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## Lucan's Use of Alliteration

### Abstract

The present article gives a rough outline of Lucan's use of alliteration by attempting to discover the most important functions of this particular rhetorical device in his epic. For the sake of clarity, the instances of alliteration that are found in the epic are divided into three groups: 'pure' (of one and the same consonant), 'mixed' (of two or more consonants) and 'combined' (accompanied by other rhetorical devices). Lucan's use of alliteration is shown to extend far beyond the achievement of an instantaneous sound effect at the level of a single line or even a single passage. In several cases, alliteration is used as a means of association in order to allow the poet to connect passages that seemingly have nothing in common. This in turn leads to the conclusion that Lucan's compositional scheme – based on allusions and association – is present even at the level of the phoneme.

Keywords: Lucan, alliteration, *Pharsalia*, allusion, association, sound effect, figure of speech, intertextuality.

Scholars have long noticed that alliteration occupies an important place in Lucan's arsenal of rhetorical devices.<sup>1</sup> However, research on Lucan's use of al-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. W.J. Evans, *Alliteratio Latina*, London 1921, p. 9, 56–58, 76–83, 107, 132; K. Seitz, *Der Pathetische Erzählstil Lucans*, "Hermes" 1965, nr 93(2), p. 204–232, at 208; S.F. Bonner, *Lucan and the Declamation Schools*, "American Journal of Philology" 1966, Jul., vol. 87, nr 3, p. 257–289, at 259; M.P.O. Morford, *The Poet Lucan: Studies in Rhetorical Epic*, Bristol 1996, p. 25, 51; R. Godel, Dorica Castra: *sur une figure sonore de la poésie latine*, "Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure" 1984, nr 38, p. 225–234, at 230–232; M. Leigh, *Lucan: Spectacle and Engagement*, Oxford 1997, p. 138; J. Hellegouarc'h, *Rhétorique et poésie dans la Pharsale de Lucain*, "Vita Latina" 2001, nr 164(1), p. 36–44, at 37, 42; Ch.R. Raschle, *Die Schlangenepisode in Lucans Pharsalia (IX 587–949): Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, Frankfurt am Main 2001, p. 210; A. Alloncle-Pery, *De la rhétorique à la poétique dans Lucain, Pharsale, IX, 950 – X*, "Vita Latina" 2001, nr 164(1), p. 45–56, at 56; E. Narducci, *Rhetoric and Epic. Virgil's Aeneid and Lucan's Bellum Civile* [in:] *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, eds. W. Dominik, J. Hall, Oxford 2007, p. 382–395, at 390; P. Asso, *A Commentary on Lucan, "De Bello Civili", IV. Introduction, Edition, and Translation*, Berlin–New York 2010, p. 25; S. Casali, *The Bellum Civile as an Anti-Aeneid* [in:] *Brill's Companion to Lucan*, ed. P. Asso,

literation would still seem to be somewhat limited – or, rather, incidental and un-systematic. Significant cases of alliteration are detected and thoroughly examined only as the need arises and in particular contexts. Apart from studies of individual cases, where alliteration provides some important clue that might solve a particular problem, no separate systematic study of Lucan's alliterations has yet been undertaken.

Much of what is already known about Lucan's alliterations has been discovered as a spin-off – so to speak – from major research carried out on Virgil and other Latin poets<sup>2</sup> or even on Lucan himself, but mostly *en passant*<sup>3</sup> or with the focus being on his intertextual relationships.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this paper is to give at least a rough outline of the most important functions of alliteration in the *Pharsalia* by analysing representative passages which exhibit this feature. To this end, I shall divide the passages into three groups according to the following criteria:

1. "Pure" alliteration (of one and the same consonant, possibly accompanied by assonance of vowels).

2. "Mixed" alliteration (of two or more consonants, possibly accompanied by assonance of vowels).

3. "Combined" alliteration (accompanied by other rhetorical devices such as onomatopoeia, anagram, homoeoteleuton, rhyme, polyptoton, anagram, anaphora, paronomasia [pun], etc.).

Though rather artificial – as it is obvious that in most cases Lucan combines various figures – this division provides for greater clarity.

## 1. "Pure" alliteration

The first case of Lucan's "pure" alliteration is to be found at the very beginning of the prologue to the *Pharsalia*. The two opening lines of the epic contain one of the most spectacular examples of the use of this particular figure:

Bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos  
iusque datum sceleri canimus [...]  
(1.1–2)

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Leiden 2011, p. 81–110, at 86. Most recently, in the introduction to his commentary to the fourth book of the *Pharsalia*, Paolo Asso numbers alliteration among the most important tropes and figures which appear in the epic: *Alliteration is strictly speaking a poetic rather than a rhetorical feature, but its use naturally produces rhetorical effects because the repeated initial sounds keep the words together and function as an aural sign-posting device for the audience who listens to the poetic performance* (P. Asso, *A Commentary...*, p. 25).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. Godel, *Dorica Castra...*, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S.H. Braund, *Lucan 6.715*, "Classical Quarterly" 1989, nr 39(1), p. 275–276, at 276; M. Möller, *Dunkelrede und Divination: Hölderlins Lucan und die Poetik des Verstummens*, "International Journal of the Classical Tradition" 2003, Fall, nr 10(2), p. 187–220, at 211.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Godel, *Dorica Castra...*, p. 230–232; S. Casali, *The Bellum Civile as an Anti-Aeneid*, p. 86; R. Sowerby, *The Augustan Lucan*, "Translation and Literature" 2005, Autumn, nr 14(2), p. 148–178, at 150.

In these lines, the alliterated consonant *k* draws the audience's attention to the fact that the war is "more than civil", as well as to the verb *canimus*, which – as James O'Donnell points out – is central to the whole prologue.<sup>5</sup>

The alliterative connection of this central word *canimus* with the adjective *civilia* and the nouns *campos* and *scelus* functions as a tell-tale sign that clearly marks the narrator's attitude to the subject which he is about to relate. Here again, the velar *c* is associated with the symbolic "murder" of the Roman Republic perpetrated by Caesar, whose name – significantly – also begins with the consonant *c*.<sup>6</sup>

Another interesting example of alliteration – where the consonant remains the same but it is accompanied by the assonance of two vowels – is to be found in the second book:

[...] nisi cum cervice recepta  
 excussi placuere tori [...]  
 (2.604–605)

In this case, Lucan repeats two-phoneme sequences of the consonant *c*, combined either with the vowel *e* or with the vowel *u*, thus forming the following pattern:

cu – ce – ce – ce – cu – cu

By means of this manoeuvre, the ablative *cervice recepta*, which contains the juxtaposed variant *ce*, is set against a background consisting of the alliterated variant *cu*. This expression – described by scholars as being singular or even mordant<sup>7</sup> – thus becomes more audible and at the same time more important. As a result, it makes a stronger impact on the audience's imagination.

## 2. "Mixed" alliterations

Just as the first group of alliterations has proved to be extremely meaningful, so too does the second group have its hidden meanings and its hidden messages. The first example of such an alliteration is to be found in the following passage:

At, postquam trunco cervix abscisa recessit,  
 vindicat hoc Pharius, dextra gestare, satelles.  
 (8.674–675)

In both lines, Lucan alliterates two consonants – *c* and *s* – which come together in the grapheme *x* in the words *cervix* and *dextra*. Line 8.675, however, is much more sophisticated, owing to the addition of a third phoneme: *t*. Moreover, the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J.T. O'Donnell, *The Prologue to Lucan*, "The Classical World" Dec., 1978–Jan., 1979, nr 72(4), p. 235–237, at 235.

<sup>6</sup> Very often, Lucan alliterates the consonant *k* in contexts that are connected with the misfortunes that befall Pompey, the Senate or the Republic itself (e.g.: *vacuaque loco cessere curules. / Omnia Caesar erat*, 3.107–108).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. Leigh, op. cit., p. 149.

consonant *t* is close to the consonant *s*. Furthermore, the expression *dextra gestare*<sup>8</sup> is made even more conspicuous by the assonance of the vowel *e*:

dextra gestare

It is not surprising that Lucan has enriched this particular expression with so many extra sound effects, as it refers to the order to carry Pompey's impaled head in a macabre procession. The narrator emphasizes his indignation by means of a double alliteration (i.e. of the consonants *s* and *t*, as the consonant *x* in *dextra* consists of *c* and *s*, which are subsequently repeated in *gestare*), which is enhanced still further by means of assonance – and not only of one vowel, but of two – *a* and *e* – which – like the alliterated consonants – follow the same order. The order is therefore as follows:

vocal 1 – consonant 1 – consonant 2 – vocal 2

As we have seen in the previous section, the symbolic theme of a decapitation, which is ubiquitous in the *Pharsalia*, is given greater impact by the use of alliteration.

### 3. “Combined” alliterations

#### a. Onomatopoeia

The third group of alliterations often used by Lucan consists in those which are accompanied by other rhetorical devices. The most conspicuous of these is onomatopoeia. It is quite spectacular in the ninth book of the *Pharsalia*, where the poet depicts the horrific serpents which inhabit Libya. For example:

aspides, in mediis sitiebant dipsades undis.  
(9.610)

In the line above, Lucan alliterates the spirant *s*, which imitates the hissing of the snakes. In 9.610 he uses collusive alliteration<sup>9</sup>, which – as Gilbert Highet defines it in his article – consists in *employing the same consonant to end one word and to begin the next*.<sup>10</sup> This happens between the words *mediis* and *sitiebant*, the repeated consonant being *s*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It seems that Lucan's *dextra gestare* is somewhat reminiscent of Virgil's *Aen.* 12.206 (*dextra sceptrum nam forte gerebat*). Interestingly, this line is part of the account of the “civil” war between the Trojans and their former allies, the Latins. Virgil – in turn – is inspired by Homer (*Il.* 1.234–239). Cf. M. Putnam, *The Ambiguity of Art in Virgil's “Aeneid”*, “Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society” 2001, Jun., nr 145(2), p. 162–183, at 162–163.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G. Highet, *Consonant Clashes in Latin Poetry*, “Classical Philology” 1974, nr 69, p. 178–185, at 178.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> The fact that the alliteration occurs just at the meeting point of two dactyls increases the hissing:

v	v	/	v	v	/	/
<i>me</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>bant</i>

A little further on – in the ninth book – there is another very interesting example of onomatopoeia achieved by means of a particular distribution of the repeated spirant:

ossaque dissolvens cum corpore tabificus seps;  
(9.723)

In this line, Lucan has alliterated the spirant *s* in two different ways. Firstly, he has chosen words such as *ossa* and *dissolvens*, which already contain the alliteration and are also loaded with meaning: the strong alliteration in the expression *ossa dissolvens* would seem to imitate the noise that is heard when the venom dissolves bones. Secondly, at the end of the line he has created a collusive alliteration by juxtaposing the adjective *tabificus* with the noun *seps*, the former ending in *s* and the latter beginning with *s*. In all, therefore, this line actually contains three double spirants: *ossa*, *dissolvens* and *tabificus seps*.

The following lines, which are part of the famous Medusa excursus, have been composed with the aid of a similar technique:

Nec Pallas spectare potest, voltusque gelassent  
Perseos aversi, si non Tritonia densos  
sparsisset crines texissetque ora colubris.  
(9.681–683)

The collusive alliteration goes beyond the end of particular lines. The final *s* in *densos* meets the initial *s* in *sparsisset*, thus creating a stream of alliterations.

The pattern of these three lines is very interesting, as the poet – consciously or not – has arranged the spirants in a symmetrical way. Moreover, this intriguing pattern is additionally highlighted by the accompanying vowels:

Nec Pallas spectare potest, || voltusque gelassent  
as s s s ass  
Perseos aversi, || si non Tritonia densos  
s(e)os si si sos  
sparsisset crines || texissetque ora colubris.  
s sisse es (k)sisse s

One half-line “reflects” the other, as it were:

ass s s ass  
s(e)os si si sos  
s sisse es (k)sisse s

It is difficult to believe that such a pattern, which mimics the behaviour of a mirror, is a product of sheer chance. A more plausible explanation for the alliteration being arranged in such a symmetrical way would be that it alludes to the mirror shield which Athena gives to Perseus in order to protect him from the monster's lethal gaze. At the same time, the hissing spirants are particularly evocative of the Gorgon's serpentine hair.

Interestingly, Ovid – to whom Lucan openly alludes<sup>12</sup> – uses a similar device in his account of Perseus and Medusa (Ov. *Met.* 4. 783):

Vocal assonance (including diphthongs):

aere repercusso || formam adspexisse Medusae  
ae e e e e e e e e

Alliteration:

aere repercusso || formam adspexisse Medusae  
r r r ss r s(k)s ss s

General symmetry:

\_ / v v \_ / \_ / || \_ / \_ / v v \_ / \_  
aere repercusso || formam adspexisse Medusae  
ae e e ss o || o sse e ae

The symmetry of this line consists in the distribution of particular vowels and consonants before and after the caesura. Before the caesura, the dominant alliterated consonant is *r*, but after the caesura it is the spirant *s*. While the vowels are distributed regularly, the alliterated consonants have been divided into two groups: the *littera canina* dominates in the first half of the line (before the caesura) and the spirant dominates in the second half (after the caesura).

Though not as meticulous as Ovid, Lucan treats the caesura – including the bucolic diaeresis in line 9.680 – with due respect.

General symmetry:

Nec Pallas spectare potest, || voltusque gelassent  
as s s || s ass

Perseos aversi, || si non Tritonia densos  
s os si || si sos

sparsisset crines || texissetque ora colubris.  
s sisse es || [s]isse s

The general pattern of symmetry based on alliteration is perfect, as in line 9.683, where the apparently ‘additional’ *es* in the word *crines* actually coincides with the third ictus which marks the caesura. It therefore comes in the very middle of the line, preserving the pattern’s ideal symmetry.

## b. Homoeoteleuton and rhyme

Another interesting combination of alliteration with other rhetorical devices includes homoeoteleuton and rhyme, especially in view of the fact that both these figures – the latter in particular – were considered to be symptomatic of poor

<sup>12</sup> Compare: *squalebant late Phorcynidos arva Medusae* (Luc. *Phars.* 9.626) and: *inponit Phorcynidos ora Medusae* (Ov. *Met.* 4.724). For Ovid’s influence on Lucan see: A. Keith, *Ovid in Lucan: The Poetics of Instability*, in *Brill’s Companion to Lucan*, ed. P. Asso, Leiden 2011, p. 111–132.

literary style by the ancient Romans.<sup>13</sup> Whereas Virgil has been found to have carefully rearranged certain lines of the *Aeneid* in order to avoid homoeoteleuta<sup>14</sup>, Lucan seems to have been willing to use them as an original means of poetic expression.

In the passage below, however, Lucan has combined the alliterated *littera canina* with assonance (of the vowel *e* in line 1.327), homoeoteleuton and rhyme:

Utque ferae tigres numquam posuere furorem,  
 quas, nemore Hyrcano matrum dum lustra secuntur,  
 altus caesorum pavit cruor armentorum,  
 sic et Sullanum solito tibi lambere ferrum  
 durat, Magne, sitis. [...]  
 (1.327–331)

These lines contain a considerable accumulation of homoeoteleuta. The *littera canina* is not only in their immediate proximity, but also forms an inherent part of each of them. Line 1.328 also contains other interesting devices such as the assonance of the vowel *u* combined with the juxtaposed homoeoteleutic *um* (*matrum dum*)<sup>15</sup>, which itself coincides with another homoeoteleuton (*matrum... caesorum... armentorum... ferrum*):

matrum dum lustra secuntur

Apart from the homoeoteleuta, this passage also contains a rhyme which occurs between the accusative *furorem* (line 1.327) and the ablative *nemore* (1.328). This type of rhyme, which is called internal rhyme<sup>16</sup> or middle rhyme, was known to Roman poets (e.g. *Quot caelum stellas, tot habet tua Roma puellas*, *Ov. Ars am.* 1.59)<sup>17</sup> and is found in line 4.481 of the *Pharsalia*: *O mundi tantorum causa laborum*.<sup>18</sup>

As far as the content of this passage is concerned, the rhyme occurs in the words *furorem* and *nemore*, which refer to “madness” and to a “grove”. In the context of the third book of the *Pharsalia*, where Caesar symbolically destroys an ancient grove, the deforestation being a metafor for the destruction of Pompey

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Parturiunt montes nascetur ridiculus mus* (Hor. *Ars.* 167). Cf. W. Allen Jr., “*O Fortunatam Natam...*”, “*Transactions of the American Philological Association*” 1956, nr 87, p. 130–146.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. L. Håkanson, *Homoeoteleuton in Latin Dactylic Poetry*, “*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*” 1982, nr 86, p. 87–115, at 90–91.

<sup>15</sup> The juxtaposition *matrum dum* clearly goes against the Horatian principle, being similar to *ridiculus mus*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J.W. Halporn, M. Ostwald, T.G. Rosenmeyer, *The Masters of Greek and Latin Poetry. Revised Edition*, Indianapolis–Cambridge 1980, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. by S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth and E. Eidinow, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Oxford 2012, p. 187. Compare: *Aspice convexo nutantem pondere mundum, / terrasque tractusque maris caelumque profundum* (Verg. *Buc.* 4, 50–51).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M. Matthews, *Caesar and the Storm. A Commentary on Lucan De Bello Civili, Book 5 lines 476–721*, Bern 2008, p. 53.

the Great<sup>19</sup> and – together with him – that of the Roman Republic<sup>20</sup>, i.e. the *furor* mentioned in the first book.<sup>21</sup>

### c. Polypoton

Another device that sometimes accompanies alliteration in the *Pharsalia* is polypoton.<sup>22</sup> The first instance of the use of such a combination is to be found in the first book of the epic, where the poet depicts a frightful panorama of cosmic dissolution<sup>23</sup>:

antiquum repetens iterum chaos, omnia mixtis  
sidera sideribus concurrent [...]  
 (1.74–75)

In these lines, the alliteration occurs only within the polypoton and in the word *mixtis* which directly precedes it. The alliteration between *mixtis* and *sideribus* is collusive, as the final *s* of the former meets the initial *s* of the latter.

The polypoton *sidera sideribus* illustrates the collision of the stars, while the accumulation of hissing spirants is evocative of the sound of burning that accompanies the collision. Moreover, *s* is not the only alliterated consonant, as the whole sequence *sidera sideribus concurrent* contains a considerable accumulation of the *littera canina*. By means of such simple devices Lucan has thus enhanced the expressive quality of the image.

Another interesting case of (mixed) alliteration combined with polypoton is to be found in the battle scene in the fourth book, where polypoton is used onomatopoeically, as a means of making the audience ‘hear’ the sounds of clashing soldiers and broken bones:

tum cervix lassata **quati**, tum pectore pectus<sup>24</sup>  
 (4.624)

frangitur armatum conliso pectore pectus.  
 (4.783)

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's Bellum Civile*, Cambridge 1992, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Pyplacz, *When Legends Come Alive. A Reading of Lucan's Pharsalia*, Kraków 2015, p. 94.

<sup>21</sup> Compare: *Quis furor, o cives, quae tanta licentia ferri?* (1.8); *primus raptam librare bipennem / ausus et aeriam ferro proscindere quercum* (3.433–434). Another interesting example of alliteration of the *littera canina* combined with rhymes is also to be found in the first book of the *Pharsalia*:

*maiores in luce moras, tu sola furentem  
 inde virum poterat atque hinc retinere parentem*  
 (1.115–116)

Here again, the rhyme occurs in two words that are crucial to the meaning of the epic: *furentem* and *parentem*. These words resound a little later on in Laelius' totally insane vow of criminal loyalty to Caesar (*pectore si fratris gladium iuguloque parentis / condere me iubeas*, 1.376–377), which itself is an obvious sign of *furor*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Wills, *Repetition in Latin Poetry. Figures of Allusion*, Oxford 1996, p. 220–221.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Henderson, *Lucan. The World at War* [in:] *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies. Lucan*, ed. Ch. Tesoriero, Oxford 2010, p. 433–492, at 465. Cf. J. Wills, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Wills, op. cit., p. 198.



In these lines, Lucan has made the most of two consonants that are an inherent part of the word repeated in the polyptoton: the velar *c* and the alveolar *t*. The immediate vicinity of the elements of the polyptoton illustrates – rather onomatopoeically – the collision of two soldiers' torsos.

#### d. Anagram

Another device which appears alongside alliteration in the *Pharsalia* is the anagram. Though seldom used in the epic, it is extremely powerful and – interestingly – occurs most often in connection with the name *Roma*, which is disguised either as *mora* or *amor*. This technique was not Lucan's invention, as it has also been found in Virgil's *Aeneid*<sup>25</sup>, where Aeneas, the future father of the Roman nation, is the son of Venus, the goddess of love, and – at the same time – the human brother of Amor.

As the *Pharsalia* is a response to the *Aeneid*, it comes as no surprise that the Virgilian anagram appears at the beginning of Lucan's poem, accompanied by the alliterated *t*:

Tum, si tantus amor belli tibi, Roma, nefandi,  
(1.21).

The same anagram appears in the second book, where Cato refuses to have intercourse with his wife, as – to use Shadi Bartsch's words – *better not to engage in such union while the Republic is under assault*<sup>26</sup>:

[...] nec foedera prisca  
sunt temptata tori: iusto quoque robur amori  
restitit. Hi mores, haec duri in mota Catonis  
secta fuit, [...]  
(2.378–381)

In this passage, the word *amor* is clearly an anagram for the Roman Republic, which Cato loves more than his own wife. It is Rome, not Marcia, that is his true *amor*. However, the words which Lucan chooses to describe this eminently heroic attitude – which even surpasses what could be expected of a Stoic<sup>27</sup> – would seem to contradict this apparent praise. The alliterated *r* might well express the narrator's rather negative attitude towards such fanaticism.<sup>28</sup> The *littera canina* is also present in the adjective *duri* which refers to Cato. By means of alliteration, the hero's 'hardness' is made more conspicuous, while at the same time it grates on

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J.D. Reed, *Virgil's Gaze. Nation and Poetry in the Aeneid*, Oxford 2007, p. 109; idem, *The Bellum Civile as a Roman Epic* [in:] *Brill's Companion to Lucan*, ed. P. Asso, Leiden 2011, p. 21–31, at 31.

<sup>26</sup> S. Bartsch, *Ideology in Cold Blood: Lucan's Civil War*, Cambridge, MA, 1997, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. E. Fantham (ed. with a comm.), *Lucan, De Bello Civili, Book II*, Cambridge 1992, p. 149. See also: Cic. *Fin.* 6.38.

<sup>28</sup> For Cato's extremist tendencies see: Cf. W.R. Johnson, *Momentary Monsters: Lucan and his Heroes*, Ithaca 1987, p. 37–38; L. Fratantuono, *Madness Triumphant: a Reading of Lucan's Pharsalia*, Lanham, MD, 2012, p. 353; M. McAuley, *Reproducing Rome. Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius*, Oxford 2016, p. 51.

the ears of the audience. The internal rhyme occurring between the genitive *tori* and the dative *amori* increases the atmosphere of unease, as the matching endings do not match metrically<sup>29</sup>:

\_ / \_ \_ / v v \_ \_ / v v \_ / v v \_ / \_  
sunt temptata **tori**: iusto quoque robur **amori**

In the *Pharsalia*, the name *Roma* is also hidden in other words, for example (as in the *Aeneid*)<sup>30</sup> in the word *mora*, which means ‘delay’. Interestingly, the expression *rumpe moras* (Verg. *Aen.* 4.9) also appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Ov. *Met.* 15.583), and, symptomatically, in a passage concerning Rome. It then returns in the second book of Lucan’s epic, as has been noted by Elaine Fantham<sup>31</sup>:

[...] ‘*Romanne* petes pacisque recessus  
degener? In medios belli non ire furores  
iam dudum moriture paras? **Rue** certus et omnes  
lucis **rumpe moras** et Caesaris effuge munus.’  
(Luc. *Phars.* 2.522–525)

The alliteration of the *littera canina* present in the expression *rumpe moras* coincides with the “naturally” alliterative words with negative meanings, such as *furores* or *moriture*.

In the sixth book, an anagram of *Roma* – hidden within the adjective *nemoralis* – appears in the following line:

distat ab excelsa || nemoralis Aricia **Roma**,  
(6.75)

Apart from the alliteration of *r*, this line has yet another interesting feature, namely the symmetry hidden in the second part, following the *caesura*:

mora – Aricia – Roma

The name Aricia stands in the very centre of this half-line, between the repeated name of Rome written backwards and forwards. As the famous grove near Rome was the site where the ancient cult of *rex nemorensis* was practised – and Lucan’s Caesar is depicted by the narrator as being *flagrans cupidine regni* (7.240)<sup>32</sup> – the association of the sacred grove with Rome is something natural, as Rome – like the Arician grove – becomes the scene of a mortal combat for the *regnum*. Aricia thus functions a symbolic place – Rome in miniature. Moreover, the aforementioned line 7.240 contains both an alliteration of the *littera canina* and an anagram. Here the word *mora* clearly hints at the name Rome:

<sup>29</sup> Whereas the vowel *o* in the word *tori* is short, the one in *amori* is long and accented. Similarly, whereas the *i* in *tori* is accented, that in *amori* bears no stress and marks the end of the whole line. Thus the rhyme, though apparently ideal, appears to be somewhat defective, perhaps mirroring the defective morals of Cato who – though fully aware of the evil nature of the Civil War – consents to take part in it (cf. 2.286–288).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J.D. Reed, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. E. Fantham, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. C.M.C. Green, “*The Necessary Murder*”: *Myth, Ritual, and Civil War in Lucan, Book 3*, “Classical Antiquity” 1994, October, vol. 13, nr 2, p. 203–233, at 208–209.

aeger quippe morae flagransque cupidine regni,

The interesting thing about this particular line is that *mora* and *regnum* are presented as two antagonists<sup>33</sup>: *mora* excludes *regnum* – a fact that literally makes Caesar sick (*aeger*), as he cannot bear to wait any longer to fulfil his dream of becoming the king of Rome. On the other hand, *Roma* is the opposite of *regnum*, the republican system being the opposite of monarchy.

### e. Anaphora and epiphora

Another rhetorical device that is accompanied by alliteration in the *Pharsalia* is anaphora. The following passage from the second book is an excellent example of such a combination:

Hic laqueo fauces elisaque guttura fregit,  
hic se praecipiti iaculatus pondere dura  
 dissiluit percussus humo, mortisque cruento  
 victori rapuere suas; [...]  
 (2.154–157)

In this gruesome passage, the poet uses anaphora in order to heighten the horror of the depiction of the soldiers' violent deaths.<sup>34</sup> In line 2.154, the onomatopoeic accumulation of guttural vowels accompanied by vocal assonance (the vowels *e* and *u*) imitates the choking sound caused by the rupture of a soldier's throat:

Hic laqueo fauces elisaque guttura fregit  
 k ... kue ke kue gu gi

An interesting example of epiphora – also noted and analysed by Fantham<sup>35</sup> – is to be found in the second book of the *Pharsalia*:

[...] Periere nocentes,  
 sed cum iam soli possent superesse nocentes.  
 (2.143–144)

In this passage, the narrator refers to the horrors of Sulla's victory over Marius. The epiphora of the word *nocentes* underlines the fact that the proscriptions eventually did lead to the punishing of the guilty, but only after thousands of innocent people were killed. As the poet remarks with bitter irony, none but the guilty were left to be punished.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Compare: *praestet Lagea iuventus / hoc regi, Romana sibi. Tu parce morari* (10.394–395).

<sup>34</sup> See also: B. Walters, *Reading Death and the Senses in Lucan and Lucretius* [in:] *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses*, ed. S. Butler, A. Purves, London–New York 2013, p. 115–126.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. E. Fantham, op. cit., p. 109, p. 108.

<sup>36</sup> This device has been described by Quintilian. In the following passage – also quoted by Alexander W. Potts – the repeated word *Carthaginienses* serves to heighten the terror that is already triggered by the mention of Rome's formidable enemy (*Qui sunt qui foedera saepe ruperunt? Carthaginienses. Qui sunt qui crudelissime bellum gesserunt? Carthaginienses. Qui sunt qui Italiam deformarunt? Carthaginienses. Qui sunt qui sibi ignosci postulant? Carthaginienses*, Quint. *Inst.* 9.100.3). Lucan's repetition of the word *nocentes* thus functions in exactly the same manner as Quintilian's *Carthagi-*

## f. Paronomasia (pun)

The most interesting figure of speech which appears in the *Pharsalia* is without a doubt paronomasia. Generally employed by Roman and neo-Latin authors as a means of evoking laughter (hence the proverb *amantes amentes*)<sup>37</sup>, paronomasia is often accompanied by alliteration. One of these authors is Lucretius, who combines puns with alliteration in order to intensify the sarcastic tone of his discourse (e.g. 3.888–890).<sup>38</sup>

In Lucan's epic there are several places where paronomasia has been enhanced by alliteration. One of these is the grotesque pun in the sixth book:

Carminibus magicis opus est herbisque, cadaver  
ut cadat, [...]  
(6.822–823)

Here again, Lucan uses the highly onomatopoeic 'choking' alliteration of *c* and *q*, which evokes the sounds made by the corpse's mouth as it attempts to die once more (*mortemque repossit* in line 6.820 is also alliterated in the same manner).

The noun *cadaver* and the subjunctive *cadat* share the same stem, *cadaver* denoting a person who has fallen. This word-play is cleverer than it seems, as it is part of a greater compositional scheme. Earlier on in the same passage, the soldier – who has been handpicked and meticulously groomed as a soothsayer by Erichtho – fails to do fulfil his task, just like Phemonoe in the preceding book of the *Pharsalia*.<sup>39</sup> He cannot provide Sextus with any useful information at all. His physical failure as a corpse therefore reflects his spiritual failure as a *vates*.

Another darkly grotesque instance of word-play combined with alliteration is to be found in the fifth book of Lucan's poem<sup>40</sup>:

[...] Docuit populos venerabilis ordo  
non Magni partes sed Magnum in partibus esse.  
(5.13–14)

This passage – which has been enhanced by a polyptoton (*Magni, Magnum*) – contains a sophisticated and quite intricate use of word-play. The sigmatism, which is similar to that in 9.680–682 – where it imitates the hissing of the poisonous serpents that are winding round Medusa's neck – seems to follow a certain pattern:

non Magni partES SEd Magnum in partibus ESSE.

*nienses*. Interestingly, in one instance Quintilian's epiphora is strengthened by the use of sigmatism (*crudelissime bellum gesserunt*), which emphasizes the cruelty of the Carthaginians.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Arist. Rhet. 1412A, 1412b. Cf. E. Wölfflin, *Das Wortspiel im Lateinischen* [in:] *Sitzungsberichte der königl. Bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-philologische Classe. Sitzung vom 11. Juni 1887*, p. 187–208, at 193.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J.M. Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura*, Amsterdam 1980, p. 125.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. Masters, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J. Wills, op. cit., p. 278.

The ending of the word *partes* and the beginning of the word *sed* meet in a peculiar way, merging as the hidden infinitive *esse*. There are therefore actually two polyptotons. By means of this manoeuvre, the meaning of line 5.14 – as has been noted by Marco Fucecchi – is more or less that *Pompey's authority is not absolute, but rather it needs the Senate's imprimatur*.<sup>41</sup> However, the word *partes* need not necessarily refer only to the factions within the Roman senate (cf. *sequitur pars magna senatus*, 8.258), but may also refer to parts of human bodies, thus functioning as a sinister and somewhat dark-witted<sup>42</sup> harbinger of Pompey's beheading.

The same double meaning may well be concealed in the following lines:

[...] totae post **Magni funera partes**  
*libertatis* erant. [...]  
 (9.29–30)

These two lines are even more sophisticated, as they resemble a chain consisting of pairs of intertwined meanings: *Magni* corresponds with *partes* and *funera* with *libertatis*.<sup>43</sup> The macabre image of the butchered Pompey corresponds with that of the metaphorically 'murdered' Republican freedom, thus becoming its symbol.

## Conclusion

Our analysis of selected examples of Lucan's use of alliteration has shown that he has made the most of the expressive potential of this common rhetorical device. Not only does it serve him as a simple means of emphasizing important places in the text, but it is also part of much deeper compositional schemes, some of which extend far beyond a single passage or a single book.

While some (mainly 'pure') alliterations merely enrich the poem with extra sound effects, thus rendering some expressions more conspicuous than others, others (especially those combined with other figures of speech) seem to play an important role in the composition. The analysis has shown that Lucan sometimes uses alliteration not only as a sound instrumentation device, but also as a means of mimicking certain optical phenomena (for example in the Medusa excursus).

A closer look at some of the more interesting cases of Lucan's use of alliteration allows us to conclude that the role of this device in the *Pharsalia* is much more significant than one might think. Apart from highlighting or illustrating particular parts of the text, it also often helps the poet to associate certain motifs with others and – by this means – to bring together seemingly unconnected parts of the poem. Lucan's compositional plan therefore extends far beyond motifs, expressions or even words, as it is present even at the level of the phoneme.

<sup>41</sup> M. Fucecchi, *Partisans in Civil War* [in:] *Brill's Companion to Lucan*, ed. P. Asso, Leiden 2011, p. 237–256, at 245; cf. J. Masters, op. cit., p. 100, S. Bonner, op. cit., p. 266.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. P. Tooley, *Reading Epic. An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives*, London–New York 2003, p. 185.

<sup>43</sup> Compare: *Bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos* (1.1); in *sua victricis conversum viscera dextra* (1.3).

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