

A ‘DIAGNOSTIC’ CONJECTURE ON LUCAN 8.614*

Abstract: A thorough analysis of Lucan. 8.612–617 reveals that in line 614 we need an element (conjunction or adverb) that clarifies the syntactic subordination of the sentence *atque indignatus apertum fortunae praebere caput* to the main clause *involvit vultus*. Therefore, I suggest to change *atque* to *velut*.

Keywords: Lucan, textual criticism

*tum stringere ferrum
regia monstra parant. Ut vidit comminus ensis,
involvit vultus atque indignatus apertum
fortunae praebere caput; tum lumina pressit 615
continuitque animam, nequas effundere voces
vellet et aeternam fletu corrumpere famam.*

614 atque Ω : saevae *Håkanson* | indignatus Ω : indignatur *Bentley, Kortte*

We are at the acme of the eighth book of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*. Pompey has just passed on the little boat sent by the king of Egypt Ptolemy XIII to pick him up, where he will be eventually murdered by Ptolemy’s assassins; when he sees the swords menacingly pointed at him, Pompey performs a series of gestures, some of which are also attested in the biographical and historiographical tradition about his death.¹

The correct understanding of the syntactic structure of lines 613–615 has challenged older and recent scholars alike. Eighteenth

*) I want to thank professor Peter Schenk and my colleague Tommaso Mari for their useful suggestions.

1) The most famous is the act of covering his face: see Plut. Pomp. 79.5 ὁ δὲ ταῖς χερσὶν ἀμφοτέραις τὴν τήβεννον ἐφελκυσάμενος κατὰ τοῦ προσώπου and Cass. Dio 42.4.5 συνεκαλύψατο. As is well known, Caesar did the same before dying: cf. Suet. Iul. 82.2; Plut. Caes. 66.12.

century editors such as Oudendorp² and Burman³ put a semicolon or a colon after *vultus*, and consequently connected the text *atque indignatus apertum fortunae praebere caput* with the following main clause, i. e. *tum lumina pressit*; but both Bentley⁴ and Kortte⁵ rightly pointed out that the reference to *caput* should be connected with the act of covering the face rather than that of closing the eyes, and consequently deleted the colon or semicolon after *vultus* and relocated it after *caput*. From their point of view, however, this solution made the succession of an indicative (*involvit*) coordinated with a perfect participle (*indignatus*) unbearable: for this reason the two scholars conjectured independently *indignatur* for *indignatus*, thus providing the coordinated clause *atque ... caput* with the finite verb it needed. The consequent shift from a perfect (*involvit*) to a present (*indignatur*) and back again to another couple of perfects (*pressit*, *continuit*) is not impossible from a grammatical point of view and is widely attested.⁶

Even if Bentley and Kortte were certainly right to reject the older vulgate punctuation, their emendation is not without problems. In fact, *indignatur* obscures the hierarchical relationship between *involvit* and *indignatus*: one cannot easily put on the same level three physical actions – *involvit*, *pressit*, *continuit* – and the psychological meaning carried by *indignatur*, that seems to be strictly

2) M. Annaei Lucani Cordubensis Pharsalia sive belli civilis libri decem cum scholiaste hucusque inedito et notis integris Henrici Glareani, Jacobi Micylli, Joachimi Camerarii, Hugonis Grotii etc. et excerptis Omniboni Vicentini, Johannis Sulpitii Verulani, Jodoci Badii Ascensii, Lamberti Hortensii, Gregorii Bersmanni, Theodori Pulmanni, aliorumque nec non Thomae Maji supplementis et ineditis Francisci Gujeti aliorumque observationibus. Curante Francisco Oudendorpio qui suas etiam adnotationes et copiosos indices adjecit, Lugduni Batavorum 1728, 649.

3) M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia cum commentario Petri Burmanni, Leidae 1740, 583.

4) I read Bentley's note in M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia cum notis Hugonis Grotii et Richardi Bentleyi, Glasgae 1816, 366.

5) M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia cum notis Casp. Barthii, Ioh. Frider. Christii, Gottl. Cortii, Ioh. Frider. Gronovii, Nicol. Heinsii, Ioh. Aloys. Martyni-Lagunae, Dan. Willh. Trilleri aliorumque. Editionem morte Cortii interruptam absolvit Carol. Frider. Weber, Lipsiae 1828 (I), 1829 (II), II, 362.

6) See R. Kühner, Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache, zweiter Band: Satzlehre, neubearbeitet von K. Stegmann, I–II, Hannover ³1955, II.1, 116–117.

related to Pompey's first gesture (*involvit vultus*) rather than being a second, independent action by itself. As we will see, this distinction between physical and psychological reactions of the character is both ideologically and literally meaningful.

This objection is also what Housman probably meant when he wrote in his critical apparatus that "Bentleius et Cortius 'indignatur' scripserunt, non bene ex aequo positus involvendi indignandi premendi verbis";⁷ Housman consequently rejects their emendation and suggests to understand the text through a punctuation "non venustam, sed ad intellectum, ut videtur, necessariam":

*tum stringere ferrum
regia monstra parant. Ut vidit comminus ensis,
involvit vultus atque, indignatus apertum
fortunae praeberere, caput; tum lumina pressit 615
continuitque animam, nequas effundere voces
vellet et aeternam fletu corrumpere famam.*

By separating *atque* from *indignatus* and *praeberere* from *caput* with two commas Housman makes *caput* a second object of *involvit* together with *vultus*, and preserves the syntactic subordination of *indignatus*: the perfect deponent participle with active meaning introduces now a reason clause.⁸ A translation of Housman's text is given by Duff in his Loeb edition of the poem: "When Pompey saw the blades come close, he covered his face and head, disdainingly to expose them bare to the stroke of doom; then he closed tight his eyes and held his breath, that he might have no power of utterance and might not mar his immortal glory by tears".⁹

7) M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis libri decem, editorum in usum edidit A. E. Housman, Oxonii ²1927, 244.

8) In Housman's text *caput* is therefore the object of both *involvit* and *indignatus* (cf. *apertum*) by ἀπό κοινοῦ.

9) Lucan. The Civil War, with a translation by J. D. Duff, Cambridge (Mass.) 1962, 483. See also the German translation by W. Ehlers, Lucanus. Bellum Civile, der Bürgerkrieg, München ²1978, 387: "Als er sich Schwertern gegenüber sah, verhüllte er sein Antlitz und sein Haupt, schien Fortuna ihm doch unwert, daß er es ihr offen darbot; dann preßte er die Augen zu und hielt den Atem an, damit er nicht versucht sei, auch nur die geringsten Laute auszustoßen und für immer seinen Ruhm mit Tränen zu verderben."

Yet even Housman's solution, however ingenious, does not seem entirely satisfactory. The syntax arising from such a punctuation is not just "non venustam", but it would have been hardly intelligible even for an ancient reader;¹⁰ moreover, the caesura after *vultus* and the synaloephe between *atque* and *indignatus* suggest to separate *involvit vultus* from what follows. To sum up, it is extremely difficult to keep the paradosis intact by taking *caput* together with *atque*; this was also the opinion of Håkanson, who considered Housman's text "clumsy and disturbing"¹¹ and decided to act differently by emending *atque* into *saevae*. Håkanson believed that the original *saevae* lost its *s-* because of the final *-s* of *vultus* (haplography), and that the surviving AEVAE was later corrected to ATQVE; by accepting *saevae* (scil. *fortuna*)¹², *apertum ... caput* is more appropriately the object of *indignatus* alone, and the participle introduces a reason clause (just like in Housman's text) without altering the punctuation.

One last suggestion has to be discussed before I introduce my own solution to this long debated textual problem. The paradosis can be preserved without alterations of text or punctuation by understanding *indignatus* as a perfect indicative, with the common ellipse of *est*; this interpretation was first put forward by Postgate in his commentary of the eighth book¹³ and has been more recently defended by Hudson-Williams.¹⁴ By doing so the two scholars go somehow back to the idea of Bentley and Kortte, for they agree with them in considering *involvit vultus* and *atque indignatus aper-*

10) Ancient texts had no punctuation at all, and for this reason readers were often puzzled in assigning them their correct syntactical structure: to give an example, at Lucan. 8.517–519 our oldest scholia, *Commenta Bernensia* and *Adnotationes super Lucanum*, give two different interpretations of the entire passage because they were not able to recognize the existence of a pause at line 518 before *quod* (cf. H. Usener, *M. Annaei Lucani Commenta Bernensia*, Lipsiae 1869, 276; J. Endt, *Adnotationes super Lucanum*, Lipsiae 1909, 323).

11) L. Håkanson, *Problems of Textual Criticism and Interpretation in Lucan's De bello civili*, PCPhS 25 (1979) 48.

12) For other instances of this iunctura Håkanson quotes Lucan. 8.704; Sen. Oed. 786; Mart. Epigr. 4.18.7.

13) M. Annaei Lucani de Bello Civili liber VIII, ed. by J.P. Postgate, 103; Postgate quotes as parallels Lucan. 9.11–14 and Val. Fl. 7.18–20.

14) A. Hudson-Williams, *Notes on some Passages of Lucan*, CQ 34 (1984) 460–461.

tum fortunae praebere caput as two main clauses coordinated to each other, with no hierarchy – neither syntactical nor of content – between the first and the second. In his Teubner edition Shackleton Bailey followed Hudson-Williams’ solution, even if he considered Håkanson’s emendation *saevae* tempting.¹⁵

From a grammatical point of view, Hudson-Williams’ defense of the paradosis is probably good enough to live with; but a closer look at the text reveals that *atque indignatus apertum fortunae praebere caput* is ultimately unsatisfactory. To understand where the problem lies, it is crucial to linger on the setting of the scene as it is described by the poet. In this section of the book Lucan is telling one of the most famous and shocking events of the entire Roman history, i. e. Pompey’s assassination:¹⁶ both he and his audience knew that story down to the very last detail, and this is one of the reasons why Lucan does not just describe what Pompey does before being struck by his assassins’ swords, but reflects thoroughly on the meaning of every single act the character performs. In other words, as often happens in the *Bellum Civile*, the commentary on the events is as important as the events themselves, if not more: the latter are so widely known that the focus often shifts to the former, where the poet makes his literary and ideological positions explicit.¹⁷

This is the kind of literary process we come across in lines 612–617. Here Pompey makes three different gestures: he covers his face (*involvit vultus*), closes his eyes (*lumina pressit*) and holds his breath (*continuit animam*). The second and third gesture have their own authorial explanation: *nequas effundere voces vellet* comments on *continuit animam*, while *et aeternam fletu corrumpere famam* explains *lumina pressit*. It looks clear enough at this point

15) M. Annaei Lucani de Bello Civili libri X, edidit D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Berolini et Novi Eboraci 2009, 216: “‘saevae’ Håkanson¹, quod poeta aut scripsit aut certe debuit”.

16) For an overall view on this topic, see G. Brugnoli / F. Stok (edd.), *Pompei exitus. Variazioni sul tema dall’Antichità alla Controriforma*, Pisa 1995.

17) Not surprisingly this is particularly true for Pompey, by far Lucan’s most complex character: see e. g. 2.725–736 (commentary on Pompey’s departure from Italy); 7.669–711 (considerations on Pompey’s flight from the battlefield of Pharsalus); 8.27–32 (further thoughts on Pompey’s flight and survival from the battle).

that also his first gesture, *involvit vultus*, needs a commentary from the narrator, and this can be carried only by *atque ... caput*:

Pompey's gesture:	Explanation:
<i>involvit vultus</i>	<i>atque (?) indignatus apertum fortunae praebere caput</i>
<i>lumina pressit</i>	<i>et aeternam fletu corrumpere famam</i>
<i>continuitque animam</i>	<i>nequas effundere voces vellet</i>

This crucial distinction between the acts of the character and their interpretation is also expected to emerge from the syntactic structure of the text, and this is exactly what happens. Lucan utilizes two final clauses to make the meaning of the second and third gesture of Pompey explicit: consequently, we expect to find another subordinate clause that makes the first one explicit, too. Housman and Håkanson were most probably right when they tried to preserve *indignatus* as a participle, and they both understood that the problem was lurking under *atque*; but what is needed in line 614 is neither a new punctuation nor an unnecessary epithet like *saevae*. We rather need an element – a conjunction or an adverb – that makes the subordinate function of *indignatus* clear once and for all. I therefore suggest to change *atque* to *velut*.

The adverb *velut* can be used together with a participle (past or present) with the meaning of *veluti si*, i. e. to introduce a comparative hypothetical clause. This usage was excellently explained by Brink in his commentary on *Ars Poetica* 245, *velut innati triviis*: “*velut* makes *innati* into something resembling a hypothetical clause, *velut si innati essent*, for which the historians and poets sometimes ventured *velut* without *si*”¹⁸. This construction is well attested in poetry, where it effectively provides a whole clause by using just *velut* and a participle.¹⁹

18) C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry. The 'Ars Poetica'*, Cambridge 1971, 291–292. See also M. Leumann / J. B. Hofmann / A. Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik auf der Grundlage des Werkes von F. Stolz und J. H. Schmalz*, zweiter Band, München 1972, 385 and 675.

19) See e. g. Hor. Sat. 2.1.33–34 *votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella / vita senis*; 2.3.98 *veluti virtute paratum*; Ciris 500 *velut patrios imitatus honores*; Ov. Met. 9.695 *velut excussam somno et manifesta videntem*.

The clause *velut indignatus apertum fortunae praeberere caput* therefore means “as if he had disdained to expose his head bare to the stroke of doom”. This hypothetical value of the sentence seems more suitable for the overall meaning of the scene than the causal nuance given to the participle by Housman and Håkanson:²⁰ Lucan does not pretend to read Pompey’s mind and is not sure about the meaning of his well known gestures; what the poet wants to do in these lines is rather to give his own interpretation of the character’s last moments. In this respect, the subjective touch given by *velut* matches perfectly the use of *vellet* for the two final clauses, that seems to have a similar purpose.

A corruption of *velut* to *atque*, however, is not easy to explain and has no evident paleographical background. It may be that the succession of *involvit vultus velut* caused the omission of *velut* by haplography, and that *atque* is the unfortunate guess of a helpless scribe; but whatever is hiding under *atque*, as I have tried to show it must be something that makes the subordination of *indignatus ... caput* to *involvit vultus* clear. Hence my emendation has to be considered a ‘diagnostic’ one:²¹ not the final solution of the problem perhaps, but a more precise (and hopefully useful) delimitation of it.

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20) The fact that their solution requires a causal nuance for *indignatus* was already acknowledged by Hudson-Williams (note 14 above) 461: “any causal significance in the clause they introduce is merely implied”.

21) I use the renowned definition of P. Maas, *Textkritik*, Leipzig 31957, 33.