

'Magnus, be great!'

Puns on Names as Transcultural Expression of Social Expectations in Lucan's *Pharsalia* and the Pyramid Texts of Teti

In Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Pompey is often called 'Magnus' to underline the 'great' expectations he arouses. In the Egyptian pyramid texts of Pharaoh Teti, his by-name *Pr-Wr* ('Great House') guarantees 'great' deeds. In my paper, I show through a comparison between these culturally and temporally separated texts that name punning is a transcultural device of social communication to express assumptions about the name-bearer. Thereby, I exemplify structural Latin-Egyptian comparisons as an innovative approach to cultural as well as literary studies.

The puns on names in Lucan have long been noticed (Mitsis/Ziogas 2016; Feeney 1986). Nevertheless, there are only rudimentary studies on either the social role of names or of puns (Tomcik 2021). For Egypt, puns in rituals have been studied extensively (Guglielmi 1984; Morenz 1958), but without closer attention to their social implications (Geisen *et al.* 2021). Methodologically, we barely have any scholarship on puns or names through transcultural comparisons (La Balbás *et al.* 2024).

First, I discuss a well-known pun on Pompey in Lucan's *Pharsalia*: After fleeing Caesar's army, the senate elects its commander: '*Magnum[...] iubete / esse ducem*' (5.46–47), the consul asks. As has been noticed, this can either be translated as 'Order 'The Great' to be the leader', taking '*Magnus*' as Pompey's by-name, or as 'Order the leader to be great', taking '*magnus*' as adjective. The first reading focuses on the commander's identity, the alternative on his quality. Thereby, the pun highlights the social expectations the by-name 'The Great' entails, while flattening its honorific connotation: By ordering Pompey to fulfill his name's expectations instead of taking his honor for granted, the senators emphasize that he is an officer of their party and they

are not just his followers (*non Magni partes, sed Magnum in partibus esse*; 5.14). Eventually, Pompey will be defeated by Caesar: The pun turns out to be illusionary.

In an overview of Lucan's poem, I show that attaching illusionary expectations to names through puns is a general feature: For example, Pompey's by-name '*Magnus*' is contrasted with his ignoble 'small' grave in book 8. Puns on names are not limited to Pompey: In book 7, Brutus disguises himself in commoner's cloths, apparently according to his name '*Brutus*' ('stupid'), but actually using this disguise to spare himself for killing Caesar; however, the senators' hope that Brutus will save the republic will be disappointed.

Second, I investigate a similar expression of social expectations in the pyramid texts for pharaoh Teti (around 2340 BC). In a hymn to Teti, the speaker requests: 'Come against your enemy, you are greater than he in your name Pr-Wr!' (*prj jr hft.j=k [tw]t wr jr=f m rn=k n(j) pr-wr*; PT 371). This line entails a pun between the wish 'come', '*pr*', together with 'you are great(er)', '*wr*', and the name '*Pr-Wr*' which means 'Great House', built with the word for 'house', related to the verb '*pr*', 'go', and the adjective '*wr*', 'great'. Thus, the by-name repeats the components of the wish: 'Come', '*pr*', and 'great', '*wr*'. Similar to the passage in Lucan, the pun on Teti's by-name is aggressive, highlighting the expectation of greatness against an enemy. However, whereas the pun on Pompey is illusionary, the Egyptian's pun confirms the pharaoh's success: Teti's by-name '*Pr-Wr*' is an unchallenged identification.

This is not the only instance in Teti's pyramid texts for puns on names as confirmation of a wish. In the saying 'Be content in your name Ka-Htp!' (*htp=k m rn=k n(j) k'-htp*; PT 356), the wish 'be content', '*htp=k*', is repeated in Teti's by-name 'Ka-Htp', meaning 'Your Ka ('personality') is content'. Once more, the fulfillment of the wish is granted by identifying the pharaoh through a corresponding by-name.

In sum, puns on names are a transcultural device to express expectations, but their connotations are context-dependent: Whereas the puns in Lucan's *Pharsalia* are illusionary, the puns in Teti's inscriptions are confirmative. Consequently, my study exemplifies the approach of structural Latin-Egyptian comparison as an innovative means to detect transcultural parallels of social communication, punning on names, while also identifying, in my example by the connotation of the puns, contextual differences.

Bibliography

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