

## THE DEATH OF DOMITIUS IN THE *PHARSALIA*<sup>1</sup>

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At Book Seven of his poem, the book of Pharsalus, Lucan causes L. Domitius Ahenobarbus to appear in the thick of battle, defying Caesar, rejoicing to die, a splendid and glorious death-scene without corroboration in any of our other sources (599–616). Caesar (*B.C.* 3.99.5) and Cicero (*Phil.* 2.71) agree in quite a different account, that during the rout Domitius fled to the Pompeian camp, then to the nearby hills, where he was overtaken by cavalry and killed. If Caesar's version might be suspect as partisan, Cicero's cannot be so impugned:<sup>2</sup> it is evident that Lucan has altered the record with a view to glorify Domitius at his death. Why? The assumption of many scholars has been that Lucan did so in order to flatter his grandson's grandson, Nero.<sup>3</sup> Because of other researches,<sup>4</sup> however, this assumption is no longer tenable; here I wish to enquire into a more likely motive.

M. Rambaud has argued<sup>5</sup> that Lucan composed with the conscious

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of the arguments here was part of a paper delivered in Chicago at the 106th Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association, on December 30, 1974. I thank Professor M. Gwyn Morgan for advice and criticism; responsibility for the views expressed remains my own.

<sup>2</sup> Other sources—Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.44), Suetonius (*Nero* 2.3), Appian (*B.C.* 2.82)—mention the fact of the death without further detail.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., C. Vitelli, "Sulla composizione e pubblicazione della *Farsaglia*," *SIFC* 8 (1900) 33–72, especially 65; V. Ussani, "Controversia Lucanea," *RFIC* 29 (1901) 50 ff.; R. Pichon, *Les sources de Lucain* (Paris 1912) 270–71; G. K. Gresseth, "The Quarrel between Lucan and Nero," *CP* 52 (1957) 24–27; J. Brisset, *Les idées politiques de Lucain* (Paris 1964) 188–89, 203–04.

<sup>4</sup> By E. Malcovati, *Lucano* (Brescia 1947) 21 ff.; G. Pfligersdorffer, "Lucan als Dichter der geistigen Widerstandes," *Hermes* 87 (1959) 355–56; F. M. Ahl, "Lucan's *De Incendio Urbis*, *Epistulae ex Campania* and Nero's Ban," *TAPA* 102 (1971) 13; R. C. Lounsbury, "History and Motive in Book Seven of Lucan's *Pharsalia*," *Hermes* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> "L'apologie de Pompée par Lucain au Livre VII de la *Pharsale*," *REL* 33 (1955)

plan of counterbalancing, now in favor of the Pompeians, Caesar's account,<sup>6</sup> a kind of compensating distortion. Comparing, with this thesis in mind, Book Seven of the *Pharsalia* and the Third Book of Caesar's *Bellum Civile*, we discover a parallel drawn between Domitius and C. Crastinus, a veteran centurion in the Caesarian army. To examine Caesar's account first: Crastinus appears twice, once before and once after the fatal engagement (3.91; 99.2-3). To him is accorded the rare honor of direct quotation (3.91.2-3):

Hic signo dato "Sequimini me," inquit, "manipulares mei qui fuistis, et vestro imperatori quam constituistis operam date. Unum hoc proelium superest; quo confecto et ille suam dignitatem et nos nostram libertatem reciperabimus." Simul respiciens Caesarem, "Faciam," inquit, "hodie, imperator, ut aut vivo mihi aut mortuo gratias agas."

Plutarch (*Pomp.* 71; *Caes.* 44.5 f.) and Appian (*B.C.* 2.82) in their accounts of Pharsalus relate the same story in substantially Caesar's form. However, although both authors allow Crastinus a brief speech, neither has the centurion refer to Caesar's *dignitas* and the *libertas* of the soldiers. This omission, it would be simplest to suppose, went back to their presumed source, Asinius Pollio, who, while ready to record an apposite saying (cf. Suet. *DJ* 30.4; Plut. *Caes.* 46.1-2), was rather less willing to trust Caesar's veracity in the *Commentarii*, both in general (Suet. *DJ* 56.4) and particularly by not accepting the casualty figures given by Caesar for this battle, at which Pollio himself was present (Plut. *Pomp.* 72.3; *Caes.* 46.2; App. *B.C.* 2.82).<sup>7</sup> But as easily it could be the case that Plutarch and Appian simply rejected any claim that Caesar's *dignitas* and the *libertas* of his troops were at issue. Nor is it without interest that Florus (2.13.46) seems to counter the claim when he observes that Crastinus *adacto in os gladio*...

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258-96; "L'opposition de Lucain au *Bellum Civile* de César," *L'Information Littéraire* 12 (1960) 155-62.

<sup>6</sup> For Caesar's manipulation of evidence see, most recently, J. H. Collins, "Caesar as political propagandist," *Festschrift Vogt* I, 1 (1972) 922-66, and bibliography there.

<sup>7</sup> The idea that Plutarch and Appian are here following Asinius Pollio is found at least as long ago as H. Peter, *Die Quellen Plutarchs in den Biographien der Römer* (Halle 1865) 122 ff., and is adduced regularly. But caution is advised: Plutarch and Appian do not agree on every detail of the battle. See N. I. Barbu, *Les sources et l'originalité d'Appien dans le deuxième livre des guerres civiles* (Paris 1934) 66 ff.

*libidinem ac rabiem qua pugnaverat ipsa novitate vulneris praeferbat.*<sup>8</sup>

The reference to *dignitas* and *libertas*, then, if not an outright invention by Caesar, seems to have been judged a highly tendentious remark. Placed as it is as the first incident of the battle, the battle takes tone and coloration from it—so Caesar meant it to do. For by it Caesar reminded his readers of what was the official view of his motives:<sup>9</sup> that he had fought not only for his own *dignitas*, a private vindication, but also for the *libertas* of his men, a public trust.<sup>10</sup>

As at the beginning, so at the end of the battle Caesar brings forth his spokesman Crastinus (and very firmly to the first couples the second appearance, by the reminder *cuius mentionem supra fecimus*), and it is here that he relates him to Domitius. The whole paragraph recording casualties (3.99) is to be noted for its structure: first are the Caesarian losses (very small, but many centurions), then the separate case of Crastinus, *fortissime pugnans*, who receives the fatal thrust full in the face. Here Caesar departs from clipped enumeration to a laudation spangled with more superlatives (99.3: . . . *excellentissimam virtutem . . . optimeque eum de se meritum . . .*), the departure emphasizing the praise. Bald style is resumed in listing Pompeian losses (and though very large, larger still is the number of surrendered), followed by the number of standards abandoned, a disgrace (no mention of centurions or officers); then finally the separate case of L. Domitius, caught and killed *refugiens*. Hence we have but two deaths reported individually, in glaring contrast: brave soldier and

<sup>8</sup> The part played by Crastinus captured the attention of many historians after Caesar; besides Plutarch and Appian, it got prominent mention by Livy (Scholium Bernense ad Lucan. 7.470 [ed. Usener, p. 270]); whether or not his account inspired Florus, the latter's use of *libido* is a suggestive response to *dignitas*, just as *libertas* is well balanced by *rabies*. (Note, too, that Lucan uses *rabies* in close conjunction with Crastinus' name: 7.474.)

<sup>9</sup> "Very regrettably we have no introductory chapters discussing the *Rechtsfrage*" (Collins [above, note 6] 945; cf. J. P. V. D. Balsdon, "The veracity of Caesar," G & R 4 [1957] 19, who accounts for this absence by the nature of the genre *commentarii*). Caesar has kept it until the best moment, at the outset of the greatest and bloodiest of the civil battles: Pharsalus, far from being justified, becomes itself a justification of Caesar's ambition.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Rambaud, *L'art de la déformation historique dans les Commentaires de César* (Paris 1966) 277. The sentiment is most suitably expressed by a centurion, for that class was a mainstay of Caesar: see R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1960) 70.

cowardly Optimate,<sup>11</sup> the respective representatives of their parties.

This before him, Lucan sets to work. In simplest structural terms, he reverses Caesar's plan: Domitius is mentioned twice, once before, once after the battle, Crastinus once, before—a perfect mirror image of Caesar's placement of them. To us looking more closely parallels multiply. Domitius, accorded the direct quotation denied Crastinus, has a speech which reminds us of that of Crastinus in Caesar. Like the centurion, he expresses the paradox of life outliving death: just as thanks will come to Crastinus alive or dead, so Domitius is confident that the cause lives though he perishes (613–15). The second import of Crastinus' speech, the *dignitas-libertas* bond, is addressed also by Domitius. According to him, the *dignitas* which Caesar sought to recover by a Pharsalian victory is still denied to him: he remains a lesser man than Pompey (611); Pompey is the leader even as his lieutenant dies amid his disastrous defeat (612). *Libertas*, too, is not the property of the Caesarians, though victorious: it belongs to the vanquished Pompeian (602–03, 612–13). The blood and slaughter at Pharsalus have gone for nothing; the claims of Crastinus are null in the event.

In short, the episode of Domitius in Lucan is Crastinus' speech in Caesar re-told according to Pompeian terms. The parallels are further driven home by the manner of Lucan's introduction of the two men before the conflict. So Domitius takes the front rank like Caesar's Crastinus (219–20), while Crastinus, most horrible of the Caesarian criminals because the first to shed Roman blood (470–73), is made to epitomize a Caesarian as Domitius in Caesar had epitomized an Optimate.

Thus Domitius is put by Lucan in deliberate and carefully balanced opposition to the Crastinus of Caesar. He is an anti-Crastinus, a repudiation of Caesar's account and so of the Caesarian tradition—which Lucan seeks to abrogate throughout his Seventh Book—at its very source.

<sup>11</sup> The venomous attacks on Domitius throughout the *Bellum Civile* are, for their implacable ferocity, almost without parallel elsewhere in Caesar. See Collins (above, note 6) 954, who finds the only comparable example to be Q. Titurius Sabinus.