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Lucan's Last Words (*)

In April 65 A.D. the poet M. Annaeus Lucanus, at the age of 25, was forced to commit suicide. It is beyond doubt that his death was the result of his involvement in the conspiracy against Nero, led by Piso, which had started at the beginning of that year. Tacitus *Ann.* 15,48 ff. is our main source for the story. Lucan's part in it (*Ann.* 15,56 ; 15,58) is short but fascinating. The proud young poet of the revolutionary epic *Bellum Ciuile* (1) who took up the case of

(*) Bibliography : A. Bourgery (et al.), *Lucain, la guerre civile (la Pharsale)*, Tome 1, texte établi et traduit par A. Bourgery et M. Ponchont (Paris 1926-1927) (= Paris 1974). — Jacqueline Brisset, *Les idées politiques de Lucain* (Paris 1964). — J. Deferrari (et al.), *A Concordance of Lucan* (Washington 1940) (repr. Hildesheim 1965). — J. D. Duff, *Lucan ; the Civil War* ; with an English translation by J. D. Duff (Cambridge / Mass / London 1928) (= London 1977). — C. M. Francken, *M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia*. Cum commentario critico ed. C. M. Francken, (Leiden 1896-1897). — Christian Gnilka, "Ultima verba", *JbAC*, 22 (1979) 5-21. — C. E. Haskins, *M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia*, edited with Engl. notes by C. E. Haskins, With an introduction by W. E. Heitland (London 1887) (= Hildesheim / New York 1971). — W. E. Heitland, Introduction to the edition of C. E. Haskins (see above). — Anton J. L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (London / New York 1990). — A. E. Housman, *M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis libri decem editorum in usum*, ed. A. E. Housman, (Oxford 1926). — Erich Koestermann, *Cornelius Tacitus. Annalen* (2 vols.) (Heidelberg 1963-1968). — G. Luck, *Marcus Annaeus Lucanus. Bellum civile*. Lateinisch und Deutsch, ed. G. Luck (Berlin 1985). — F. A. Marx, "Tacitus und die Literatur der exitus illustrium virorum", *Philol.* 92 (1937) 83-103. — F. Oudendorp, *M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia sive belli civilis libri decem* curante F. Oudendorpio (Leiden 1728). — Willibaldus Schmidt, *De ultimis morientium verbis* (Diss. Marburg 1914). — Hans-Albert Schotes, *Stoische Physik, Psychologie und Theologie bei Lucan* (Diss. Bonn 1969) 61-63. — Otto Schonberger, "Ein Dichter römischer Freiheit : M. Annaeus Lucanus", in W. Rutz, *Lucan* (Darmstad 1970) 525-545. — Robert A. Tucker, "Tacitus and the Death of Lucan", *Latomus* 46 (1987) 330-337. — Joseph P. Wilson, "The Death of Lucan : Suicide and Execution in Tacitus", *Latomus* 49 (1990) 458-463. — V. Ussani, "L'ultima voce di Lucano", *Rivista di Filologia*, 31 (1903) 545-557. — C. F. Weber, "De suprema M. Annaei Lucani voce", *Ind. Lect. Marburg* (1857-1858).

(1) The discussion on the title of the work, *Bellum Ciuile* or *Pharsalia*, continues. Cfr. F. M. Ahl, *Lucan. An Introduction* (Ithaca-London 1976) 326-332 ; W. Lebek, *Lucans Pharsalia. Dichtungsstruktur und Zeitbezug* (Göttingen 1976) 13 n. 1 ; Werner

the lost Roman republic, and who is still considered by many to be a serious political opponent to Nero's government (2), is told to have accused his mother Acilia, in the hope of impunity (*Ann.* 15,56). He still did not manage to escape death. The three short *Vitae* of Lucan still extant (3) inform us that the relation between Nero and Lucan had much deteriorated even before the conspiracy, as a result of either Lucan's offended pride (Suet. *Vita*, 4) or jealousy on the part of Nero (Vacc. *Vita*, 13-14). We will probably never know whether Lucan was the *paene signifer Pisonianae coniurationis* (Suet. *Vita*, 6) or whether Nero just wanted go get rid of his rival in the field of poetry. Whatever the exact cause may have been, Lucan was forced to kill himself, as our sources confirm. In his brief chapter on the death of Lucan, Tacitus (*Ann.* 15,70) includes a remarkable detail : he tells us that when Lucan's blood flowed, he died while reciting some of his own verses which described a wounded soldier dying in the same way : *Exim Annaei Lucani caedem imperat. Is profluente sanguine ubi frigescere pedes manusque et paulatim ab extremis cedere spiritum feruido adhuc et compote mentis pectore intellegit, recordatus carmen a se compositum, quo uulneratum militem per eius modi mortis imaginem obisse tradiderat, uersus ipsos rettulit eaque illi suprema uox fuit. Senecio posthac et Quintianus et Scaeuinus non e priore uitae mollitia, mox reliqui coniuratorum periere, nullo facto dictoue memorando* (4). This *suprema uox*, a highly romantic feature, has fascinated readers since the Mediaeval period : what verses could Tacitus possibly mean ? A

Rutz, "Lucans 'Pharsalia' im Lichte der neuesten Forschung (...)", ANRW II, 32,3,1457-1537, esp. 1469-70, proposing *Pharsalia*. Recent editions, as by Luck (1985) and Shackleton Bailey (1988) retain *Bellum Ciuile* or *De bello ciuili*. As no MS shows the title "Pharsalia" I stick to *Bellum Ciuile*, henceforward abbreviated "*BC*".

(2) Cfr. Georg. Pfligersdorffer 1959 "Lucan als Dichter des geistigen Widerstandes", *Hermes* 87 (1959) 344-77.

(3) A short account of Lucan's life ascribed to Suetonius (probably containing the most important facts of what he wrote in his *De uiris illustribus*) ; another short biography probably written by the 6th cent. grammarian Vacca ; and a third one of lesser importance, largely derived from the Suetonian account.

(4) "He next ordained the despatch of Lucan. When his blood was flowing, and he felt his feet and hands chilling and the life receding little by little from the extremities, though the heart retained warmth and sentience, Lucan recalled a passage in his own poem, where he had described a wounded soldier dying a similar form of death, and recited the very verses. Those were his last words. Then Senecio and Quintianus and Scaevinus, belying their old effeminacy of life, and then the rest of the conspirators met their end, doing and saying nothing that calls for remembrance" (transl. Jackson, Loeb edition).

15th cent. MS of Lucan preserved in Deventer has a confident note to *BC* 9,811 : *haec sunt carmina quae Lucanus moriens recitabat* (quoted by Francken, a.l.). But one of the earliest editors of Lucan, Sulpitius, proposed 3,638 sqq, followed among many others by Iustus Lipsius in his commentary to Tacitus' Annals (1627 and later) (see discussion below). Later scholars have also attempted to locate these verses in Lucan's epic and have proposed various texts.

The most recent articles devoted to the subject of Lucan's last words, by Ussani and Thomas, date from 1903. Since then, the subject has only been discussed in footnotes, and one gets the impression the same references were used over and over again by scholars of subsequent generations. This may be partly due to the risk of "biographism" which looms large with this kind of subject. I do not suggest the biographical method should be applied again. The subject of Lucan's *ultima uerba* is not just a question of biography, but as various texts have been proposed and nearly all modern editions mention the story in a footnote to some specific passage, it belongs primarily to the study of Lucan's text. We cannot ignore the question, if only because scholarship has not done so up to now.

Purpose. — In this article I intend to reconsider the various passages of *BC* which have been proposed as the verses Tacitus mentions, in order to find out if there is any text which fits in with Tacitus' account at all, and, if so, which one may be presented as the most likely, or least unlikely, candidate. But before studying the texts from *BC*, I shall discuss a few preliminary methodological problems, and subject Tacitus' text to a closer scrutiny. Some concluding remarks will come at the end of the discussion.

Preliminary Remarks. — The first problem is obvious to any reader : can we trust Tacitus ? Some 50 years lie between his historiographic activity and the actual event. In this period rumour and fantasy may have had their share in shaping the tradition, as the alleged involvement of Seneca in editing *BC* after Lucan's death (*Vita* III, 8) proves. Furthermore, Tacitus may have used monographs on the *exitus illustrium uirorum*, which had developed into a separate subgenre (5),

(5) Pliny mentions two writers of this genre : C. Fannius (*scribebat exitus occisorum aut relegatorum a Nerone et iam tres libros absoluerat, subtiles et diligentes et latinos atque inter sermonem historiamque medios, ac tanto magis reliquos perficere cupiebat,*

in which *ultima uerba* were a stock feature (6). Last words or even speeches are recorded in the *Annals* frequently, both in cases of murder and of suicide (7). In poetry heroes dying with a typical phrase on their lips are not uncommon either (8). Last words are recorded of many famous persons, among them Lucan's father, Mela and the emperor Nero himself (9). Thus we can consider the story to be a mere

quanto frequentius hi lecticabantur ; ep. 5,5) and Titinius Capito (*ep.* 8,12). Cfr. H. Bardon, *La littérature latine inconnue*, 2 (Paris 1956) 221. On the genre see Schmidt 1914, 11-14 ; Gnilka 1979, 5-8. For Tacitus using this sort of material : Schmidt 1914, 2 ; Marx 1937 ; G. Bellardi, 'Gli *exitus illustrium uirorum* e il libro XVI degli *Annali* tacitiati' *A & R* 19 (1974) 129-137. Gnilka, 5 says many letters of Pliny, as 6,16, belong here too. On the death of Socrates as the main model for Stoic *exitus* cfr. Alessandro Ronconi, *Da Lucrezio a Tacito. Letture critiche.* (Firenze 1968) 207-210 ; 215.

(6) Cfr. Marx 1937,97 ; Gnilka 1979,7. Schmidt 1914,6 gives both a narrow and a wider definition : *non solum ea esse dico, quae nullo intermisso temporis spatio ante exitum dicta sint, sed etiam haec omnia, quae quis certam sibi mortem cognoscens fecerit.* The phrase *ultima uerba* itself is not attested before. Hist. Aug. *Vit. Sept. Seu.* 23,3. Schmidt lists a great number of *ultima uerba* before the Christian period. Gnilka shows how the feature developed, from Socrates (Pl. *Phaedo*, 118) to the Christian martyrs. A very famous case of *ultima uerba* is, of course, the words of Christ dying on the cross.

(7) With *murder : Ann.* 2,71-72 (Germanicus) ; 14,8 (Agrippina) ; 14,51 (Burrus) ; 15,67 (Subrius Flavus, on three occasions). With *suicide : Ann.* 4,34-35 (Cordus) ; 5,6-7 (name in lacuna) ; 6,48 (Arruntius) ; 11,3 (Asiaticus) ; 15,60-63 (Seneca) ; 16,11 (Vetus, Sextia and Pollitta) ; 16,34-35 (Thrasea, actually echoing the famous last words of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*). Related is the motif "last words written down" : mostly defensive e.g. Ann. 3,16 (L. Piso) ; 15,59 (C. Piso) ; 16,17 (Annaeus Mela, Lucan's father (!)) ; not specified in 15,63 (Seneca), and outright provocative in 16,19 (Petronius, whose death amounts to parody of the heroic suicide as a whole). No "last words" in the strict sense in 6,9 and 13,25. Significant absence of "last words" : 6,26 ; 15,60 (Plautius Lateranus) *plenus constantis silentii.*

(8) See H. Raabe, *Plurima mortis imago. Vergleichende Interpretationen zur Bildersprache Vergils* (München 1974) 132-141 for "Letzte Worte und Gedanken" in Roman epic (Vergil ; Statius ; Silius ; Corippus ; Valerius Flaccus). "Bewahrt (oder erfunden) haben solche letzten Worte die Historiker, freilich wohl auch erst in der Kaiserzeit. Hier hat Tacitus in dieser Hinsicht Vorläufer gehabt. Vergil mögen solche letzten Worte vielleicht zu "aufdringlich" gewesen sein". (134 n. 7). There are some cases, however, in the *Aeneid*, e.g. : 2,535 ff. (Priamus) ; 4,590 ff. (esp. 5659-62) (Dido) ; 9,427 ff. (Nisus) ; 10,739 ff. (Orodes) ; 10,878 (Mezentius) ; 11,823 ff. (Camilla). Already in Homer's *Iliad* we find examples : 16,492 ff. (Sarpedon) ; 16,844 ff. (Patroklos) ; 22, 297 ff. (Hektor) ; 21,74 ff. (Lycaon). For other genres see Schmidt 1914,16-18 (Greek tragedy), and 19-22 (epigram).

(9) Mela was forced to commit suicide as well (Tac. *Ann.* 16,17), accused by Nero of complicity in the same conspiracy as his son. Tacitus tells how he complained he had to die innocent, whereas Crispinus and Cerealis were allowed to stay alive. Nero himself uttered famous last words in his hour of death, as recorded by Suetonius : *qualis artifex pereo !* "what an artist is lost with me !", words which would even be fitting for Lucan himself.

invention by Tacitus or his source to give an *exemplum* of Lucan's character or simply to comply with what a dying poet was expected to do.

Apart from the problem that possible sources of Tacitus are no longer extant, no evidence in support of his account can be found in the ancient *Vitae* of Lucan ([10]). For historians this leaves the matter settled : it is likely to be a traditional piece of "romantic" fiction ([11]). However, philologists may still continue their search. We will probably never be sure of what actually happened in Lucan's last moments, and we must be very careful not to suggest we can recall the irrevocable. But whether it is fiction or not, to the ancient and modern reader it must have made sense, and some verses of Lucan must have been considered to be these final verses Tacitus mentions. Tacitus' lively interest ([12])

(10) Suet. *Vita*, 9 has a somewhat similar story : *impetrato autem mortis arbitrio libero codicillos ad patrem corrigendis quibusdam uersibus suis exarauit epulatusque largiter bracchia ad secandas uenas praebuit medico*. That is, Lucan did not so much recite verses, as write them down for his father to amend them (cfr. OLD s.v. *exaro* 4), dined copiously and then had a doctor cut his veins. Vacc. *Vita*, 17 remains more vague on the death itself : *nam sua sponte coactus uita excedere uenas sibi praecidit periitque pridie Kal. Maias Attico Vestino et Nerua Silano coss. XXVI aetatis annum agens (...)*, and defends Lucan's literary memory. Apparently, Lucan's work was censured for its lack of a final revision. In the third *Vita*, 5 we read *Qui largiter epulatus iussit sibi archiatrum arcessiri et incisis omnibus uenis corporis periit*. Lucan's last "literary activity" ; has evolved to : *Libellos etiam suos inemendatos auunculo suo Senecae ut eos emendaret tradidit* (c. 8), and the account ends with the remark that the first seven verses of book 1 were added by Seneca. Statius, *Siluae* 2,7,100-104 is not much of a help either : Calliope ends her speech with *sic et tu — rabidi nefas tyranni ! — / iussus praecipitem subire Lethen, / dum pugnas canis arduaque uoce das solatia grandibus sepulcris, / — o dirum scelus ! o scelus ! — tacebis*. "Even so on thee ah the impious frenzied tyrant ! — bidden while singing of battles and with lofty utterance solacing the mighty dead to plunge in Lethe's rushing stream — O crime, O most foul crime ! — on thee too shall silence fall" [transl. J. H. Mozley, Loeb-ed.]. The words *dum pugnas canis* (...) probably refer not so much to "last words" as to the whole of BC, on which Lucan was still working (cfr. H.-J. van Dam, *P. Papinius Statius, Silvae book II : a Commentary* [Leiden 1984] on Stat. *Silv.* 2, a.l.).

(11) The first scholar to declare the story as fictional was Cortius (Kortte) in the 18th cent, in his commentary published by C. F. Weber in 1828. Schmidt 1914,31 implies the story is fictional. He mentions it as an example of the category *Vltima uerba quibus fides haberi non potest*, and compares the Epitaph of Vergil : *Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc, / Parthenope : cecini pascua, rura, duces* (Donat. Vit. Verg.). Cfr. further the clearly fictional Epitaph of Lucan (Baehrens, PLM 5,386). Marx 1937,94, while stressing the influence of authors like Fannius on Tacitus, refers to the story without further comment. However, the majority of commentators on Lucan or Tacitus consider the story to bear a germ of truth at least.

(12) For Tacitus' intention in portraying these deaths cfr. *Ann.* 3,65 *quod praecipuum*

in *exitus illustrium uirorum* and *ultima uerba*, and indeed, the literary tradition, may have prompted readers to put faith in the story, rather than doubt its authenticity. It does not contradict the general image of Lucan : the pathetic aspect of the poet reciting dramatic verses of a "dying soldier" perfectly agrees with the pathos of *BC* (13), and with the personal pride which Lucan is said to have displayed (14). Indeed it corresponds quite well with what Vacca, *Vita*, 15 calls *iuuenili* (...) *animi calore*. Due to the cultural atmosphere of the early empire, with its widespread influence of Stoic approval of honorable suicide (15), which even seems to have grown into a complete ritual (16), such a story on the death of Lucan must have come as no surprise.

Now we can formulate the problem more distinctly : considering that the story of Lucan reciting verses of a dying soldier in his hour of death may have seemed plausible in the eyes of readers, which of Lucan's verses might correspond to Tacitus' words ? Surely the story can hardly have persisted without such a text in Lucan's work. Modern editors have proposed several passages, but do they fit in at all with the scanty detail Tacitus supplies ?

munus annalium reor, ne uirtutes sileantur, utque prauis dictis factisque ex posteritate et infamia metus sit ; 15,70 *nullo facto dictoue memorando* ; 16,16.

(13) On pathos as constitutive element in *BC* see K. Seitz, "Der pathetische Erzählstil Lukans", *Hermes* 93 (1965) 204-232.

(14) Cfr. Suet. *Vita*, 2 for Lucan's remark *et quantum mihi restat ad Culicem*, when he compared his own achievement to Vergil's ; id., 4 for his offended pride. Cfr. further in *BC* itself 9,980-6, which testify to the poet's proud self-assertion in competition with Homer (see Marion Lausberg, "Lucan und Homer", *ANRW* II,32,3 (Berlin / New York 1985) 1565-1622, esp. 1612-1614).

(15) Cfr. Sen. *De Prou.*, 6,7 ; *Ep. ad Luc.* 70 ; *Cons. ad Marciam* 20,2-3 ; *De Ira* 3,15,3 ; and passim. Cfr. Georg Pfligersdorffer, "Lucan als Dichter des geistigen Widerstandes", *Hermes* 87 (1959) 344-77, esp. 350 ; Werner Rutz, "Amor mortis bei Lucan", *Hermes* 88 (1960) 462-475 ; Schotes 1969, 61-63 ; In general cfr. M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* (Göttingen 1984) [6th impr.] I,156 ; II,84 ; 160.

(16) van Hooff 1990, 50-53 argues that suicide by cutting the veins was the early empire's domestic equivalent to the Old Roman virtus of suicide by soldiers and politicians after a lost battle. A rich vocabulary was developed, especially by Tacitus (*uenas abrumpere ; uenas abscindere ; uenas intercidere ; uenas porrigere ; uenas praebere exsoluendas*, etc. Cfr. also Suet. *Nero*, 37,2). Elements of the ceremony, which assumed the character of a sacrifice, could be the assistance of a doctor, the making of testaments, and philosophical discussion with friends. Thus the elite of the early empire, having little opportunity for real battle, could prove its valour by suicide, as an ultimate heroic and political protest. Late Republican heroes such as Brutus, Cassius or Cato, in whom philosophical, political and military motivation was not yet divided, functioned as examples. Dr. van Hooff does not include *ultima uerba* as a standard element.

Tacitus' Text. — Now, first things first : let us reconsider Tacitus' text (quoted above). Actually it is not immediately clear what kind of death Lucan met with, although most scholars take it for granted that Lucan was forced to commit suicide ([17]). According to Tucker 1987, *caedem* may just as well be taken to indicate murder, if only because a "wounded soldier" is "a person who would not normally be understood as a man committing suicide" (336 n. 14). However, the word *caedes* is used to describe Seneca's death (Ann. 15,60), which is difficult and painful, and supervised by soldiers, but nonetheless a case of suicide and not of murder. In Tacitus' work *caedes* can evidently mean compulsory suicide. Wilson 1990 convincingly defends the traditional view that Lucan took his own life.

The phrase *feruido adhuc et compote mentis pectore* is somewhat confusing too : *feruido* may be taken as "excited, fired with passion" (cfr. OLD s.v. 6), as Weber 1858 (quoted in Ussani 1903, 549) seems to imply, or simply as "warm" as opposed to the chilliness invading the extremities of the body (OLD s.v. 2). And what about *recordatus or carmen* ? Strictly speaking, this might mean Lucan called to mind a separate poem, maybe from his youth. More probably we should interpret the phrase simply as "Lucan thought of a certain passage in his work" ([18]). A difficult word is *spiritus* : we may take it in a general sense of "life" (cfr. OLD s.v. 3b) or "spirit, soul" (OLD s.v. 4), but it is also possible to regard it as a reference to the Stoic theory of blood as carrying the life-giving pneuma in the body ([19]). Other words have been called into question as well ([20]).

(17) Cfr. Suet. *Vita* 9 and *Vita* III,5 : euthanasia performed by a doctor ; Vacca, *Vita* 17 : suicide committed by his own hand.

(18) *Recordatus* does not seem to have a particular sense of "evoking from a distant past" : cfr. OLD s.v. and the note of Koestermann 1968 to Tacitus. *Carmen* in this sense : thus interpreted by Koestermann (calling it a brachylogy), and the earlier Tacitean commentators Jacob, Furneaux and Nipperdey.

(19) See Schotes 1969, 50-51 with note 167 ; 57-59. Lucan seems to have been influenced by this theory, as many passages in his work show : cfr. *BC* 4,286v ; 3,640 ; 3,623-7 ; 6,750-60. But in *BC* older theories as to the separation of body and soul occur as well : cfr. 5,279 and 8,682v (where soul seems to be equated to breath, in Homeric fashion).

(20) Ussani 1903, 548-9 sees a problem in *eius modi mortis imaginem*, which he confines to death "nella sua forma esteriore". But cfr. Verg. *Aen.* 2,369 *plurima mortis imago* ; Tac. *Hist.* 3,28 *uaria pereuntium forma et omni imagine mortium.* Likewise Usanni contends (553) *uersus ipsos* suggests the text to have been in oratio recta, as indirect speech would require *uerba ipsius*, but that seems to be too subtle.

The essential information we obtain from Tacitus' words amounts to only a few elements : in any case Lucan died by cutting his veins, or having his veins cut. This at least is confirmed by the *Vitae*. Secondly, the verses Lucan is said to have quoted had some relation to a wounded soldier, dying either by his own hand, or by the hands of others. The symptoms Tacitus clearly indicates are the flowing of blood (*profluente sanguine*), the chilling of feet and hands (*frigescere pedes manusque*), and some sort of contrast between the extremities from which the *spiritus* gradually withdraws and the breast (*pectore*), in which consciousness remains ([21]).

Surely we are entitled to add two or three things in advance to limit our search : such a text must be short, as a dying man cannot have been supposed to recite a lengthy passage of, say, more than 50 verses. Also we may expect such a text to display some pathos : no one, least of all Lucan, would choose some dull or uninspired verse for his last words. The pathos may be created by direct speech, but not necessarily so. Finally, if any link with tyranny, or with Caesar (and thus, indirectly, with Nero), can be discerned in a relevant text, this would highly recommend it, although there is no reference to this element in Tacitus' passage. At any rate texts complimentary of tyranny or Caesar, can hardly be considered.

Texts Proposed. — Some commentators take the easy way out of the problem, by assuming that the quotation comes from some of the lost works of Lucan ([22]). Apart from spoiling the game, this solution neglects the importance of *BC*. If we start guessing we may just as well assume that Lucan was thinking of a section of the poem he was still working on, and which played an important part in the animosity between him and Nero, which, in turn, finally lead to his death. In addition, *BC* was generally considered to be Lucan's main work (cfr. Vacca. *Vita*, 19). Thus, I shall confine myself to *BC*.

(21) Since Plato and Aristotle most or all parts of the soul were generally located in the breast : cfr. Plato *Tim* 69E-70B ; Arist. *De anima* 416 B 25-29 (and comm. of Ross a.l.) ; *De juv.* 469 A 2-10 ; 469 B 9-17. This was also part of Stoic theory : cfr. the relevant fragments of Zeno (*SVF* I,148) and Chrysippus (*SVF* II, 897-911), and M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* (Göttingen 1984 [6th impr.], 87-88.

(22) With some caution this is suggested by Heitland 1887, xxx ; Furneaux on Tac. *Ann.* 15, 70, and J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age* (London 1927) 237-263, esp. 240, though he prefers *BC* 9,811 ff.

In *BC* we find a few examples of warriors speaking *ultima uerba* before they breathe their last breath (23). These surely may be dismissed right away, although they confirm once more the popularity of the theme, and its firm roots even in the epic tradition. More generally, if we glance through Lucan's text, we discover many more passages which would be perfectly suited for reciting in the final moment (24), but which have nothing to do with Tacitus' text. We should not allow ourselves to be carried away by our imagination, at least not too much.

So what serious candidates do we have ? The most important one is a passage in book 3 (3,683-646), where Lycidas, one of the participants in the naval battle of Massilia, is torn asunder by a grappling iron with which he is clinging to a ship and the helping hands of his comrades holding his legs :

> *scinditur auolsus, nec, sicut uolnere, sanguis*
> *emicuit lentus : ruptis cadit undique uenis,*
> *discursusque animae diuersa in membra meantis*
> *interceptus aquis. nullius uita perempti*
> *est tanta dimissa uia. pars ultima trunci*
> *tradidit in letum uacuos uitalibus artus ;*
> *at tumidus qua pulmo iacet, qua uiscera feruent,*
> *haeserunt ibi fata diu luctataque multum*
> *hac cum parte uiri uix omnia membra tulerunt* (25).

(23) 3,716-721 (Tyrrhenus remains intrepid until the very last moment) ; 3,742-7 (the father of Argus excuses his impiety) ; 4,542-4 (Vulteius asks who of his men volunteers to kill him) ; 6,777-820 (prophecy of the revived dead soldier. After this *mortemque reposcit*, and he is granted his request) ; 7,610-615 (angry words of the dying Domitius) ; 8,622-635 (Pompey's last thoughts : strictly taken, these are no spoken words but thoughts. Their function and position is completely similar. It may be significant that Pompey does not express the words, but remains, or has become, introvert. Cfr. Lucan's concluding words *talis custodia Magno / mentis erat, ius hoc animi morientis habebat* (635-6)). *Vltima verba* are absent, however, e.g. in 4,746-798 (Curio) ; 6,140-262 (Scaeva, who does not get killed ; cf. 10,544-6) ; 9,700-838 (the snake section).

(24) E.g. 2,115-118 ; 2,143-4 *periere nocentes ; / sed cum iam soli possent superesse nocentes* ; 2,536-539 (words of Pompey, who is not dying) ; 7,445-455 ; 10,525-529, to mention just a few.

(25) "He was torn asunder, and his blood gushed out, not trickling as from a wound, but raining on all sides from his severed arteries ; and the free play of the life coursing through the different limbs was cut off by the water. No other victim's life escaped through so wide a channel. The lower half of his body resigned to death the limbs that contain no vital organs ; but where the lungs were full of air and the heart of heat, there death was long baffled and struggled hard with this part of the man, till with difficulty it mastered the whole body" (transl. Duff ; Loeb-ed.).

Sulpitius, in his late 15th cent. editions of Lucan, was the first to suggest this text, and Iustus Lipsius in his editions of Tacitus followed him (26). Since then commentaries on Tacitus (27) have especially favoured this text in *BC* 3. Many scholars on Lucan support this text (28). A 17th cent. German poet, Lohenstein, in his poem *Epicharis* of 1665, quoted and adapted these lines : Lucan personally plays a role here and speaks these verses as dying words : "Der Adern Brunn müht sich des Lebens-Oel zu giessen / Durch hundert Röhren aus ; die Seele macht sich frey / Und reisst der Sinnen Band, der Glieder Joch entzwey, / Der Leib wird Eiss, und auf der Zung erstirbt das letzte Wort ..." (29).

Indeed, at first sight the text contains some elements which make it likely to be the *carmen* alluded bo by Tacitus. In the first place we are clearly reading about a soldier here, albeit a marine. Secondly his veins are cut : Lucan's gruesome picture does not leave much room for doubt as to this aspect (30). Furthermore, although no chilliness is mentioned, the blood does not just flow, but even spurts out onto

(26) Sulpitius : "Hos versus Lucanus ipse percussis venis profluente sanguine, ubi frigere pedes manusque et paulatim ab extremis cedere spiritum sensit, fervido adhuc et compote mentis pectore, dicitur cecinisse" (quoted by Oudendorp 1728 on *BC* 3,638). Iustus Lipsius "sunt haud dubie isti : scinditur ... interceptus aquis" (edition of Tacitus Annals, Antwerpen 1627 and 1668, to *Ann.* 15,70).

(27) In recent times : Jacob (Paris 1886) ; Furneaux (1907), who says the verses are commonly supposed to be part of 3,635-646, but suggests they may be no longer extant ; Andresen (Berlin 1915) ; Jackson (1962, Loeb-ed.) who is sceptic, but adds that 3,642sqq are "the most relevant and least absurd" ; Koestermann 1968 ; and Pierre Wuilleumier (1978, Budé-ed.).

(28) *RE* I,2230 ; L. Herrmann, "Deux allusions contemporaines dans le livre III du 'De bello civ.'", *RÉA* 32 (1930) 339-341, regarding the lines as an allusion to the death of Octavia (Tac. *Ann.* 14.64), a theory which has gained no support of other scholars. ; Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, II (München 1959) (= 1935) 494 ; Bourgery, 91 : G. de Plinval, "Une insolence de Lucain", *Latomus* 15 (1956) 512sqq, 519 ; Brisset 1964, 15 n. 4 ; Schonberger 1970, 543 n. 92, observing Lucan tends to avoid the 1st p.sg., but still favouring this text rather than e.g. 7,608 ff. ; Erich Burck, Werner Rutz, "Die "Pharsalia" Lucans", in Erich Burck (hrsg), *Das römische Epos* (Darmstadt 1979) 154-199, esp. 157-8 who speak about a "Versuch einer Hochstilisierung seines Sterbens" (158) ; Luck 1985,517 ; Miriam Griffin, *Nero, the End of a Dynasty* (London 1984) 159 who adds the comment that "the concentration on himself, and on the means rather than the end, do seem to be common features of his life and work".

(29) Cfr. Walter Fischli, *Studien zum Fortleben der Pharsalia des M. Annaeus Lucanus* (Luzern [without year]) 66-67.

(30) The flowing of blood had become a poetic device in descriptions of battles : cfr. Hom. *Il.* 4,451 ; Verg. *Aen.* 12,691 ; Ov. *M.* 5,76 ; *BC* 3,712 ; 7,635 ff. In *BC* 7,621 by analogy a sword is pushed out.

the waves, and there is a very clear stress on the receding of the *anima* from the extremities, with the centre resisting death much longer (31). We may even see an echo of Tacitus' *feruido pectore* in *qua uiscera feruent*. Finally, the text is short and pathetic, though it is not in direct speech. However, in spite of these arguments, I think a serious objection must be made to this text, which editors generally have passed by in silence. Poor Lycidas is completely torn asunder, and the blood bursts out of his entire body. This is quite unlike suicide or even murder in a bath. In a few exceptional cases (eg. the death of Seneca, Tac. *Ann.* 15,60-63) additional cutting of veins in the knees or in the legs is mentioned, but this shows that normally the cutting was restricted to the arms, and more specifically to the wrists.

Therefore, the analogy does not fail in any specific detail of the dying process, but in the process as a whole, the *per eiusmodi mortis imaginem*. Lucan's and Lycidas' death are fundamentally different in cause, in form and in result. Also, Lycidas' death lacks any possible political dimension. There is no trace of hatred towards a tyrant, or even an enemy. The "resistance" is biological and has no political significance.

We can only suppose this text to be the one Tacitus means if we assume *per eius modi mortis imaginem* to have no strict relation to the verses, or, in other words, if we assume Lucan to have revelled in extravagant hyperbole, to such an extent as to go far beyond what actually happened to himself, and could happen to any man committing a respectable suicide.

But apart from 3,638 ff. several other texts have been put forward. Amoung them is 9.808-814. This passage describes the horrible death of Tullus, one of Cato's soldiers. He dies in the deserts of Africa, after he has been bitten by a snake.

> *utque solet pariter totis se fundere signis*
> *Corycii pressura croci, sic omnia membra*
> *emisere simul rutilum pro sanguine uirus.*
> *sanguis erant lacrimae ; quaecumque foramina nouit*
> *umor, ab his largus manat cruor ; ora redundant*

(31) Ussani 1903, 549 reports this argument as being used by others, but thinks the analogy is not clear. I cannot see where the analogy fails. Maybe Ussani did not see the close relation of *anima* with blood.

et patulae nares ; sudor rubet ; omnia plenis
membra fluunt uenis ; totum est pro uolnere corpus (32).

There is a long tradition here too : Oudendorp 1728, after quoting Sulpitius' note to 3,638, and Michyll's note, says : "Sed alii alios allegant, eos scilicet, qui libro nono de milite quodam ab Haemorrhoide percusso dicuntur *sanguis erant* (...)". Several later scholars followed him (33).

Again, we have a short text full of pathos on the death of a soldier, this time on land, and we hear of blood pouring through openings in the body. But here an objection similar to that of the preceding text can be made : the death as a whole is not similar at all to the one described by Tacitus. Here we have no calm suicide, indeed no "cutting the veins" at all. The blood bursts out of every part of the body, even in the form of sweat : these are not really results of decently cutting one's veins. Not only the effects are different, but the cause is dissimilar as well : here we have no knife or sword but a venomous snake's bite. Tullus is heroic perhaps only in that he did not utter a single word, least of all an *ultimum uerbum*. On the whole, this death is, I would say, quite unheroic, an accident.

In short, this text seems to be even more remote from a conceivable reality in imperial Rome. We may suggest Lucan can be thought to have said such words before dying, but not without adding that it would be an almost incredible hyperbole, an extravagant excess.

The verses 7,608-15 are of a somewhat more political character, where the proud Domitius Ahenobardus (34) directs his last words to his enemy Caesar :

(32) "And as Corycian saffron, when turned on, is wont to spout from every part of a statue at once, so all his limbs discharged red poison together instead of blood. His tears were blood ; blood flowed abundantly from all the openings that the body's moisture uses ; his mouth and open nostrils were filled with it ; he sweated blood ; all his limbs streamed with the content of his veins ; his whole body was one wound".

(33) C. M. Francken, *Mnem.* ns 17 (1889) 59-61, quoting a 15th. cent. Deventer MSS scholion a.l.*haec sunt carmina quae Lucanus moriens recitabat* ; J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age* (London 1927) 237-263, who cites 9,811 ff., thus suggesting he favours this text, although he makes no clear decision. According to Duff (240) already in the 17the century Thomas May in his *Vita* supposed these lines to be Lucan's last words.

(34) On the problematic figure of Domitius in BC see R. C. Lounsbury, "The Death of Domitius in the Pharsalia", *TAPA* 105 (1975) 209-212 ; F. M. Ahl, *Lucan. An Introduction* (Ithaca-London 1976) 47-54 ; R. Mayer, "On Lucan and Nero", *BICS* 25 (1978) 85-88 ; L. Kepple, *The Textual and Thematic Contexts of Lucan's Praise of Nero in the Bellum Civile*, (Diss. Harvard 1980) (summary in *HSPh* 85 [1981] 303-5).

(...) *ast illi suffecit pectora pulsans*
spiritus in uocem morientiaque ora resoluit :
"non te funesta scelerum mercede potitum,
sed dubium fati, Caesar, generoque minorem
aspiciens Stygias Magno duce liber ad umbras
et securus eo ; te saeuo Marte subactum
Pompeioque graues poenas nobisque daturum,
cum moriar, sperare licet". (non plura locutum
uita fugit, densaeque oculos pressere tenebrae) ([35]).

Weber 1858 argues (according to Ussani 1903, 549) that Tacitus included the detail of the last words to depict Lucan's character, and to make clear that our poet hated Nero up to his last moments. Weber's thesis does not seem to have gained much support ([36]), but it is worth considering. However Lucan may have regarded Domitius, his hour of death is clearly depicted in terms of praise (cfr. 7,600-605) : they are the proud and angry words of a hero dying in front of the hated tyrant Caesar without base submissiveness (cfr. Sil. It. *Pun.*, 15,468 ... *femineo clamore Dracen extrema rogantem*). The lines are vigourous and, what is more, in direct speech, allowing a much more outspoken critical attitude. But unfortunately our brave warrior does not die from cutting his veins : Lucan just says he dies in a pool of blood (*in crasso uersantem sanguine membra*, 605), probably due to a thousand wounds (*mille in uolnera*, 603). We might read a slight indication of contraction of the spirit in lines 608-09, but the emphasis here is clearly not on the external symptoms Tacitus discusses. Furthermore the motif of "avoiding Caesar's cruel *clementia*" after the humiliating experience at Corfinium (2,478-525) would appear to be completely out of place in the case of Lucan's own death, just as the content of the threatening words themselves : for who can be the Pompey Nero would pay a reckoning to ? Domitius hopes to be revenged by his leader, but Lucan's

(35) "Thus he spoke ; and the breath that heaved the older's breast was enough for speech, and he opened his dying lips : "Caesar, you have not grasped the fatal reward of your guilt : your fate remains uncertain and you are inferior to your son-in-law ; and seeing your plight, I go free and untroubled to the Stygian shades, and Pompey is still my leader. Though I die, I can still hope that you, borne down in fierce battle, will pay a heavy reckoning to Pompey and to me". Before he could say more, life left him and thick darkness closed his eyes".

(36) According to Ussani, 550 P. Lejay, *M. Annaei Lucani De bello civili liber primus* (...) (Paris 1894) accepted Weber's theory.

"leader" Piso was already dead ([37]). So, we have to dismiss this text as well, as the differences with Tacitus' text are too great.

The last section I would like to discuss at some length is 4,478-581. A group of Caesarean auxiliary soldiers, led by Vulteius, is surrounded by Pompeian troops near the coast of Illyria. They end up killing each other, actually rejoicing in their death in what may be properly called *amor mortis* ([38]). An important part of the scene is formed by a speech of Vulteius. Several parts have been mentioned as suitable "final words".

(1) (478-480)
uita breuis nulli superest, qui tempus in illa
quaerendae sibi mortis habet ; nec gloria leti
inferior, iuuenes, admoto occurrere fato ([39]).

(2) (482-487)
par animi laus est et, quos speraueris, annos
perdere et extremae momentum abrumpere lucis,
accersas dum fata manu ; non cogitur ullus
uelle mori. fuga nulla patet, stant undique nostris
intenti ciues iugulis : decernite letum,
et metus omnis abest. cupias, quodcumque necesse est ([40]).

(3) (514-520)
Dent fata recessum
emittantque licet, uitare instantia nolim.
proieci uitam, comites, totusque futurae
mortis agor stimulis : furor est. agnoscere solis
permissum, quos iam tangit uicinia fati,
uicturosque dei celant, ut uiuere durent,
felix esse mori ([41]).

(37) This is noted by Ussani, 550. For Piso's death cfr. Tac. *Ann.* 15,56.

(38) The term is coined by Werner Rutz, "Amor mortis bei Lucan", *Hermes* 88 (1960) 462-475.

(39) "No life is short that gives a man time to slay himself ; nor does it lessen the glory of suicide to meet doom at close quarters".

(40) "(...) it is no less noble to cut short even a moment of remaining life, provided that you summon death by your own act. No man is forced to die voluntarily. No escape is open to us ; our countrymen surround us, eager for our lives ; resolve upon death, and then all fear is dispelled : let a man desire whatever he cannot avoid".

(41) "Should Fate now suffer me to withdraw and release me from her grasp, I should refuse to shun what lies before me. I have cast life behind me, comrades, and am wholly driven on by the excitement of coming death ; it is a veritable possession. None but those whom the approach of death already overshadows are suffered to

These three are mentioned by Ussani 1903, 551-554 ([42]), but he adds he does not believe our text must necessarily come from a section of direct speech of a soldier. He then chooses two parts from the following account of the mutual killing of the Vulteian troups :

(4) (466-470)

iam latis uiscera lapsa
semianimes traxere foris multumque cruorem
infudere mari. despectam cernere lucem
uictoresque suos uoltu spectare superbo
et mortem sentire iuuat ([43]).

(5) (575-581)

non tamen ignauae post haec exempla uirorum
percipient gentes, quam non sit ardua uirtus
seruitium fugisse manu, sed regna timentur
ob ferrum, et saeuis libertas uritur armis,
ignorantque datos, ne quisquam seruiat, enses.
mors, utinam pauidos uitae subducere nolles,
sed uirtus te sola daret ! ([44]).

What strikes the eye is, of course, the fact that we have a soldier, or soldiers here, who die by suicide, in a brave attitude and even lust for death. Texts (1) to (3) are in direct speech too, and have considerable emotional force. I do not want to discuss Ussani's comments, which include some typically Italian nonsense ([45]). But one inevitable objection comes up again : there is no mention of cutting the veins, as the soldiers clearly die of mutual strokes of the sword (*gladiis incumbere*, 500 ; *fodiemus uiscera ferro* ; 511 ; *uiscera ... transigit ensis* 545 ; further 547 ;

know that death is a blessing ; from those who have life before them the gods conceal this, in order that they may go on living".

(42) Further Thomas 1903. Brisset 1964, 15 n. 4 mentions 4,556 ff. as a possibility.

(43) "By now half dead, they dragged their protruding entrails over the wide gangways and poured streams of blood into the sea. They rejoice to see the light they have rejected, to watch their conquerors with disdainful eyes, and to feel the approach of death".

(44) "Yet even after the example set by these heroes, cowardly nations will not understand how simple a feat it is to escape slavery by suicide ; and the tyrant is dreaded for his sword, and freedom is weighed down by cruel weapons, and men are ignorant that the purpose of the sword is to save every man from slavery. O that death were the reward of the brave only, and would refuse to release the coward from life !".

(45) E.g. : (4) deals not with a specific soldier but is actually in the plural. Ussani, 553 justifies this with the remark that Tacitus "citava a memoria".

558-62 ; 564-5 ; *ignorantque datos, ne quisquam seruiat ensis* 578 (46)). In (4) we do have "blood and water", but it is water of the sea again, and not a bath, and the text contains no mention whatsoever of the physical symptoms described by Tacitus. It is an entirely different form of death, death by mutual killing, which has no relevance to Lucan's death. And what are we to think of Lucan actually pronouncing words uttered by a commander of Caesar ? The description in *BC* leaves no doubt as to Lucan's admiration for his attitude, but in the end his virtue is "misdirected", as Caesar is evidently the villain of the play. Text (5) has the advantage of being general without being unspecific, but, apart from the remarks above, it seems to confer a somewhat obsolete image of Lucan dying the virtuous death of a Stoic sage, uttering instructive maximes until his final breath. It is incompatible with Tacitus' suggestive image of Lucan cowardly betraying his mother, disregards Lucan's unorthodox Stoicism and takes away much of the pathos in the other texts. To sum up : many parts of the Vulteius-scene stir our imagination, but none of them stands out clearly.

Weber 1858 (according to Ussani 1903, 550) briefly considered a part of the *elogium Curionis* (4,799 ff.) and some of the dying words of Pompey (8,629-632) (47). The fact that Pompey finally dies by having his head cut off should settle this matter right away, but similar objections to the ones listed above might be raised here as well.

Other Texts. — Every page of *BC* is spattered with blood : *sanguis* and its adjective *sanguineus* alone occur a staggering 130 times, and if we add *cruor, sanies* and *cruentus*, we come to more than 200 places where blood flows freely. So it is easy to pick out any text where this important detail of Tacitus' story is present. One may think of 3,572-3 where, during the naval battle near Massilia : ... *cruor altus in unda / spumat, et obducti concreto sanguine fluctus* (48), or of 4,237-250 where domesticated wild beasts regain their former *rabiesque furorque* during a dinner (*inter mensasque torosque* ; 245, cfr. Suet. *Vita*, 9 *epulatusque largiter !*).

(46) This famous verse was written on the sables of the French *Garde Nationale* during the French Revolution. Cfr. Ernst Bickel, "Ein Motiv aus Lucan bei E. M. Arndt 'Der Gott der Eisen wachsen liess' ", *RhM* 82 (1933) 285-288.

(47) "*Ne cede pudori / auctoremque dole fati : quacumque feriris, / crede manum superi. spargant lacerentque licebit, / sum tamen, o superi, felix, nullique potestas / hoc auferre deo. mutantur prospera uita : / non fit morte miser* (...)".

(48) "Their blood foamed deep upon the wave, and a crust of gore covered the sea".

No less absurd is 9,759-760 where Cato's soldier Aulus suffers from the effects of a bite by a snake called *dipsas*. He tries to quench his insatiable thirst by searching in the *uenae* of the desert (755), then swallowing all the water of the sea, and in a horrible climax : ... *ferroque aperire tumentes / sustinuit uenas atque os implere cruore* (49). The physical effects contrasting the centre of the body with the extremities occur in 6,750-4 : *protinus astrictus caluit cruor atraque fouit / uolnera et in uenas extremaque membra cucurrit. / percussae gelido trepidant sub pectore fibrae, / et noua desuetis subrepens uita medullis / miscetur morti* (...) (50). But here it is not life receding, but life returning ! The witch Erichtho revives a poor corpse to make him predict the future to Pompey's son, and with great precision Lucan reverses the usual symptoms of death into their opposites. Of course we are very far from Tacitus' story here.

It seems needless to point to the great number of sections in *BC* where soldiers occur, or where a fierce hate of tyrants and Caesars is manifest (51). *BC* is full of texts which, in one way or another, might well be *ultima uerba*, but of none of them can this be shown conclusively.

Summary and Conclusion. — As we have seen, it seems best to take Tacitus' text on Lucan's *ultima uerba* (*Ann.* 15.70) as not relating historical fact. If we take it as a story, and take the story for what is says, we may adduce a number of texts in *BC*, which might be these "last words". Among them 3,638-646 ; 9,308-14 ; 7,608-15 and 4,478-81 have found various supporters over the centuries, and especially 3,638 ff. is still mentioned in many studies. On close scrutiny none of these texts stands the test of a confrontation with Tacitus' text. As Heitland, xxx observed, none answers exactly to the description in Tac. *Ann.* 15,70.

It may be argued that my objections to e.g. 3,638 ff. and 9,308 ff. amount to denying the possibility of hyperbole and pathos, which are so very typical of Lucan's work. It may also be argued that this

(49) "... and ventured to open his swollen veins with his sword, and fill his mouth with the blood".

(50) "... it warmed the livid wounds, coursing into the veins and the extremities of the limbs. Struck by it, the vital organs thrilled within the cold breast ; and a new life, stealing into the inward parts that had lost it, wrestled with death".

(51) E.g. 7,426-459 ; 638-646.

approach is too narrow, as I look for a text which corresponds as closely as possible to every detail of Tacitus' account. What I tried to show is that through this philological approach it is not possible to point to any specific text as the one Tacitus may have alluded to. All texts contain one or more fitting elements, but none of them has them all. If we abandon strict philologic standards, and assume hyperbole or approximative parallelism, it will be largely a matter of personal taste which text one establishes as the right one.

If we choose to retain remarks on Lucan's last words in our texts and commentaries, we must provide them with these nuances. This is another myth destroyed, perhaps, but every reader has become free once more to invent his own myths.

Katholieke Universiteit,
Nijmegen (The Netherlands).

Vincent HUNINK.