

## To Be, or Not to Be Pardoned: Lucan's Play with Vergil's "*finis laborum*"

In his *Anti-Aeneid*, Lucan inverts Vergil's scenes in which beaten victims in a battle plead or do not plead for Aeneas' mercy. Caesar thus becomes an Anti-Aeneas. We can extrapolate what Cato's suicide and Caesar's death could have meant for the *Pharsalia*.

In the *Aeneid*, Venus asks Jupiter (1.241) what *finis laborum* he has in mind to bestow on her son and his crew. On a metapoetic level, this question is also directed at Vergil himself. The *Aeneid* ends with Turnus' death after the final duel. Turnus claims to accept Aeneas' right to kill him ("*Utere sorte tua.*" 12.932). Then he continues to tell Aeneas why he should spare his life. Turnus attempts to evoke the same feelings in Aeneas that incidentally the slain Lausus brought before Aeneas' eyes (10.824): the love of his father in the face of the potential death of his son. When Turnus' words just begin to convince Aeneas to sheath his sword, Turnus' baldric brings back the memory of Pallas as he was slain, spoilt and his father ridiculed by Turnus in *Aeneid* 10. Enraged, Aeneas buries his sword in Turnus' chest in book 12. Generations of readers and scholars have been puzzled by this kind of closure to say the least. Yet it has been argued that Turnus' death finds its parallel in Marc Antony's fate at Actium and as such is a fitting end of the *Aeneid*.

Mezentius does not plead for his life when Aeneas has defeated him. In 10.902 he exhorts Aeneas to kill him: "*nullum in caede nefas*". While he is aware that he is unpopular among his own people, he just asks Aeneas to see to it that he will be buried with his son in *Aeneid* 10.

Aeneas does not pardon his opponent twice. The important question especially at the end of the *Aeneid* is why Aeneas does not pardon Turnus.

In the *Pharsalia*, Caesar's opponents actually strive not to be pardoned by the tyrant. They want to become his victims in order not to have to thank the criminal for their lives. Caesar in turn desperately wants to pardon his opponents.

The first instance is Domitius in book 2.507-525. Caesar is said to know that his opponent fears his pardon and pardons him anyway in order to set an example for the future. Consequently, Domitius seeks to kill himself in order to escape Caesar's gift.

A very interesting case is Metellus in book 3.112-168. Caesar tells him: "*dignum te Caesaris ira / nullus honor faciet.*" (3.136f.) A pardon is not necessary here. Metellus is not even worthy to count as an enemy. Even Lucan scornfully casts doubts on Metellus' motives to resist Caesar ("*amor auri*" 3.119).

In book 9 Caesar is presented with Pompey's head. Caesar hides his joy under heavy accusations against the Egyptians. Not *ira*, but *fides* is the emotion Caesar pretends to feel (9.1063). His first reason to be angry at the Egyptian "*scelus*", he says, is that he has lost ("*perdidimus*") the unique remuneration of civil war, i.e. the opportunity to pardon the defeated and to bestow salvation on them ("*victis donare salutem*" 9.1066ff.). Lucan himself is grateful for the fact that Rome's honor was spared Caesar's pardon of Pompey (9.1061f.). Caesar at least can condone Ptolemy's transgression on the grounds of his youth (9.1088f.). Turnus' youth did not count in the end of the *Aeneid*.

What has been lost in the *Pharsalia* is the opportunity to rewrite the *Aeneid*. In this context it is important that Lucan just instructed Caesar on the task of poets in 9.980-6 and that Caesar visited Troy and invoked Aeneas, Lavinium and the entire *Aeneid* in 9.990-9. Now Caesar asks why the pharaoh has acted independently and secretly thrust his weapon into Caesar's affairs ("*labor*"; 9.1072). Whereas in the *Aeneid* the Rutulians look upon the scene of their leader's demise with true and fitting emotions ("*gemitus*", 12.928f., cf. Turnus in 12.952), the onlookers in Lucan are at their "liberty" to suppress their sorrow ("*gemitus*") and to stand there in faked glee (9.1107).

What will the end of Caesar's and Lucan's labor look like? Cato in 2.315ff. suggested that weapons should penetrate his body to bring about a *finis laborum* and peace for the price of liberty. In all likelihood Cato's suicide will frustrate Caesar's desire to pardon an enemy

and thus save Rome's honor yet again. Caesar's death, however, could be portrayed as the repetition of the death of Mezentius or as a vain hope for closure.

#### Bibliography

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