolescence of oracles in his own day, but gives no hint that Delphi had been closed down. Cf. H. W. Parke, *The Delphic Oracle*² (Oxford 1956) vol. 1, 283-84 and vol. 2, 243 and 597.

³¹ See note 28 above.

entered upon his quaestorship.³² Nero would hardly have banned Lucan from recitations and pleading causes in the law-courts only to raise him to the quaestorship. Besides, Vacca himself assigns the period of Lucan's quaestorship to the "happy days" of his relationship with Nero.³³ Further, if our previous argument about the *De Incendio Urbis* is correct, we would have to move the ban up to the end of July 64 at the earliest, in which case it would be necessary to accept Rose's theory that publication of *Pharsalia* 1-3 did not occur until July 64 or even later.

Since Rose seems to find December 63 more attractive than December 62 for the beginning of Lucan's quaestorship, the years 64-65 would be very busy indeed for the young Lucan. For during these months, according to Rose, Lucan would have written ten books of the *Pharsalia*, the *Medea*, the *Epistulae ex Campania*, the *Adlocutio ad Pollam* and the *De Incendio Urbis*, in addition to holding a quaestorship (complete with gladiatorial games) and joining a conspiracy.³⁴ This compression of Lucan's activities is less than satisfactory, and less than probable.

If, however, we postulate that Vacca, in accordance with his practice of maintaining the "innocent" Lucan, deliberately omits the *De Incendio Urbis* from his sequence of events leading to the ban, we need not assume that the ban was an immediate consequence of the appearance of the *Pharsalia*.

V. The *De Incendio Urbis* and the "carmen famosum" of Suetonius

Curiously, the Suetonian *Life* makes no specific mention of a ban, despite the fact that our other sources do. What Suetonius does tell us is that Nero summoned a meeting of the senate in the middle of one of

³² See note 22 above.

³³ *equidem hactenus tempora habuit secunda* (Vacca 335.16-17).

³⁴ See Rose 381 ff. It is crucial to Rose's theory that the *Pharsalia* was published *after* the *De Incendio Urbis* and the *Adlocutio ad Pollam*. As far as the *Adlocutio* is concerned, there is no reason to assume that this was a very long work. It may therefore have been published around the time of the *De Incendio Urbis*, even slightly after it. Though Statius' description of it makes one inclined to feel that it may have occurred shortly after (or before) Lucan's marriage. Since we do not know when Lucan married Polla, we reach a dead end once we have said that.

Lucan's recitations, which would, no doubt, have obliged Lucan to terminate the reading forthwith.³⁵ For not only would Nero have left, but Lucan would also have had to leave, presumably, since he was a member of the senate. After this, Suetonius tells us, there was a period when Lucan openly attacked Nero both verbally and by means of provocative actions.³⁶ What work could Lucan have been reciting? Hardly the *Medea*, which was incomplete, or the *Catachthonion*, *Orpheus* or *Laudes Neronianae*, which seem to have been early compositions. He wrote ten books of *Silvae*, but there is no evidence that *Silvae* were recited publicly. Certainly Statius implies that his *Silvae* were given to those in whose honor they were written and afterwards published. But there is no hint of recitation.³⁷ Much the same is true of the *Epigrammata* (if that is what they were).³⁸ The *Epistulae ex Campania* would not be a likely choice, since we would infer that they were written to a person or persons while Lucan was in Campania. If Rose is right, the *Saturnalia* and the *Salticae Fabulae* were probably rather early works.³⁹ That leaves us with the *De Incendio Urbis*, the *Adlocutio ad Pollam* and the *Pharsalia*, unless the work concerned is among those of which we have now no record. If Suetonius is right that Nero's only reason for walking out on Lucan was a desire to freeze the recitation, the *De Incendio Urbis* is hardly a likely candidate. The chances that the *Adlocutio* was read publicly are slim. Its very title suggests something informal and personal. Thus, unless Lucan was reciting a work now lost to memory, the chances are it was the *Pharsalia*.

Since the *Pharsalia* was, doubtless, regarded by Lucan as his most important work, his fury at Nero's departure is quite understandable. But, since Nero himself might have detected some sarcasm in Lucan's tone in the epic, he might have had a real pretext for walking out on Lucan. After all, Nero was himself a poet, and would have been

³⁵ *si quidem aegre ferens quod Nero se recitante subito ac nulla nisi refrigerandi sui causa senatus recessisset* (Suetonius 332.11-13).

³⁶ *neque verbis adversum principem neque factis excitantibus post haec temporavit* (ibid. 332-33).

³⁷ Statius, preface to *Silvae* 4, in the letter addressed to Marcellus, tells Marcellus that he had given many of his poems to Domitian prior to publication: *multa ex illis iam domino Caesari dederam, et quanto hoc plus est quam edere?*

³⁸ The text in Vacca is hopelessly corrupt. See note 7 above.

³⁹ Rose 393.

considerably more sensitive to innuendo than, say, someone like Suetonius, whose attitude to Lucan's poetry is somewhat cavalier, to say the least.⁴⁰ In other words, the recitation of the *Pharsalia* (whatever books may have been involved) could have been the turning-point in the relationship of Lucan and Nero, the moment of rupture.

After this, Lucan turned against Nero. Then, says Suetonius, he wrote a *carmen famosum*, in which he brought very serious charges against the emperor and his most powerful friends.⁴¹ This is the last work which Suetonius mentions before Lucan's joining of the conspiracy. There is no word about a ban, and no suggestion that Nero's reaction to the recitation was the equivalent of a ban. In Suetonius' *Life*, only three works are mentioned: the *Laudes Neronianae*, the *Pharsalia* and the *carmen famosum*. Further, Suetonius is our only source for information on this last work—unless we identify it with the *De Incendio Urbis* which is the only work we know of whose contents suggest an outright and personal attack on Nero.

What could the *carmen famosum* have been about? If the charges were of a very serious nature—as Suetonius' *gravissime proscidit* implies—the chances are that the content was either an attack on Nero's sexual profligacy or some kind of political slander. The possibility of a lampoon on the emperor's sex-life is less attractive for several reasons. The first and most important is that Nero, as Suetonius tells us in his *Nero* (39), seems to have been indifferent to most ordinary libellous verse. Even references suggesting that he was responsible for the deaths of his father, mother and half-brother were passed off lightly. If Nero was going to be hurt, he had to be hit really hard. And, as we have seen, there was no subject about which he was more sensitive than the fire of Rome. For, if a Suetonian phrase may be pardoned, he might well find it harder to forgive a false accusation than a true one.

Secondly, Suetonius in his life of Lucan seems to be attributing the *carmen famosum* to the later stages of the deteriorating relationship between poet and emperor, probably to the year 64. Since that

⁴⁰ *Poemata eius etiam praelegi memini, confici ac veno proponi, non tantum operose et diligenter, sed inepte quoque* (Suetonius 333.18–20).

⁴¹ *Sed et famoso carmine cum ipsum, tum potentissimos amicorum gravissime proscidit* (*ibid.* 5–6).

year was particularly notable for the fire of Rome, and since Lucan wrote a poem on that very subject, the possibility looms large that the *De Incendio Urbis* and the *carmen famosum* were one and the same. For what more severe charge could Lucan bring against Nero and his most powerful friends than that they wilfully burned the city?

Against this thesis we can throw one major problem: the fact that Suetonius does not give the slightest hint as to the content of the *carmen famosum*. If Lucan had accused Nero of burning the city in this poem, why does Suetonius not tell us so? There is only one possible reply to this question. We have seen that Suetonius, like Tacitus, goes out of his way to diminish Lucan's political significance. Indeed, Suetonius' Lucan cuts an altogether sorry figure—an arrogant and petulant fool whose poetry is poor and whose behavior is infantile. Granted this, may we not argue that Suetonius wishes to gloss over the real nature of the *carmen famosum*, to leave the impression that the work was merely some undefined attack upon the emperor? Since he omits all mention of the ban, it is scarcely surprising that he glosses over the work which probably caused it. We should not forget that Suetonius' extreme example of Lucan's hostile actions towards Nero is the notorious tale of the quotation in the latrine. Lucan's part in the conspiracy is reduced to an idiotic scampering around, promising Nero's head to all and sundry. To credit Lucan with an open denunciation of Nero and the fire, or to admit that Nero thought him dangerous enough to suppress would be inconsistent with the picture Suetonius wishes to give us. Suetonius, like Vacca, has his own reasons for withholding information.

Thus, although we cannot prove beyond doubt that the *carmen famosum* of Suetonius was the *De Incendio Urbis*, we should hesitate before dismissing the possibility of their identity. For after all, it is worth remembering that the *De Incendio Urbis* was a *carmen famosum* in the most extreme sense.

If we piece together our information, perhaps the picture of what happened becomes a little clearer. Lucan gave a *recitatio* of some book(s) of the *Pharsalia* early in 64—certainly not much later than the beginning of July. Nero, taking offence at something, called a meeting of the senate, forcing Lucan to abandon his recitation. Lucan retaliated with outright hostility, culminating after the fire of Rome

with the publication of the *De Incendio Urbis*. Nero replied—probably with some speed—by banning Lucan from further recitations and from taking an active part in the law-courts. If this is true, then we may feel some confidence that the ban took effect around August 64.⁴²

VI. Lucan between ban and conspiracy

There is a vexed question as to how much time elapsed between Nero's ban and Lucan's entry into the conspiracy. By and large the tendency has been to push them ever closer in time. Rose, for instance, places the ban as late as the beginning of 65. Tacitus has provided the basic pretext for this. He describes Lucan as bringing *vivida odia* into the conspiracy, which is taken to imply that Lucan entered the plot as soon as the ban took effect. Since it is not clear that the plot had any formal shape before the beginning of 65, it seemed reasonable to move the ban to the end of 64 or the beginning of 65.⁴³

Unfortunately, this has usually dragged the *Pharsalia* with it. Since Rose has argued that the *Pharsalia* was the cause of the ban, as have almost all scholars, then it is quite natural that he should date the publication of 1-3 no earlier than July 64 and probably later. The great flaw in this theory is the fact that it seems to give Lucan far too much to do in the last year or so of his life, as we have already pointed out.

If, however, the *De Incendio Urbis* was the cause of the ban, the *Pharsalia* does not have to be thus compressed into the last busy months of Lucan's life. Further, it would be reasonable to suppose that the *De Incendio Urbis* and the ban belong, rather, to August or September

⁴² G. K. Gresseth (*CP* 52 [1957] 22-27) infers that Vacca would have us believe that the ban followed the *Neronia*: "for, *in toto*, the passage (sc. referring to the ban) can only be taken to mean that Nero took pique at Lucan's success at the *Neronia*" (p. 26). Gresseth argues that Vacca may mean the *Neronia* of 65. This is not to infer that Gresseth actually believed that this was the case, but rather that he is questioning Vacca's reliability as an authority. One might also get the impression from Suetonius that the *Pharsalia* was written before Lucan's recall from Greece and before his quaestorship (332.1-11). Neither Vacca nor Suetonius seem much concerned about precise chronology.

⁴³ *Annales* 15.48-49, where Tacitus is clearly implying that the plot did not begin until the beginning of 65 and that Lucan entered it then. Dio 62.29.4 dates the ban to 65, but this could well be the result of the lack of any precise dating in his sources.

64, thus leaving a period of some three months or so before the actual beginning of the conspiracy—unless, of course, the plot began before the new year.

In this connection it is worth noting two references to Brutus in books 7 and 10 of the *Pharsalia*. The first describes Brutus' attempt to kill Caesar at Pharsalus, and underlines the futility of his effort:

nil proficis istic
Caesaris intentus iugulo; nondum attigit arcem,
iuris et humani columnen, quo cuncta premuntur,
egressus meruit fatis tam nobile letum.
vivat, et ut Bruti procumbat victima regnet. (7.593-95)

Lucan is here expressing the desire that Caesar may live until the appropriate moment for his assassination, so that he can be the sacrificial victim of Brutus. There is no hint, however, that this act of tyrannicide is to become a precedent for others. This note is not introduced until book 10:

procul hoc avertite, fata,
crimen, ut haec Bruto cervix absente secetur.
in scelus it Pharium Romani poena tyranni,
exemplumque perit. (10.341-44)

Here Lucan prays that Caesar may not be killed in Egypt. If that happened, not only would the just punishment for tyrannicide be thwarted, but the example, the *precedent*, would be lost. In these two passages, Lucan clearly relishes the thought of tyrannicide, but it is not until 10 that the act is seen as a precedent.

Book 7 is the most gloomy and wrathful in the epic. The utter hopelessness of *in totum mundi prosternimur aevom* (640), the angry *post proelia natis / si dominum, fortuna, dabas, et bella dedisses* (645-46) have no equal elsewhere in the *Pharsalia*. The extended outbursts of anger at the Rome of his own day bespeak a fury and frustration more acute than that found in earlier or later books. It might indeed be attractive to date its composition to the period shortly after the ban.

In book 9, Lucan has recovered his poise somewhat. As he speaks of his epic, he exclaims that he and Caesar will live in men's memories:

Pharsalia nostra
vivet, et a nullo tenebris damnabimur aevo. (9.985-86).

These are confident words from a poet who has just been banned from further recitation of his works. And, as we have noted, in book 10 Lucan's tyrannicide is an *exemplum*. By 10, Lucan must be in the conspiracy.⁴⁴

It might, then, be attractive to assign the composition of 7 to an *interim* period between ban and conspiracy—a period of anger, frustration and powerlessness.

If there was indeed such an interim period, what could Lucan have been doing at the time? The most we can do is speculate, though there are some clues, and they are all in Tacitus, *Annales* 15.51–52.

VII. The beginning of the Pisonian Conspiracy

The first hint Nero had that there was a conspiracy under way against him came when the commander of the fleet at Misenum, Volusius Proculus, brought the freedwoman Epicharis to the emperor. She had suggested that Proculus might find it advantageous to join the plot. Exactly how Epicharis came by this information Tacitus does not know—*incertum quonam modo sciscitata*. He tells us that she happened to be in Campania—in *Campania agens*—and approached the leaders of the fleet at Misenum, in particular Volusius Proculus. Once again Tacitus does not know where or how Epicharis met Proculus—*is mulieri olim cognitus, seu recens orta amicitia*. If, however, Epicharis had known Proculus for some time, or spent some time cultivating a friendship with him, she had probably resided in Campania for some time. The fact that Proculus discussed his dissatisfaction with Nero in her company, and the absence of witnesses when he accused her before Nero surely imply that their relationship was close enough for the exchange of confidences *in private*.

That Epicharis should have chosen to approach the commander of the fleet at Misenum may be further indication that she was residing in Campania at that time, since the army—particularly the praetorians—would have been a more logical target for her efforts if she had been operating from Rome. The fleet would have been of little practical assistance for a *coup d'état* at Rome. All in all the chances are that Epicharis had not only been resident in Campania for some time, but

⁴⁴ Cf. note 5 above.

that she had heard of the plot there too. She may even have been connected with the household of one of the conspirators. Her reticence about giving information to Nero's interrogators even under torture suggests that she was more than a casual eavesdropper. Had Epicharis talked, we would know a lot more about the conspiracy than we know now, for all the protests of the ancient authorities about how badly the secret was kept.⁴⁵

We know that Piso had a villa at Baiae which Nero was fond of visiting, and to which he came without any formal guard—*balneas et epulas inibat omissis excubiis et fortunae suae mole*.⁴⁶ Some of the conspirators were obviously favoring the idea that Piso's villa would be an ideal site for the assassination. Not only were they attracted by the fact that Nero came there without formal guard, but they were afraid of betrayal. It was because of *metu prodicionis* as much as anything else that they wished *maturare caedem apud Baias in villa Pisonis*. Their fear of betrayal—though Tacitus does not suggest this—might well have been the result of Epicharis' arrest. It is therefore possible that the conspirators themselves were at Baiae at the time, knew of her arrest, and were afraid of returning to Rome. Further they could scarcely have *hastened* the assassination at Piso's villa unless (a) they were at Baiae and (b) they expected Nero to come there in the relatively near future. This further increases the possibility that Epicharis was connected with the household of one of the conspirators, and had been sent to Misenum, just a few miles away, to win over Volusius Proculus.

Thus Piso and the conspirators may well have been at Baiae towards the end of 64 or the beginning of 65. Since Lucan seems to have been involved in the conspiracy shortly after its inception, it is quite possible that he was at Baiae around the beginning of 65 when the proper time and place for the assassination was being discussed. But

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Annales* 15.51 and Suetonius 333.6–9.

⁴⁶ Baiae had been a favorite resort with Nero and his family. We learn from *Annales* 14.4 that Nero regularly attended the feast of Minerva at Baiae. Ironically, it was at Baiae that Nero attempted to have Agrippina drowned, when he invited her to come to stay with him at Bauli, just a few miles away (cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 34). In *Annales* 13.21, Agrippina finds fault with Nero's aunt Domitia for spending too much time at Baiae, and in 11.1 Decimus Valerius Asiaticus was apparently taking life easy there at the time of his arrest. Cf. J. H. D'Arms, *Romans on the Bay of Naples* (Cambridge, Mass. 1970) 94–99, 205–6.

was he there *before* he entered the plot? Possibly, if we can accept the following hypothesis. After the ban Piso may have invited Lucan to come to visit him at Baiae, or Lucan may have gone there of his own volition. He must, no doubt, have wondered what to do. He either had to patch things up with Nero, to make compensation, if you like, for his *carmen et error*, or enjoy a life of luxury until Nero's death, hoping that he would outlive his emperor. Of course, he could also enter a plot to kill him.

But if there was no plot until the beginning of 65, and Lucan arrived at Baiae in August or September 64, he may at first have tried to persuade Nero to relent. He may, after the fashion of Ovid, have chosen to write some apologetic epistles in the style of the *Epistulae ex Ponto* to bring about a reconciliation—the *Epistulae ex Campania*. The melodramatic touch of writing Ovidian epistles from the luxury of a Baian villa is not altogether out of keeping with the spirit of the age. If and when these overtures were categorically rejected by Nero, Piso, who would have been close at hand, had the viable material he needed. Lucan's *vivida odia* would have been complete. There may, after all, be something in Vacca's suggestion that Lucan was *deceptus a Pisone*. And what greater catch could the conspirators have had than a poet who could write of them to the world as the successors of Brutus?

This hypothesis, is, of necessity, vague and insubstantial; yet, given the fact that the *Epistulae* were (a) in verse and (b) written from Campania, it does not seem unreasonable to connect their appearance with a period of time when Lucan was in Campania, in all likelihood.

VIII. Lucan's motivation: a final note

At this juncture, many questions remain unanswered, and will, presumably, remain so indefinitely. So far, however, we have attempted no general explanation of Lucan's apparently erratic behavior. If Lucan could, as I have argued, look forward to a successful political and poetical career, why did he become such a fierce enemy of the emperor as to attack him in an open and dangerous way? After all, he had not hesitated, presumably, to write the *Laudes Neronianae* in 60, and it must have been through Nero's friendship that he

was elevated to the quaestorship and senatorial rank before the legal age. He owed his entire *political* advancement to Nero—with, possibly, some help from Seneca. His cautious uncle would hardly have turned him against Nero in such an obvious way.

Perhaps the fatal step, so far as Nero was concerned, was elevating Lucan to senatorial rank at such a young age. All our sources on Lucan agree that the poet was mercurial in temperament, and *Pharsalia* 7 is clearly the work of someone both *ardens* and *concitatus*.⁴⁷ Nero, no less than his predecessors, underrated the effect that the senate and its traditions could have upon even his own nominees. The backbone of senatorial resistance came from the new aristocracy throughout the first century A.D.—men like Paetus Thrasea, Helvidius Priscus and Herennius Senecio. Paetus Thrasea seems to have quite consciously emulated Cato, and we should not forget that he was in the senate when Lucan entered the *curia* for the first time, somewhere around A.D. 62–63. The career of Cicero should have been a warning to the *principes* that the chief spokesmen of senatorial conservatism may indeed be *novi homines*.

During the first century, the senate remained a symbol of the republican past, and with it remained all the hollow trappings of the high political offices of quaestor, praetor and consul. It is not hard to imagine that a young man, such as Lucan, could be moved by the awesome starkness of what had once been the hub of Roman power. Surely the contrast between present and past must have become deeply impressed upon him as he took his place along with Piso, Lateranus and Thrasea where Scipio, Cato and Brutus had once sat.

It was, no doubt, his elevation to the senate that moved him to write the *Pharsalia*, the desire to portray that crucial moment in history when the republic finally disintegrated. His experience in the senate slowly drew him away from Nero. For Lucan, as a man of literature, was steeped in the republican traditions of history and poetry; as a politician, he lived in the shell of the Roman past. The first recitations of his epic must have disturbed Nero profoundly. He walked out on one of them, not necessarily through jealousy, but in anger and shock at the effects of senatorial influences on his erstwhile friend.

⁴⁷ *iuvenili . . . animi calore* (Vacca 336.3). Cf. Suetonius, *passim* and Tacitus, *Annales* 15.49 and 70 and Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 10.1.90.

This rejection by his emperor was all that Lucan needed to plunge him finally and decisively into the senatorial camp. When the rumor got around that some ex-consuls had seen Nero's men setting fire to buildings, Lucan took up his pen and wrote the *De Incendio Urbis*.⁴⁸ This was all Nero could take. He reacted with a devastating ban, which put an end to Lucan's career. With that came the rude awakening to the *reality* of Nero's power; then, perhaps, Lucan's attempt to compromise, the *Epistulae ex Campania*. But it was too late, and Nero refused. Piso was waiting with open arms. Finally, the last, sad chapter: in writing the *Epistulae ex Campania*, the poet had placed his desire to write poetry above his dedication to principle. When he was accused of complicity in the plot he stated that his own mother, Acilia, was also involved. He may have said it sarcastically, but there seems to be no reason to doubt that he said it. Lucan appeared to have compromised again. Hence the venom of Suetonius towards him and the contempt of Tacitus.

But Suetonius and Tacitus, unfair as they are in judging the actions of Lucan, had probably noted something else about him which was important.⁴⁹ After the discovery of the Pisonian conspiracy, the enraged Nero turned to a purge of everyone who might have shown disloyalty with voice or pen. Petronius, who championed Rose's "less earnest" literary clique, fared no better than his "rival" Seneca in the aftermath. Lucan had taught Nero that the dissident critic is a potential assassin—a lesson which, as Tacitus and Suetonius well knew, Nero's successors never forgot.

APPENDIX

Tentative Chronology for Lucan's Activities from 61–65

- 61 Lucan elevated to senatorial rank (???). Vacca seems to imply that Lucan was given senatorial standing prior to his quaestorship. Vacca's account is, however, very confused.

⁴⁸ For the ex-consuls and the fire, see Suetonius, *Nero* 38. Cf. Beaujeu (above, note 11).

⁴⁹ Tacitus does finally give Lucan something approaching a compliment in *Annales* 16.17, where he describes Lucan's father Mela enjoying added fame from his son's reputation: *idem Annaeum Lucanum genuerat, grande adiumentum claritudinis*.

- 62-63 December 5th, 62 or 63. Lucan takes office as quaestor. If 63, then the ban takes effect during Lucan's quaestorship. Since Vacca attributes the quaestorship to the "happy days" December 62 is preferable. Around the same time Lucan becomes an augur. Also, work probably begins on the *Pharsalia* in either 62 or 63.
- 64 Recitations of *Pharsalia* 1-3 and their publication. Possibly also recitations of 4-6, with publication pending just before the ban. During one of these recitations (no later than the end of June, probably earlier) Nero walks out, summoning a meeting of the senate. Open hostility between Lucan and Nero.
 July-August: Fire of Rome. The *De Incendio Urbis*, the *Adlocutio ad Pollam*. The ban.
 August-December: completion of *Pharsalia* 7 and 8. Lucan withdraws to Baiae. The *Epistulae ex Campania*.
- 64-65 December-February: Nero rejects conciliatory moves. Lucan joins Piso.
- 65 February-April. Lucan continues work on *Pharsalia* 9 and 10. Detection of Pisonian conspiracy. Arrest and death of Lucan.

No attempt is made in the above chart to account for Lucan's other works. The chances are that they all belong to before 64. The Octavius Sagitta orations are probably *suasoria* connected with the trial of Octavius in 58. The *Laudes Neronianae*, *Orpheus*, *Iliacon* and *Catachthonion* are probably assignable to 60-61, if not earlier (except the *Orpheus* and *Laudes* which clearly belong to 60). The *Silvae*, the *Medea*, the *Salticae Fabulae* and the *Epigrammata* (or whatever they were) are very hard to date. They could possibly be assigned to 61-63.