



Lucan and Virgil: From Dante to Petrarch (and Boccaccio)

Bianca Facchini¹ 

© The Author(s) 2018

Many recent works on ‘Dante’s Lucan’ emphasize the opposition between Lucan and Virgil in the *Divine Comedy*.¹ To different extents, these studies appear informed by 20th-century views of the *Bellum Civile* as an anti-*Aeneid*, meant as a parodic subversion of Virgil’s poem and characterized by a turn from mythology to history, an anti-imperial agenda and an anti-providential, ‘nihilistic’ stance. Building on an argument put forth by Ettore Paratore, this article contends that rather than reading Virgil and Lucan in conflict with one another, Dante regards and reuses the figures and works of the two Latin poets as fundamentally consonant with each other.² In keeping with high-medieval Latin commentaries on Lucan, Dante interweaves Lucan’s and Virgil’s texts in his *Comedy* to evoke the same world of ancient history and magic. In the *Monarchia* and *Epistles*, Dante combines the *Bellum Civile* and the *Aeneid* to support his philo-monarchic agenda, effacing the contrast between Roman Republican and Imperial values. Furthermore, Dante cites Lucan as a reliable moral–philosophical authority: in the *Convivio* he appropriates

¹ See W. Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets*, Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 2008, pp. 61–95; Id., “‘Poeta che mi guidi’: Dante, Lucan, Virgil”, in *Dante: The Critical Complex*, ed. R. Lansing, vol. II, New York, Routledge, 2003, pp. 303–20, at p. 308; D. Quint, ‘Epic Tradition and *Inferno IX*’, *ibid.*, pp. 71–8; M. Picone, ‘Dante and the Classics’, *ibid.*, pp. 321–44, at p. 337; G. F. Butler, ‘Statius, Lucan, and Dante’s Giants. Virgil’s Loss of Authority in *Inferno XXXI*’, *Quaderni d’Italianistica*, 24, 2003, pp. 5–21; A. Montefusco, ‘La presenza di Lucano nella *Comedia*: il fantasma della storia’, *Linguistica e Letteratura* 35 (2010), pp. 83–108, at pp. 94–6. See also R. Hollander, ‘L’Anteo dantesco (*Inferno* 31.97–132)’, *Annali della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell’Università degli studi di Milano*, 55, 2002, pp. 3–11; S. Marchesi, ‘Lucan at Last: History, Epic, and Dante’s *Commedia*’, in *Brill’s Companion to Lucan*, ed. P. Asso, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2011, pp. 481–90, at p. 486. See the sections ‘Dante’s Mentions of Lucan’ and ‘Erichtho and Antaeus’ in this article.

² For Paratore’s observations on the affinity between Lucan and Virgil in Dante’s works (especially in the *Comedy*), see E. Paratore, ‘Lucano’, *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. III, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1971, pp. 697–702, at pp. 700–02; Id., *Tradizione e struttura in Dante*, Florence, Sansoni, 1968, pp. 38–9, 42–4, 70, 82–5; Id., ‘Il canto VI del Paradiso’, *Studi Danteschi*, 49, 1972, pp. 49–77, at pp. 62–8.

✉ Bianca Facchini
bianca.facchini@kcl.ac.uk

¹ Department of Classics, King’s College London, North Wing, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK

Lucan's voice and applies to the *Bellum Civile* the same allegorizing reading he adopts for the *Aeneid*.

The article demonstrates the difference between Dante's and slightly later, early-humanist views of Lucan in relation to Virgil. Unlike Dante, Petrarch sponsors a strongly biographical conception of the ancient epic canon: following Suetonius, he highlights the most controversial aspects of Lucan's life and the concept of his poetic rivalry with Virgil, which are absent in Dante's works. The elements are also recalled by Boccaccio, who moreover underlines Lucan's anti-Neronian stance. Therefore, Petrarch and Boccaccio play a historically crucial role in marking the contrast between Lucan's and Virgil's poetic *personae*. However, the concept of Lucan's anti-Virgilianism, which underlies 20th-century interpretations of the *Bellum Civile*, is much more nuanced in 14th-century receptions of the poem, where it emerges only gradually and in a very limited, mostly biographical, sense.

Dante's Mentions of Lucan

Dante's direct mentions of Lucan unquestionably acknowledge the latter as a canonical poet. Lucan appears in the *bella scola* of *Inf.* IV, next to Homer, Virgil, Horace and Ovid:

Lo buon maestro cominciò a dire:
 'Mira colui con quella spada in mano,
 che vien dinanzi ai tre sì come sire:
 quelli è Omero poeta sovrano;
 l'altro è Orazio satiro che vene;
 Ovidio è 'l terzo, e l'ultimo Lucano.'³

Scholars have often wondered about Dante's epithetical characterization of Lucan as 'the last one'. Critics such as Paratore and Marsili explain this enigmatic phrase as referring to Lucan's historical–chronological 'posteriority' in relation to the Augustan poets, more than as an indicator of Lucan's subordinate position within a precise taxonomic ranking of ancient poetry.⁴

Indeed, in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the *Bellum Civile* had sometimes been classified as the work of a 'historian', rather than that of a 'poet'.⁵ However,

³ *Inf.* IV, 85–93 (Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. G. Petrocchi, Florence, Le Lettere, 1994 [orig. edn, Milan, Mondadori, 1966–67]). 'My kindly master then began by saying: "Look well at him who holds that sword in hand, who moves before the other three as lord. That shade is Homer, the consummate poet; the other one is Horace, satirist; the third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan."' (transl. A. Mandelbaum, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. A Verse Translation with Introduction & Commentary. 3 vols [I. Inferno; II. Purgatorio; III. Paradiso]*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1980–82, vol. I, p. 34).

⁴ E. Paratore, 'Lucano e Dante', *L'Alighieri*, 2, 1961, pp. 3–24, at pp. 3–4; Id., *Dante e Lucano. Lectura Dantis Romana*, Turin, S.E.I., 1962, pp. 6–7; A. Marsili, *Lucano e Dante*, Lucca, Pacini Fazzi, 1986, pp. 5–6.

⁵ On the debate of Lucan's standing as a poet or a historian from antiquity to the Middle Ages, see for example E. M. Sanford, 'Lucan and his Roman Critics', *Classical Philology* 26, 1931, pp. 233–57; G.

Dante explicitly and repeatedly names Lucan as a major *poeta*, without any suggestion of the *Bellum Civile*'s generic ambiguity. What is more, throughout Dante's corpus ancient poetry is classified in an open and plurivocal way. The same four Latin poets who make an appearance in the *bella scola* are listed in *Vita Nova* XXV, 9, where Dante provides examples of the various sorts of literary personification. Here the names of Virgil, Lucan, Horace and Ovid are listed in a different order than in *Inf.* IV:

Che li poete abbiano così parlato come detto è, appare per Virgilio [...] Per Lucano parla la cosa animata a la cosa inanimata [...] Per Orazio parla l'uomo a la scienza medesima sì come ad altra persona; e non solamente sono parole d'Orazio, ma dicele quasi recitando lo modo del buono Omero [...] Per Ovidio parla Amore, sì come se fosse persona umana, ne lo principio de lo libro c'ha nome Libro di Remedio d'Amore [...]⁶

In *DVE* II, vi, 7, Lucan is mentioned within a different taxonomic scheme, namely, within the traditional medieval canon of four hexametric poets (Virgil, Ovid, Statius, Lucan), whose technique of *constructio* should, according to Dante, be particularly imitated:

Nec mireris, lector, de tot reductis autoribus ad memoriam; non enim hanc quam suppremam vocamus constructionem nisi per huiusmodi exempla possumus indicare. Et fortassis utilissimum foret ad illam habituandam regulatos vidisse poetas, Virgilium videlicet, Ovidium *Metamorphoseos*, Statium atque Lucanum [...].⁷

Footnote 5 continued

Martellotti, 'La difesa della poesia nel Boccaccio e un giudizio su Lucano', *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 4, 1967, pp. 265–79, at pp. 266–70; P. von Moos, 'Lucan au Moyen Âge', in *Entre histoire et littérature: Communication et culture au Moyen Âge*, Florence, Sismel, 2005, pp. 89–202, at pp. 102–28. In high-medieval literary culture, however, these two possible definitions of Lucan and his work were not necessarily perceived as mutually exclusive. In many instances, the *Bellum Civile* was described as characterized by a mixture of history and poetic *factio* (B. M. Marti, 'Literary Criticism in the Medieval Commentaries on Lucan', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 72, 1941, pp. 245–54, at pp. 246–7; Von Moos, 'Lucan au Moyen Âge', 116; E. M. Sanford, 'The Manuscripts of Lucan: *Accessus* and *Marginalia*', *Speculum*, 9, 1934, pp. 278–95, at pp. 285–6; F. Fontanella, *L'impero e la storia di Roma in Dante*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016, p. 246, n. 106).

⁶ Dante Alighieri, *Vita nova*, ed. D. De Robertis, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1980. 'That poets have written as I have said above is evident in Vergil [...] Through Lucan a thing animate speaks to a thing inanimate [...] Through Horace one speaks to one's own poetic faculty as to another person — and not only are they Horace's words, but he speaks them while reciting in the manner of the good Homer [...] Through Ovid, Love speaks as if it were a human being, in the beginning of the book entitled *The Book of the Remedies of Love* [...]' (Transl. D. S. Cervigni and E. Vasta, *Vita Nuova; Dante Alighieri. Italian Text with Facing English Translation*, Notre Dame and London, The University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, pp. 109–11).

⁷ Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. P. Rajna, in *Le opere di Dante: testo critico della Società Dantesca Italiana*, Florence, Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960 [orig. edn 1921]. 'Nor should you be surprised, reader, if so many authorities are recalled to your memory here; for I could not make clear what I mean by the supreme degree of construction other than by providing examples of this kind. And perhaps it would be most useful, in order to make the practice of such constructions habitual, to read the poets who respect the rules, namely Virgil, the Ovid of the *Metamorphoses*, Statius, and Lucan [...]' (transl. S. Botterill, *Dante: De vulgari eloquentia*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 67).

The authority of the poetic foursome of *DVE* II, vi is indirectly reasserted in *Conv.* IV. Here, Dante's examples of the four ages of human life (*adolescenza*, *gioventute*, *senettute* and *senio*) are drawn from Statius, Virgil, Ovid and Lucan. In reusing the story of Cato and Marcia to exemplify *senio*, Dante significantly calls Lucan a 'great poet' ('quello grande poeta Lucano').⁸

In Dante's works Lucan is, thus, repeatedly equated with Virgil as a pre-eminent ancient *poeta* and an excellent hexametric poet in particular. In all these passages, Dante recalls Lucan as an established literary *auctoritas* and demonstrates no interest in his controversial biography or in the idea of his possible rivalry with Virgil. As I will show, these biographical elements, unmentioned by Dante, will be emphasized later in the 14th century, by the early humanists Petrarch and Boccaccio.⁹

However, studies on Dante and the classical tradition have often underlined Lucan's relative subordination and distance from Virgil in Dante's 'epic canon'.¹⁰ In *Inf.* XXV, 94–9 Dante compares the incredible transformations he is going to describe to the marvels recounted by Lucan and Ovid, in what Marchesi has defined an 'emulative canon confirmation'¹¹:

Taccia Lucano omai là dov'e' tocca
del misero Sabello e di Nasidio,
e attenda a udir quel ch'or si scocca.
Taccia di Cadmo e d'Aretusa Ovidio,
ché se quello in serpente e quella in fonte
converte poetando, io non lo 'nvidio;
[...]¹²

Linking these lines with the passage from *Inf.* IV discussed above, some scholars have claimed that Dante draws an implicit and yet clear distinction within the group of four *poetae regulati*, representing Virgil and Statius as superior to, and more dignified than, Lucan and Ovid. This thesis is grounded in the fact that in *Inf.* IV Lucan and Ovid are named last and without remarkable literary epithets and in *Inf.*

⁸ *Conv.* IV, xxviii, 13–19 (see this article, section “‘Nihilism’ and Morality”).

⁹ Suetonius's 'Life of Lucan' was included at the beginning of the *Commenta Bernensia* and other commentaries (e.g., *Cim* 4593), but does not seem to have played as crucial a role for Dante as it did for Petrarch.

¹⁰ For the sake of simplicity, in this article I use the term 'epic' with reference to works such as Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile*; as it is well known, however, his medieval conception of literary genres was different from ours, and Dante would have probably called these texts 'tragedies' (see H. A. Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 144–57).

¹¹ S. Marchesi, 'Lucan at Last' (n. 1 above), p. 486.

¹² 'Let Lucan now be silent, where he sings of sad Sabellus and Nasidius, and wait to hear what flies off from my bow. Let Ovid now be silent, where he tells of Cadmus, Arethusia; if his verse has made of one a serpent, one a fountain, I do not envy him; [...]'; transl. Mandelbaum, *The Divine Comedy* (n. 3 above), vol. I, p. 218.

XXV they are silenced by Dante with an agonistic attitude which contrasts with the respectful consideration he shows to Virgil and Statius.¹³

I agree that Dante demonstrates a special predilection for Virgil, his *maestro* and *autore* (*Inf.* I, 85): as is well known, the author of the *Aeneid* stands as Dante's guide in the first part of the journey described in the *Comedy* and is elsewhere defined as the major Roman poet.¹⁴ It is also true that Dante could have perceived numerous affinities between Lucan and Ovid, based on their common engagement with mythic history, as well as with extraordinary marvels. In *Inf.* XXV Lucan and Ovid are evoked as pre-eminent in describing metamorphoses that violate the integrity of the human body; similarly, in *Mon.* II, vii, 9–10 they are cited together as the main authors recounting the fight between Antaeus and Hercules.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, the opposition between Lucan and Virgil has been exaggerated by scholars of Dante. The limited textual evidence of *Inf.* IV and XXV has informed interpretations ultimately based on 20th-century understandings of the *Bellum Civile* as an anti-*Aeneid*, characterized by the absence of *pietas* or providential vision, the choice of history instead of myth and an anti-imperial stance. Montefusco, for instance, underlines the ideological and generic 'eccentricity' of Lucan's poem and suggests that Dante might want to exclude the Cordovan poet from the epic canon he implicitly traces in his *Comedy*.¹⁵ Wetherbee, who speaks of 'Lucan's fleeting appearance as the last of the "bella scola" in Limbo and the dismissive naming of him in *Inferno* 25', similarly insists on the anti-Virgilian character of Lucan's work and attributes to Dante a conception of the *Bellum Civile* as 'mockery', 'parody' and 'caustic exploitation' of the *Aeneid*.¹⁶ Assumptions of this kind especially inform recent readings of the episodes of Erichtho and Antaeus, in which Virgil the character indirectly cites, or refers to, Lucan's narration.

Erichtho and Antaeus

The first of these two instances occurs in *Inf.* IX, where the pilgrims approach the entrance of the City of Dis. Dante, who distrusts Virgil's experience of the path, asks his guide whether any soul has ever descended from Limbo into lower Hell. Virgil replies that, in fact, he himself did so when Erichtho asked him to bring back a soul from Judas's circle (*Inf.* IX, 16–30). This story, which finds no precise literary parallels outside the *Comedy*, has puzzled ancient and modern commentators, since it is seemingly anachronistic or, at least, presents some chronological difficulties:

¹³ P. Renucci, *Dante, disciple et juge du monde gréco-latin*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1954, p. 330; T. Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 194–5 with bibl.; Picone, 'Dante and the Classics' (n. 1 above), p. 330; Montefusco, 'La presenza' (n. 1 above), pp. 88–97. However, Barolini points out that in *Inf.* XXV Dante limits criticism to Ovid, excluding Lucan (*Dante's Poets*, p. 225).

¹⁴ *Conv.* IV, xxvi, 8: 'lo maggiore nostro poeta' ('our greatest poet', transl. R. H. Lansing, *Dante's Il Convivio [The Banquet]*, New York and London, Garland, 1990, p. 226).

¹⁵ Montefusco, 'La presenza' (n. 1 above), pp. 94–7.

¹⁶ Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame* (n. 1 above), pp. 61–95.

Virgil was alive at the time Erichtho was active according to Lucan (i.e., around 48 B.C.). Moreover, Virgil's tale seemingly endorses the belief that black magic can recall the souls of the damned from Hell.¹⁷

The second episode takes place in the Well of Giants of *Inf.* XXXI. Wishing to move from the eighth to the ninth circle, Virgil seeks Antaeus's help through a flattering speech which recalls the giant's legendary strength and deeds (*Inf.* XXXI, 112–32). In this passage, the character of Virgil appropriates Lucan's narration about Antaeus, as confirmed by various textual affinities.¹⁸ The importance of the *Bellum Civile* for these lines of the *Inferno* was noted by 14th-century commentators on the *Comedy* before modern scholars¹⁹; moreover, Dante openly acknowledges Lucan's role as a source on the Hercules–Antaeus episode in the above-mentioned passage of the *Monarchia* (*Mon.* II, vii, 9).

The two passages from *Inf.* IX and XXXI have often been read as ridiculing the character of Virgil through parodic intertextuality. Barolini and Clogan both point out that Virgil's supposed familiarity with Erichtho's nefarious world casts a shadow on him in *Inf.* IX²⁰; other scholars take the argument a step further and read Dante's allusions to Lucan's text as intrinsically threatening to Virgil's authority. According to Butler, Dante juxtaposes Virgil against Lucan and Statius (the later innovators of the epic genre) to expose the former's fallibility: Virgil's unacknowledged quotation of Lucan on Erichtho suggests dishonesty and creates an anachronism we are meant to notice, while the Antaeus episode represents a similar 'intertextual struggle' with Lucan in which Virgil 'unknowingly' affirms 'the truth presented in Lucan's text' and appears unable to produce a reliable

¹⁷ Doubts of this sort are raised by Boccaccio, *Esp.* IX, esp. litt. 17–18 (*Esposizioni sopra la 'Commedia' di Dante*, ed. G. Padoan, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca, vol. VI, Milan, Mondadori, 1965) and Benvenuto da Imola (*Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam: nunc primum integre in lucem editum*, ed. G. F. Lacaïta, 5 vols., Florence, Barbèra, 1887, vol. I, p. 308). But on chronology, see Chiavacci Leonardi: 'se Eritone viveva nel 48 a.C. (al tempo di Farsalo), poteva benissimo essere ancora in vita l'anno della morte di Virgilio (19 a.C.)' (*Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia*, ed. A. M. Chiavacci Leonardi, vol. I, *Inferno*, Milan, Mondadori, 2008, p. 277).

¹⁸ In particular, Dante's association between Hercules's fight with the giant and the later encounter between Scipio and Hannibal (*Inf.* XXXI, 115–17) is already a feature of Lucan's text (Lucan, V, 656–60) upon which medieval commentators often expanded: *Lucani M. Annaei Commenta Bernensia*, ed. H. Usener, Leipzig, Teubner, 1869, p. 657; *Arnulfi Aurelianusensis Glosule super Lucanum*, ed. B. M. Marti, Rome, American Academy in Rome, 1958, p. 244.

¹⁹ Guido da Pisa, comm. *Inf.* XXXI, 100 and 118 (*Expositiones et glose: declaratio super Comediam Dantis*, ed. M. Rinaldi, 2 vols., Rome, Salerno, 2013, vol. II, pp. 901 and 907–8); Pietro Alighieri, III, *Comm. Inf.* XXXI, par. 35–40 (*Comentum super poema Comedie Dantis: A Critical Edition of the Third and Final Draft of Pietro Alighieri's Commentary on Dante's 'The Divine Comedy'*, ed. M. Chiamenti, Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002, p. 261; many references to Lucan characterize also the first and second redactions of Pietro's commentary: *Petri Allegherii super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam commentarium, nunc primum in lucem editum consilio et sumtibus G. J. bar. Vernon*, ed. V. Nannucci, Florence, G. Piatti, 1845, pp. 260–62; *Il 'Commentarium' di Pietro Alighieri nelle redazioni ashburnhamiana e ottoboniana*, ed. R. Della Vedova and M. T. Silvotti, Florence, Olschki, 1978, pp. 413–17); Guglielmo Maramauro, *comm. Inf.* 31, 47–65 (*Expositione sopra l'Inferno di Dante Allighieri*, ed. P. G. Pisoni, Padua, Antenore, 1998, pp. 458–61).

²⁰ See P. M. Clogan, 'Dante's Appropriation of Lucan's Cato and Erichtho, *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 37, 2011, pp. 111–15, at p. 114; Barolini, *Dante's Poets* (n. 13 above), p. 205.

response to the *Bellum Civile*.²¹ Likewise, Hollander argues that Virgil's reuse of Lucan's account of Antaeus is comic in that the predecessor 'steals' from his imitator, and not vice versa.²²

Other scholars highlight the inherent contrast between Lucan's and Virgil's texts in Dante's eyes. In his analysis of the Erichtho episode, Quint emphasizes the divergence between the Virgilian descent to the underworld (*Aen.* VI) and the conjuration scenes described by Lucan and Statius: confronted with the two options, Dante would choose the Virgilian model, by which 'divine significance enters the poetic universe'.²³ Wetherbee similarly remarks that the horrific tones and dark humour of Lucan's poem make it a very apt model for Dante's *Inf.* IX, whereas Virgil's *Aeneid* appears an inappropriate precedent at this stage, given its very high seriousness.²⁴

These readings hint at the structural dissimilarities between Virgil's and Lucan's epics. Yet, they are primarily based on 20th-century views of Lucan's text as anti-Virgilian, in line with an interpretive trend championed by Narducci and other contemporary critics.²⁵ The idea of a 'radical opposition' between the *Aeneid* and the *Bellum Civile* has, however, recently been revisited by scholars who have underlined the complexity of both poems, as well as the problematic nature of Lucan's supposed anti-Caesarism.²⁶

Second, and more importantly, this 'modern' interpretation of Lucan's work as anti-Virgilian hardly corresponds with Dante's view of the *Bellum Civile*. Already thirty years ago Marsili suggested that there are fundamental differences between medieval and post-Enlightenment understandings of the *Bellum Civile* and its 'ideology'; Paratore similarly pointed out that Dante's understanding of the relation between Lucan and Virgil is open to question: as a medieval reader, Dante was likely to appreciate the similarity and integration, rather than the opposition,

²¹ Butler, 'Statius, Lucan' (n. 1 above), pp. 9f. and 15–17.

²² Hollander, 'L'Anteo dantesco' (n. 1 above).

²³ Quint, 'Epic Tradition' (n. 1 above).

²⁴ Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame* (n. 1 above), pp. 62–6.

²⁵ On Lucan as an 'anti-Virgil', see for example A. Thierfelder, 'Der Dichter Lucan', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 25, 1934, pp. 1–20; E. Burck, *Vom römischen Manierismus: von der Dichtung der frühen römischen Kaiserzeit*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971, p. 94; L. Thompson and R. T. Bruère, 'Lucan's Use of Virgilian Reminiscence', *Classical Philology*, 63.1, 1968, pp. 1–21; Id., 'The Virgilian Background of Lucan's Fourth Book', *Classical Philology* 65, 1970, pp. 152–72; E. Narducci, *La provvidenza crudele: Lucano e la distruzione dei miti augustei*, Pisa, Giardini, 1979.

²⁶ C. Walde, 'Lucan und Dante', in *Dante Alighieri und sein Werk in Literatur, Musik und Kunst bis zur Postmoderne*, ed. K. Ley, Tübingen, Francke, 2011, pp. 57–74, at pp. 60–62; S. Casali, 'The *Bellum Civile* as an Anti-*Aeneid*', in *Brill's Companion to Lucan*, ed. P. Asso, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2011, pp. 81–110. As is well-known, the interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid* has been complicated by the so-called 'Harvard School'; see also C. Kallendorf, *The Other Virgil: 'Pessimistic' Readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. On Lucan, see J. Brisset, *Les idées politiques de Lucain*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1964, pp. 35–223; J. Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's 'Bellum Civile'*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 1–10, 87–9; S. Bartsch, *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's 'Civil War'*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997, pp. 1–9, 73–100; W. R. Johnson, *Momentary Monsters: Lucan and his Heroes*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1987.

between the most representative texts of the great, ancient Latin epic.²⁷ We have already seen that, in the *Comedy* as well as in the *De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Convivio*, Dante often mentions Lucan alongside Virgil, recalling him as a highly serious model and defining him as ‘a great poet’, without any hint to an opposition or rivalry between Lucan and Virgil.

Dante likely interpreted classical texts through methods and categories common to his contemporaries and to the world of late-medieval commentaries and rhetorical schools.²⁸ In late-medieval commentaries on the *Bellum Civile*, Virgil is, in fact, often quoted and mentioned as an important point of reference for Lucan’s narration about Erichtho and Antaeus. Virgil is the most referenced author in the *Adnotationes super Lucanum*: here the commentary on the two episodes under consideration frequently includes the phrase ‘ut (ait) Vergilius’, followed by Virgilian passages about magic and mythological history. For example, on Lucan. VI, 452 (‘carmine Thessalidum’) we read: ‘exaggeratio magicæ potestatis, ut ait Vergilius “carmina vel caelo possunt deducere lunam”²⁹’; Lucan. VI, 460 (‘vertigine fili’) is explained thus: ‘ut Vergilius amorem incutiens hoc fieri iubet: “necte tribus nodis ternos, Amarilli, colores”’, etc.³⁰

Similar citations of Virgil are present in the *Commenta Bernensia* – here, for instance, Lucan. IV, 611 (‘magnanimum Alciden’) is explained with a reference to Virgil’s narration about Hercules: ‘Virgilius “attulit et nobis aliquando optantibus aetas/auxilium adventumque dei.”³¹’ The same is true for the glosses gathered by

²⁷ Marsili, *Lucano e Dante* (n. 4 above), 7–11; for Paratore’s studies, see n. 2 above.

²⁸ On this point, see Paratore, *Tradizione e struttura* (n. 2 above), p. 70; L. Medeossi, ‘Dante e Lucano’, *Sileno*, 15, (1989), 219–33, at pp. 222ff.

²⁹ ‘Exaggeration of the power of magic, as Virgil also says: “Enchantments can even bring the moon down from the heavens”’ (*Adnotationes super Lucanum*, ed. J. Endt, Stuttgart, Teubner, 1909; cfr. Virg. *Ecl.* 8, 69).

³⁰ ‘So Virgil, inducing love, exhorts to do this: “Twine, Amaryllis, three colours in three knots”’ (cfr. Virg. *Ecl.* 8, 77). On Lucan. VI, 456 (‘frontis amature subducunt pignora fete’) we read: ‘ut Vergilius “et matris praereptus amor”’ (Virg., *Aen.* IV, 516); Lucan. VI, 553 (‘expectat siccis’): ‘ut difficilium possit auferre esurientes, addidit lupos, quod ait Vergilius “collecta fatigat edendi/ex longo rabies et siccae sanguine fauces”’ (Virg. *Aen.* IX, 63–4); Lucan. VI, 648 (‘non Taenariis’): ‘et in Tenaro enim fertur ad inferos esse descensus, ut ait Vergilius “Tenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis”’ (Virg., *Georg.* IV, 467); Lucan. VI, 663 (‘ignibus’): ‘Phlegethontis, ut Virgilius “qua<e>rapidus flammis<ambit>torrentibus amnis Tartareus Phlegethon”’ (Virg., *Aen.* VI, 550–51); Lucan. VI, 699 (‘matrem perosa’): ‘Proserpinam dicit, quae superos contempsit et matrem; bene ergo perosa, ut ait Virgilius “nec repetita sequi curet Proserpina matrem”’ (Virg., *Georg.* I, 39); Lucan. VI, 715 (‘licet’): ‘permittitur, ut Vergilius “casta licet patrii servet Proserpina limen”’ (Virg., *Aen.* VI, 402); Lucan. VI, 730 (‘secura Megera’): ‘hoc cum indignatione dicit, quod vocem suam Megera audiat et sit secura, ut Vergilius “securi pelagi atque mei”’ (Virg. *Aen.* VII, 304); Lucan. VI, 743 (‘ruptis titana cavernis’): ‘ut Vergilius “trepident inmisso lumine manes”’ (Virg., *Aen.* VIII, 246); Lucan. VI, 749 (‘Stygias qui perierat undas’): ‘hic peierat, qui omnibus potior est et non timet Stygiam ut dii alii, ut Vergilius “di cuius iurare timent et fallere numen”’ (Virg., *Aen.* VI, 324), etc. On Lucan. VI, 584 (‘Curio’): ‘hic est, de quo voluit dixisse Virgilius “vendidit hic auro patriam”’ (Virg., *Aen.* VI, 621); Lucan. IV, 588 (‘siccae sulcator harenae’): ‘unde et Virgilius: “sitiensis ibimus Afros”’ (Virg. *Ecl.* 1, 64); Lucan. IV, 612 (‘ille Clonaei’): ‘Clonae regio iuxta Nemeam, ubi interimit leonem Hercules, ut ait Vergilius “et vastum Nemeam sub rupe leonem”’ (Virg., *Aen.* VIII, 295).

³¹ ‘Virgil says: “finally, time brought the god’s arrival and help also to us who were hoping for it”’ (ed. Usener [n. 20 above]; cfr. Virg., *Aen.* VIII, 200–201). Similarly, on Lucan. IV, 592 (‘cognita permultos docuit rudis incola patres’) we read: ‘antiqui temporibus, antequam annales essent vel historiae, ita fuit ut

Weber³² and for other manuscripts of Lucan, such as Clm 14505 (11th century) and Clm 4593 (12th century), where Lucan's passages about Erichtho and Antaeus are glossed with these and other quotations of Virgil.³³

Dante's juxtaposition of Lucan and Virgil seems to develop from an analogously integrative view of classical antiquity. In her detailed analysis of the Erichtho episode, Sonia Gentili has grounded Dante's interweaving of Virgil and Lucan in the precedents of medieval manuscripts of Virgil, Lucan and Dracontius – where Erichtho is often compared to the Virgilian Aletto and Sybilla – and medieval legends on Virgil's *katabasis*. Gentili has also suggested that already in Lucan's text Erichtho is not an entirely disruptive force, as she recognizes the supremacy of fate, and that the sorceress comes to play a truly providential role in Dante's *Comedy*.³⁴

Furthermore, interpretations of *Inf.* IX should not overlook the fact that Virgil's puzzling story about Erichtho is, in context, intended principally to reassure Dante. This aspect was noticed already by late-medieval commentators on the *Comedy*, such as Pietro Alighieri and Benvenuto da Imola; Jacopo della Lana further adds a meta-literary explanation that connects Lucan's and Virgil's narrations on *nekyia* and the underworld.³⁵ The strongly contextual function of Virgil's reference to Erichtho has also been pointed out by many contemporary scholars, among whom is

Footnote 31 continued

maiores natu ante acta posteris indicarent. Unde Virgilius: "fama est obscurior annis,/Auruncus ita ferre senes" (Virg., *Aen.* VII, 205–6), etc.

³² *Lucani Pharsalia*, vol. III *continens scholiastas*, ed. K. F. Weber, Leipzig, Gerhard Fleischer, 1831, pp. 466–7, 474, 488 (Virgil is frequently quoted about Lucan's episode of Erichtho).

³³ *Clm* 4593, f. 51r (on Lucan. IV, 593): 'Et Virgilius "Centumgeminus Briareus", id est centies duplex se dum faber ipse esse Egeon' (Virg., *Aen.* VI, 287). F. 52r (on Lucan. IV, 640ff.): 'Virgilius "Ethera mulcebant cantu"' (Virg., *Aen.* VII, 34; also in *Clm* 14505, f. 46v). F. 78v (on Lucan. VI, 450, 'dura in praecordia [...]': 'Exaggeratio magice potestatis. Ut Virgilius "Carmina (...) deducere lunam"' (Virg. *Ecl.* 8, 69; also in *Clm* 14505, f.: 'Carmina lunam celo possent deducere'); *ibid.* (on Lucan. VI, 460): 'Ut Virgilius "Necte tribus nodi ternos Amarilli colores"' (Virg. *Ecl.* 8, 77); f. 79v (on Lucan. VI, 531, 'mors invita subit'): 'Virgilius "muroque subibant"' (Virg., *Aen.* VII, 161). *Clm* 14505, f. 72r (on Lucan. VI, 650): 'quando sol est apud antipodas, ut Virgilius ait: "Aut redit a nobis Aurora diemque reducit"' (Virg., *Georg.* I, 249).

³⁴ S. Gentili, 'La necromanzia di Eritone da Lucano a Dante', in *Dante e il 'locus Inferni'. Creazione letteraria e tradizione interpretativa*, ed. with S. Foà, Rome, Bulzoni, 2000, pp. 13–43, at pp. 16–32. See also J. T. Schnapp, 'Lucanian estimations', in *Seminario Dantesco Internazionale. International Dante seminar 1: Atti del primo convegno tenutosi al Chauncey Conference Center, Princeton 21–23 Ottobre 1994*, ed. Z. G. Baranski, Florence, Le Lettere, 1997, pp. 111–13, at p. 124.

³⁵ Pietro Alighieri III, *Inf.* IX, 4–6, pp. 152–3 ed. Chiamenti (n. 19 above); cfr. Pietro II, p. 166 ed. Della Vedova-Silvotti (n. 19 above); Pietro I, pp. 118–19 ed. Nannucci (n. 19 above). After mentioning the chronological problems entailed by the passage, Benvenuto da Imola also concludes that this is only a tale invented by Virgil to reassure Dante (Ed. Lacaita [n. 17 above], vol. I, pp. 307–8). A similar explanation is also present in the *recollectae* of the lecture Benvenuto gave in 1375 in Bologna (*La 'Commedia' di Dante Alighieri col commento inedito di Stefano Talice da Ricaldone*, ed. V. Promis and C. Negroni, Turin, Bona, 1886, p. 58). Jacopo della Lana states that this is an allegory meaning that Virgil dealt with the underworld realm in his poem (*Comm. Inf.* IX, 16; Iacomo della Lana, *Commento alla 'Commedia'*, ed. M. Volpi, 4 vols., Rome, Salerno, 2009, vol. I, p. 311). On other similar interpretations by 14th-century commentators, see D. Consoli, 'Virgilio Marone, Publio', *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. V, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1976, pp. 1030–44, at p. 1031.

Scott, whose study also remarks that, in general, ‘Dante succeeded in marrying both Vergilian and Lucanian elements in his *Comedy*.’³⁶

As for the Antaeus episode, Virgil’s complimentary address to the giant does have humorous implications. However, Virgil’s knowledge of the ancient mythological story of Hercules and Antaeus is not at all surprising, especially considering that for Dante and the Middle Ages he was an almost omniscient *sapiens*.³⁷ As the medieval commentator of *CIm* 4593 notices in glossing Lucan. IV, 593, Virgil’s *Aeneid* includes a mention of another famous giant, Briareus.³⁸ Briareus’s name actually appears also in *Inf.* XXXI, ll. 97–105. Scholars have pointed out that, here, Briareus is defined as ‘immense’ (‘smisurato’, l. 98) following Statius, *Theb.* II, 596 (‘immensus [...] Briareus’), is linked to Antaeus as in Lucan’s text (Lucan. IV, 596) and is described by Virgil with words that are reminiscent of *Aen.* X, 565–6.³⁹ Thus, Dante’s *canto* XXXI reassembles and rewrites the mythological repertory on giants as transmitted by different ancient epic authors, whose words are often interwoven already in the medieval commentary tradition. Dante, who in the episode is pointed out by Virgil as a poet who can make Antaeus famous, stands as the heir of the ancient epic tradition as a whole.

History and Mythology

While read against the backdrop of late-medieval literary culture, the intertextual strategy of *Inf.* IX and XXXI suggests that Lucan and Virgil were regarded by Dante as belonging to the same moral–ideological and literary culture, and describing different aspects of essentially the same world of ancient magic and mythological history. Therefore, these *canti* confirm another fact, namely, that the supposed opposition between Virgil as a writer of mythological epic and Lucan as a writer of ‘historical truth’ and ‘nonfiction’ was probably not a feature of Dante’s literary understanding.⁴⁰

In this regard, it is true that Dante often refers to Lucan as a historical witness,⁴¹ and as an almost scientific *auctoritas*. In the *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Convivio*, Dante draws from the *Bellum Civile* some anthropological and geographical

³⁶ J. A. Scott, *Understanding Dante*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2004, pp. 247, 250–51 with bibl.

³⁷ Hollander remarks that it was impossible for Virgil to have read Lucan (Hollander, ‘L’Anteo dantesco’, [n. 1 above]), but the story of Hercules and Antaeus was part of the ancient mythological encyclopedia.

³⁸ F. 51r ‘Et Virgilius “Centumgeminus Briareus”’ (Virg. *Aen.* VI, 287).

³⁹ Butler, ‘Statius, Lucan’ (n. 1 above), pp. 11–16; Hollander, ‘L’Anteo dantesco’ (n. 1 above), pp. 5–7.

⁴⁰ The idea of such an opposition characterizes, for example, Picone, ‘Dante and the Classics’ (n. 1 above), p. 337; Montefusco, *La presenza*’ (n. 1 above), pp. 94–6; Marchesi, ‘Lucan at Last’ (n. 1 above), pp. 483–4.

⁴¹ See *Mon.* II, iv, 4–6 (on Numa’s miracle); *Mon.* II, viii, 7, 9, 12 (on Xerxes, Alexander the Great and Rome); *Mon.* II, ix, 16–18 (on the Wars against the Sabines), see this article, section “[Republic and Empire](#)”. See C. T. Davis, *Dante and the Idea of Rome*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, pp. 42–4 on Lucan as model for history–writing before Dante.

concepts,⁴² while in the *Comedy* he readapts Lucan's astronomical periphrases.⁴³ Dante's redeployment of Lucan's scientific notions in the *Comedy* finds a parallel in the *Rime*, and especially in the *petrose*.⁴⁴

However, a distinction between history and mythology, or between science and poetry, seems alien to Dante's *Comedy*, which is a profoundly holistic project. In this context, the *Bellum Civile* is reused in a markedly multifunctional way. In the *Comedy*, Lucan's poem is cited as a source about late Republican Roman history as well as about Erichtho's magic and about mythological creatures like Antaeus and the *Furiae*.⁴⁵ In fact, and more fundamentally, for Dante the stories of Hercules, the giants and Aeneas himself were not less 'historical' than the Caesar–Pompey civil war.⁴⁶ As I will shortly discuss, in the second book of the *Monarchia* Dante also interlaces quotations of Virgil's 'mythological' epic and of the *Bellum Civile* to support his thesis about the historically providential role of the Roman Empire.⁴⁷

Republic and Empire

The presumed dichotomy between Lucan's Republicanism, or anti-imperialism, and Virgil's imperial faith is equally hard to discern in Dante's works. Like other medieval authors and unlike later humanists, Dante regarded Caesar as a divinely appointed ruler and did not, in fact, have a full historical understanding of the transition from Roman Republic to Principate.⁴⁸ Paratore, Hollander, Rossi and Scott have noticed that in the *Comedy* there is no clear-cut opposition between Roman Republic and Empire, but both periods are extolled for their positive values. The characters of Caesar and Cato, whom Dante represents based on Lucan, stand in

⁴² See *DVE* I, x, 6 (Lucan. II, 394–438); *Conv.* III, v, 11–12 (Lucan. IX, 371–949; Lucan. IV, 332).

⁴³ See Medeossi, 'Dante e Lucano' (n. 28 above), pp. 221ff.

⁴⁴ Contini has noted the connection between *Purg.* XXX, 89 and the reference to the Ethiopian wind in the second stanza of 'Io son venuto', as well as their common source in a passage by (Lucan. IX, 447ff.) also evoked in *Mon.* II, iv, 6. Likewise, Singleton noticed the possible derivation of *Purg.* XXX, 89 from Lucan's description of the solstice (IX, 528–32), which, according to Durling and Martinez, could also be echoed in lines 23–4 of 'Al poco giorno' (see R. M. Durling and R. L. Martinez, *Time and the Crystal: Studies in Dante's 'Rime Petrose'*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, pp. 421, 375 with bibl.).

⁴⁵ On this point, see E. Paratore, 'Lucano' (n. 2 above), p. 702; on Lucan's mythological fables, see also Marsili, *Lucano e Dante* (n. 4 above), p. 41; V. Ussani, *Dante e Lucano. Lectura Dantis Fiorentina*, Florence, Sansoni, 1917, pp. 8ff. On Dante's and Lucan's *Furiae*, see S. Gentili, "'Ut canes infernales': Cerbero e le Arpie", in *I 'monstra' nell'inferno dantesco. Tradizione e simbologie; atti del XXXIII Convegno Storico Internazionale, Todi, 13 – 16 ottobre 1996, 177–204*, Spoleto, Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1997; Ead., 'La necromanzia' (n. 34 above), pp. 32–3; C. Bon, 'Lucano all'Inferno', in *La divina foresta. Studi danteschi*, ed. F. Spera, Naples, D'Auria, 2006, pp. 71–104, at pp. 85–6.).

⁴⁶ See g. Padoan, Anteo', *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. I, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970, pp. 296–7, at p. 296; Id., 'Enea', *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. II, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970, pp. 678–9, at pp. 677–9; Consoli, 'Virgilio' (n. 35 above), p. 1033.

⁴⁷ See this article, section "[Republic and Empire](#)".

⁴⁸ On the difference between Dante's historical understanding and later humanist views of the figure of Caesar, see for example M. McLaughlin, 'Empire, Eloquence, and Military Genius: Renaissance Italy', in *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, ed. M. Griffin, Chichester, Wiley–Blackwell, 2009, pp. 335–55.

‘complementary opposition’ to each other: Cato’s *virtus* justifies, and is only possible within, the just and divinely ordered Roman Empire.⁴⁹

More specifically, Walde has recently observed that, in the context of Dante’s *Comedy*, Lucan does not necessarily challenge Virgil’s supremacy, nor is he necessarily seen as an ‘anti-imperial’ writer because of his presumed Republicanism.⁵⁰ This remark, which is in line with my understanding of Dante’s reception of Lucan as explained thus far, finds further confirmation in Dante’s *Monarchia* and *Epistles*, where Lucan’s and Virgil’s voices are combined to corroborate Dante’s argument about the providential nature of Roman history and of the Holy Roman Empire.⁵¹

In the second book of the *Monarchia*, Dante claims that the Romans rightfully gained the empire of the world (*imperium mundi*): he always speaks of ‘Roman authority’, without distinguishing between the Roman Republican and Imperial phases. In this rhetorical context, Virgil’s *Aeneid* is quoted to praise the splendour of both Republican and Imperial Rome. Often combined with Livy, Virgil is cited to recall the courage of the Republican Fabricius, Camillus and Brutus, as well as Anchises’s prophecy about Imperial Rome.⁵² Similarly, Dante reuses the supposedly Republican Lucan – which he also combines with Livy⁵³ – to underscore the ‘providential’ character of Rome’s history, from its monarchic origins to its Republican and Imperial developments.

In *Mon.* II, iv, 4–6, Dante references Lucan alongside Livy to recall the prodigious fall of a shield from the sky while King Numa was officiating at a sacrifice.⁵⁴ Significantly, the example subsequently adduced by Dante is the Campidoglio geese legend as told by Virgil and Livy.⁵⁵ Not only do citations from Lucan and Virgil appear almost interchangeably alongside Livy, but Lucan’s text is used to prove the righteousness of ancient Roman monarchy, while the presumably philo-imperial Virgil is evoked about an event which dates to the Republican stage

⁴⁹ Paratore, ‘Lucano’ (n. 30 above), pp. 701–2 with bibl.; R. Hollander and A. L. Rossi, ‘Dante’s Republican Treasury’, *Dante Studies*, 104, 1986, pp. 59–82; J. A. Scott, ‘Cato: a Pagan Suicide in Purgatory’, in *Dante’s Political Purgatory*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, pp. 69–84, at pp. 78–84.

⁵⁰ Walde, ‘Lucan und Dante’ (n. 28 above), pp. 60–62. Through a series of preliminary questions on the topic, Schapp also suggests that, in confronting the Virgil/Lucan agon, Dante possibly re-Virgilianize Lucan (Schnapp, ‘Lucanian estimations’ [n. 34 above], pp. 119–20).

⁵¹ On Dante’s reuse of Lucan in the *Monarchia* and political epistles, see B. Facchini, ‘“As Lucan says”: Dante’s Reuse of the *Bellum Civile* in the *Monarchia* and the Political Epistles’, forthcoming in *Mediaevalia* 40 (2019).

⁵² *Mon.* II, v, 11 (Virg. *Aen.* VI, 844–5); *Mon.* II, v, 12 (Virg. *Aen.* VI, 825); *Mon.* II, v, 13 (Liv. II, 5; Virg. *Aen.* VI, 820–21); *Mon.* II, vi, 9–10 (Virg. *Aen.* VI, 846–53 and IV, 227–30). Cfr. *Mon.* I, xi, 1, where Dante quotes Virg., *Ecl.* 4, 6 (‘Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna’) in the context of his exaltation of monarchy; cfr. Davis, *Dante and the Idea* (n. 41 above), p. 106, on Dante’s reception of Virgil’s praise of the splendour of Augustan times.

⁵³ In addition to the examples mentioned below, see *Mon.* Mon. II, viii, 8–9 (with a mention of Livy and a quotation of Lucan. VIII, 692–94); *Mon.* II, ix, 16–17 (with quotations of Liv. I, 24–6; Lucan. II, 135–8).

⁵⁴ Lucan. IX, 477–80 (Livy does not actually tell this episode).

⁵⁵ *Mon.* II, iv, 7–8.

of Roman history. In *Mon.* II, viii, 11–2, Dante extolls the final triumph of the Romans as dominators of the world through quotations of Virgil and Lucan.⁵⁶ Dante thus combines the *Aeneid* and *Bellum Civile* to underpin his discourse on the providential superiority of the *romanum imperium*.

A similarly integrative reuse of Virgil's and Lucan's texts characterizes Dante's epistles in support of Henry VII's Italian expedition.⁵⁷ In *Epistles* V and VII, the emperor is assimilated to both Caesar and Augustus, namely, the leaders made famous by Lucan and Virgil.⁵⁸ *Epistle* VII, directly addressed to Henry, urges him to move from northern Italy to Tuscany by quoting Curio's advice to Caesar and Mercury's exhortation to Aeneas.⁵⁹ Therefore, as a further indicator of Dante's integration of Lucan and Virgil, the *Bellum Civile* is once more combined with the *Aeneid* to substantiate Dante's philo-imperial claims.⁶⁰

'Nihilism' and Morality

Far from being accused of anti-providentialism or nihilism, Lucan is repeatedly recalled by Dante as a moral–philosophical *auctoritas*. This is particularly evident in book IV of the *Convivio* (ca. 1307), where Lucan appears as a very important point of reference for Dante's attempt to discredit the value of wealth in determining nobility. In *Conv.* IV, xi, 3, Dante aims to show that riches are base and lacking in nobility, and cites Lucan as the first *auctoritas* in this regard:

E ciò testimonia Lucano quando dice, a quelle parlando: 'Sanza contenzione peri-ro le leggi; e voi, ricchezze, vilissima parte delle cose, moveste battaglia.'⁶¹

Lucan's famous apostrophe to riches ('pereunt discrimine nullo/amissae leges; sed, pars vilissima rerum,/certamen movistis, opes')⁶² is translated by Dante into Italian vernacular and becomes part of his argumentative strategy. The voices of the ancient and the medieval philosophers overlap as the latter strives to rectify common definitions of nobility.

⁵⁶ Virg. *Aen.* I, 234–6; Lucan. I, 109–11.

⁵⁷ See Davis, *Dante and the Idea* (n. 41 above), pp. 142ff. on the relation between *Epistles* V–VII and the *Monarchia*; pp. 163–9 for an analysis of these epistles.

⁵⁸ *Ep.* V, 2–3: 'Et Augustus et Caesar'; *Ep.* VII, 1: 'Caesaris et Augusti successor' (*Epistole*, ed. C. Villa, in *Dante Alighieri, Opere*, vol. II, ed. M. Santagata, Milan: Mondadori, 2014). As scholars have remarked, Dante's mention of Augustus's expedition to Thessaly in *Ep.* V intertwines memories of Caesar's and Augustus's battles: the conflation of Pharsalus and Philippi finds precedents in Florus as well as in other ancient sources, including Lucan and Virgil (Villa, ed., *Epistole*, p. 1543; A. Heil, 'Dantes "Thessalien": Pharsalus oder Philippi?', *Mittelaltersches Jahrbuch*, 37, 2002, pp. 75–81; Fontanella, *L'impero* [n. 5 above], pp. 175–6).

⁵⁹ *Ep.* VII, 4; Lucan. I, 280–82 and Virg. *Aen.* IV, 272–6.

⁶⁰ See Paratore, *Tradizione e struttura* (n. 1 above), p. 70.

⁶¹ *Dante Alighieri, Convivio*, ed. F. Brambilla Ageno, Florence, Le Lettere, 1995. 'Lucan attests to this when he addresses them by saying, "Without a fight the laws have perished and you riches, the basest part of things, have led the battle"'; transl. Lansing, *Dante's Il Convivio* (n. 14 above), p. 179.

⁶² Lucan. III, 119–21.

In Dante's treatise, Lucan's authority intersects with that of Boethius, invoked as the *sapiens* par excellence. *Conv.* IV, xiii, 11–13 Dante claims that the possession of riches causes evil: in this passage, Dante combines words by Boethius, 'lo Savio', and by Lucan⁶³:

[...] E però dice lo Savio: 'Se vòto camminatore entrasse nel cammino, dinanzi alli ladroni canterebbe.' E ciò vuol dire Lucano nel quinto libro, quando commenda la povertà di sicurezza, dicendo: 'Oh sicura facultà della povera vita! oh stretti abitaculi e masserizie! oh non ancora intese ricchezze delli Dèi! A quali tempî o a quali muri poteo questo avvenire, cioè non temere con alcuno tumulto, bussando la mano di Cesare?'. E quello dice Lucano quando ritrae come Cesare di notte alla casetta del pescatore Amiclas venne, per passare lo mare Adriano. E quanto odio è quello che ciascuno al possessore della ricchezza porta [...] E però Boezio, nel secondo della sua Consolazione dice: 'Per certo l'avarizia fa li uomini odiosi.'⁶⁴

Embedded in a context of Boethian citations⁶⁵ is Dante's translation of *Bellum Civile* V, 527–31: Lucan's narration about Amyclas is quoted and translated by Dante to demonstrate the appeal and advantages of poverty.⁶⁶

Dante's reuse of Lucan in the *Convivio* is in keeping with the previous medieval Latin tradition as represented by moral and satirical authors like Alain of Lille, John of Hauvilla and Peter the Chanter, who often cite Lucan's text in their eulogies of poverty.⁶⁷ A similar strategy is observable also in Dante's *Comedy*. In *Par.* XI, 64–72, Amyclas is presented as a predecessor of St. Francis because of his love of

⁶³ Boethius, who is included among the wise in the heaven of the Sun in *Par.* X, 124–9, represents one of the most important sources of the fourth book of the *Convivio* (F. Tateo, 'Boezio', *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. I, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970, pp. 654–8, at pp. 654–6).

⁶⁴ Boeth. *Cons.* II, pr. V, 34; Lucan. V, 527–31 and 507–27; Boeth. *Cons.* II, pr. V, 4. '[...] Therefore the Sage says, "If a traveler entered upon his journey empty-handed, he would sing in the face of the thieves." This is what Lucan means in the fifth book when he praises poverty for the security it offers with the words, "O secure ease of the poor man's life! O constricted dwellings and furnishings! oh not yet understood riches of the Gods! In what temples, within what walls could this ever happen without their shaking with fear when the hand of Caesar knocks?" This is said by Lucan when he tells how Caesar came by night to the cottage of the fisherman Amyclas in order to cross the Adriatic Sea. How great is the hate that everyone bears the possessor of riches [...] Therefore Boethius says, in the second book of his *Consolation*, "Truly avarice makes men hateful"; transl. Lansing, *Dante's Il Convivio* [n. 14 above], p. 188).

⁶⁵ The preceding chapter (*Conv.* IV, xii, 4–7) also has quotations of Boethius, *Cons.* III, pr. 3, 2–11 and II, m. II, 1–8.

⁶⁶ Martellotti has noticed how Dante's version is more emphatic than the original and especially stresses the concept of 'riches' (G. Martellotti, 'Dante e i classici', *Cultura e Scuola* 13–14, 1965, pp. 125–37, at pp. 134–5 with bibl.).

⁶⁷ See E. Sanford, 'Quotations from Lucan in Medieval Latin Authors', *American Journal of Philology*, 55, 1934, pp. 1–19, at pp. 11–15; E. D'Angelo, 'La *Pharsalia* nell'epica latina medievale', in *Interpretare Lucano: miscellanea di studi*, ed. P. Esposito and L. Nicastrì, Naples, Arte Tipografica, 1999, pp. 389–453, at pp. 432–6; P. G. Schmidt, ed., *John of Hauvilla, Architrenius*, Munich, Fink, 1974, pp. 59–61; C. Ratkowitsch, *Descriptio picturae. Die literarische Funktion der Beschreibung von Kunstwerk in der lateinische Großdichtung des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Vienna, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991, pp. 269–71; C. Waddell, 'The *Exordium Cistercii*, Lucan, and Mother Poverty', *Citeaux. Commentarii Cistercienses*, 33, 1982, pp. 379–88.

poverty. Overall, Lucan's Stoic dismissal of riches provides a framework for Dante's advocacy of inborn over hereditary nobility and of Church pauperism.

As has partly emerged, translation plays an important part in Dante's readaptation of Lucan's text in the *Convivio*. At a macro-textual level, Lucan's poem becomes part of the patrimony of philosophical wisdom made accessible by Dante's vernacular treatise. Not only does Dante translate passages of the *Bellum Civile* in his *Convivio*, he also explains them allegorically. In *Conv.* III, iii, 5–7, the story of Hercules and Antaeus is reinterpreted philosophically.⁶⁸ Furthermore, *Conv.* IV, xxviii, 13–19 provides a translation and detailed allegorization of Lucan's narration about Cato and Marcia (Lucan. II, 326–91), interpreted as signifying that, in old age, the noble soul returns to God, its harbour and blesses the journey it has made.

Dante first provides an allegorizing summary of the events from Marcia's adolescence and first marriage with Cato to her union with Hortensius and her later return to Cato after Hortensius's death (Lucan. II, 326–37). Dante explains that Cato signifies God and Marcia stands for the noble soul, who goes back to the Lord at the beginning of old age (*Conv.* IV, xxviii, 13–15). Dante's allegorization of the story builds on Lucan's poem and medieval exegesis on it, where Cato is considered 'almost divine',⁶⁹ and yet stretches this tradition still farther, regarding Cato as a figure of God himself. The passage continues with a translation of Marcia's speech to Cato (Lucan. II, 338–45), which is glossed allegorically by Dante with a rather lengthy, word-by-word explanation (*Conv.* IV, xxviii, 16–19).

Lucan's poem is read by Dante as an historical account which also carries profound religious–philosophical meaning in a moral and anagogical sense.⁷⁰ Strikingly, Dante applies to the *Bellum Civile* the reading and interpretive practices

⁶⁸ In this Dantean passage, the story is used to signify the special connection between the human body and the place of its generation. Medieval exegetes give various allegorical interpretations for the story of Hercules and Antaeus. According to Fulgentius (*Myth.* II, 4) and the third Vatican mythographer (ed. G. H. Bode, *Scriptores rerum mythicarum Latini tres Romae nuper reperti*, Cellis, Schulze, 1834, *myth.* III, 13, 2), Antaeus symbolizes lust (*libido*), ultimately subdued by virtue. In his commentary on *Inf.* XXI, 118, Guido da Pisa similarly explains that the fight between Hercules and Antaeus signifies the struggle between spirit and flesh (*Expositiones*, ed. Rinaldi [n. 19 above], pp. 907–8).

⁶⁹ Lucan IX, 254–83, 554–86. See V. De Angelis, '... e l'ultimo Lucano', in *Dante e la 'bella scola' della poesia. Autorità e sfida poetica*, ed. A. A. Iannucci, Ravenna, Longo, 1993, pp. 145–202, at pp. 165ff.; Ead., 'Il testo di Lucano, Dante e Petrarca', in *Seminario Dantesco Internazionale* (n. 34 above), pp. 67–109, at pp. 72–6; Fontanella, *L'impero* (n. 5 above), pp. 270–72 on Cato in medieval commentaries on Lucan. Also in *Conv.* IV, v, 16; *Conv.* IV, vi, 10; and *Purg.* I, Cato's almost–divine aura is described in terms reminiscent of Lucan. On Lucan's importance for these Dantean descriptions of Cato's quasi–divinity, see for example, W. Fischli, *Studien zum Fortleben der 'Pharsalia' des M. Annaeus Lucanus*, Lucerne, Haag, 1944, pp. 37–40; Paratore, 'Lucano e Dante' (n. 4 above), pp. 18ff.; Scott, 'Cato' (n. 49 above), pp. 70–77; W. Boggione, 'La custodia, la vera libertà, la colpa, la pena. Ancora sul Catone dantesco', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 189, 2012, pp. 321–53, at pp. 321–3; G. Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the 'Divine Comedy'*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Fioravanti suggests that Dante reads Lucan's text as an 'allegory of theologians' (*Dante Alighieri, Convivio*, ed. G. Fioravanti and C. Giunta, in *Dante Alighieri, Opere*, vol. II, ed. M. Santagata, Milan, Mondadori, 2014, p. 793). However, Dante's treatment of the concept in *Conv.* II, 1 seems to imply that the 'anagogical' sense could also be part of the 'allegory of poets'. Nevertheless, the degree of attention that Dante devotes to the word-by-word allegorical reading of Lucan's passage is striking.

that he otherwise reserves for the most authoritative of texts, such as the *Aeneid* or the Bible itself. Indeed, Virgil's narration about Aeneas, which, as has been noted, had a historical value for Dante, is subject to a sustained moral allegorization in the same fourth book of the *Convivio*. In a passage which is reminiscent of Fulgentius's *Expositio* and yet clearly departs from it, Dante interprets books IV–VI of the *Aeneid* as signifying the virtues of temperance, affection, courtesy and loyalty in the age of *gioventù*.⁷¹ Dante's combination of the *Bellum Civile* and the *Aeneid* within the allegorizing discourse of his philosophical treatise is a further indicator of his integrative view of Virgil's and Lucan's poems and of his appreciation for the allegedly 'constructive' aspects of Lucan's philosophical thought. Rather than emphasizing the anti-providential implications of the *Bellum Civile*, the Christian Dante confers upon Lucan the role of an authority on philosophical and religious matters.⁷²

Petrarch's and Boccaccio's Biographical Approach

Petrarch's representation of Lucan in relation to Virgil presents continuities with Dante's view, but also significant differences from it, and is intimately connected with Petrarch's reception of the figure and work of Dante himself and with his attempt to establish a contemporary literary canon. Indeed, Petrarch re-reads the history of ancient Latin literature through a strongly biographical lens. His depiction of the ancient, as well as contemporary, literary canon is grounded on a notion of rivalry between great authors. Moreover, Petrarch represents Lucan as a historical individual, as well as a literary–philosophical *auctoritas*, and expresses reservations on his personal moral conduct.⁷³

⁷¹ *Conv.* IV, xxvi, 6–15; see Fioravanti, ed., *Convivio*, (n. 78 above), p. 757; A. Ronconi, 'Virgilio Marone, Publio', *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. V, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1976, pp. 1044–49, at p. 1046. In *Conv.* IV, xxv, 6–11 Dante refers to Statius, *Theb.* I, 395–7, 529–39, 671–81 to provide examples of praiseworthy shame in the age of *adolescenza*. Likewise, in *Conv.* IV, xxvii, 17–21 Dante turns to Ovid's tale of Cephalus and Aeacus (*Met.* VII, 490–664) to illustrate the virtues of prudence, justice, largesse and cheerfulness in *senettute*. However, he defines the story a *favola* and the reference sounds more like an *exemplum* than a true and proper allegorization (Fioravanti, ed., *Convivio*, p. 785).

⁷² This also appears from the possibly spurious *Epistle to Cangrande*, where the *Bellum Civile* is recalled alongside scriptural texts to confirm the thesis that God is everywhere (*Epist.* XIII, 22; *Sap.* 17; *Eccl.* XLII, 16; Lucan, IX, 580). On the passage, see Marchesi, 'Lucan at Last' (n. 1 above), pp. 484–5; E. Fraenkel, 'Lucan as the Transmitter of Ancient Pathos', in *Lucan*, ed. C. Tesoriero, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 15–45, at p. 36 [Originally published as 'Lucan als Mittler des Antiken Pathos', *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, 4 (1924), 229–57]; Fischli, *Studien* (n. 69 above), p. 33.

⁷³ In this regard, also Petrarch's understanding of the story told by Lucan also differs profoundly from Dante's in that Petrarch fully grasps the historical significance of the Roman civil war, even if he does not necessarily see Lucan as anti-Caesar. See G. Martellotti, 'Petraeca e Cesare', in *Scritti Petrarqueschi*, ed. M. Feo and S. Rizzo, Padua, Antenore, 1983, pp. 77–89; B. Facchini, 'Petrarch's Lucan and the ambiguities of ancient heroism', forthcoming in *Humanistica* 13 (2018).

Like Dante, Petrarch also considers Lucan a key literary model, a fundamental source and an important guide on philosophy and ethics⁷⁴; Petrarch also regards Lucan as a ‘poet’, rather than a historian, as revealed by Petrarch’s recurrent use of the epithet *poeta* or *vates* to identify Lucan.⁷⁵ Petrarch’s works, too, present instances of integration of the *Bellum Civile* with the *Aeneid*, and of association between the figure of Lucan and that of Virgil.⁷⁶ In his *Collatio laureationis*, Petrarch names Lucan alongside Virgil, Ovid and Statius, in line with a common medieval tradition and with Dante’s own practice in the *De vulgari eloquentia*.⁷⁷ Moreover, as Crevatin has noticed, *Fam.* V, 5, which deals with the faculty of poetic description, presents an implicit ‘formalization’ of the epic triad Homer–Virgil–Lucan.⁷⁸

However, Petrarch also discloses the tensions intrinsic to this epic–poetic canon. He portrays Lucan as talented but overambitious, for he dared to compete with Virgil, the greatest Roman poet. In *Sen.* V, 2 a letter addressed to Boccaccio, Petrarch praises his addressee’s humility and observes that underestimation of one’s own skills is more commendable than their overevaluation. According to Petrarch, this latter mistake was proper for Lucan, who presumed to challenge Virgil’s supremacy⁷⁹:

Hic me locus admonet Lucani cordubensis qui, ardentis vir ingenii atque animi
— que ut ad ascensum sic ad precipitium via est —, cum se adhuc iuvenem et
provectum suorum iam prosperum studiorum cerneret, et etatem suam et
rerum a se ceptarum reputans initia successusque operum elatus seque ipsum
cum Virgilio comparare ausus, libri, quem de civili bello, morte perventus,
inexpletum liquit, partem recitans in prefatione quadam dixit: ‘Et quantum

⁷⁴ On Lucan’s importance for Petrarch, see R. T. Bruère, ‘Lucan and Petrarch’s *Africa*’, *Classical Philology*, 66, 1961, pp. 83–99; cf. G. Velli, *Petrarca e Boccaccio: Tradizione, memoria, scrittura*, Padua, Antenore, 1995, 2nd ed, pp. 95–6, n. 35; M. Leigh, ‘Petrarch’s Lucan and the *Africa*’, in *Classical Constructions: Papers in Memory of Don Fowler, Classicist and Epicurean*, ed. S. Heyworth, P. G. Fowler, and S. J. Harrison, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 242–57; G. Crevatin, ‘Il *pathos* nella scrittura storica del Petrarca’, *Rinascimento*, s. II, 35, 1995, pp. 155–71, at pp. 167–70; Ead., ‘“Stat magni nominis umbra”. La presenza di Lucano nel “De gestis Caesaris” di Petrarca’, in *Pervertere. Ästhetik der Verkehrung: Literatur und Kultur neronischer Zeit und ihre Rezeption*, ed. L. Castagna and G. Vogt-Spira, Munich, Saur, 2002, pp. 237–52; Facchini, ‘Petrarch’s Lucan’ (n. 73 above).

⁷⁵ See for example, Petrarch, *Fam.* II, 2, 3; II, 3, 22; II, 7, 7; XIV, 1, 34 (*Le Familiari = Familiarium rerum libri*, ed. U. Dotti, Cuneo, Aragno, 2004–9.); Id., *Sen.* VII, 1, 83 (*Le Senili = Rerum senilium libri*, ed. U. Dotti, Cuneo: Aragno, 2004–10); Id., *Invectiva contra medicum*, III, 156–9 and *Invectiva contra quendam magni status hominem sed nullius scientie aut virtutis*, 96 (ed. F. Bausi, Florence, Le Lettere, 2005). On Petrarch’s conception of Lucan as a poet, see for example, Crevatin, ‘Il *pathos*’ (n. 74 above), pp. 167–8; Ead., ‘La presenza’ (n. 74 above), p. 244.

⁷⁶ An example in this regard is provided by the frequent mentions of Lucan in Petrarch’s glosses on Virgil: *Francesco Petrarca; Le postille del Virgilio Ambrosiano*, ed. M. Baglio, A. Nebuloni Testa and M. Petoletti, Rome, Antenore, 2006 (see vol. II, p. 1007).

⁷⁷ *Coll. laur.* 10, 4–8, in F. Petrarca, *Opere latine*, ed. A. Bufano et al., Turin, U.T.E.T., 1975. On this common late-medieval classification, see for example, M. Pastore Stocchi, ‘Il primo Omero del Boccaccio’, *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 5, 1969, pp. 99–122, at pp. 101–5.

⁷⁸ *Fam.* V, 5, 2; see Crevatin, ‘La presenza’ (n. 74 above), p. 244.

⁷⁹ The anecdote is told by Suetonius, *Vita Lucani*, 2–5 ed. C. Braidotti, *Le vite antiche di M. Anneo Lucano*, Bologna, Patron, 1972.

restat michi ad Culicem?’ Huic insolenti percontationi an tunc a quoquam amicorum quid ve responsum fuerit incertum habeo; certe ego, ex quo illum legi primum, gloriabundo illi sepe tacitus et indignans hoc respondi: ‘Bone homo, ad Culicem quidem nichil, sed immensum ad Eneyda’. Quidni ergo pluris faciam hu’ militatem tuam, me tibi tuo iudicio preferentis, quam illius iactantiam vel preponentis se Virgilio vel equantis?’⁸⁰

By retelling, and commenting on, Suetonius’s anecdote on Lucan’s challenge to Virgil, Petrarch sponsors a strongly biographical conception of the ancient epic canon, based on the notion of personal competition between great poetic figures. In Petrarch’s view of this canon, Lucan is firmly subordinated to Virgil among the greatest ancient poets.⁸¹

Petrarch’s hierarchical classification of the major ancient poets is of relevance for his definition of a contemporary literary canon. In the continuation of *Seniles* V, 2, Petrarch argues that Boccaccio’s possible intolerance of the second or third place would make him even more haughty than those who yearn for the first place. Indeed, in the hierarchy suggested by Petrarch, Dante (‘the master of our vernacular literature’) and Petrarch himself hold the first two places, while Boccaccio is assigned the third place.⁸² The triad of the ‘modern’ Italian poets (Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio) thus appears to replicate the ancient triad of Homer, Virgil and Lucan. We might argue that Petrarch’s questioning of Dante’s hegemony finds a parallel in his frequent displacement of Homer in favour of Virgil.⁸³ More obviously, in this passage of the *Seniles*, the poetic *persona* of Boccaccio overlaps with that of Lucan: the author of the *Bellum Civile* becomes a figure of Boccaccio, or of the kind of poet that Boccaccio both could, and should not, be. Paradoxically enough, in order to avoid Lucan’s *iactantia*, Boccaccio has to accept Lucan’s place, that is the third position in the ‘modern’ poetic canon established by Petrarch.

As scholars have occasionally noticed, Petrarch’s estimate of Lucan is influenced by moral disapproval of the poet’s suicide. This especially emerges from *Fam.*

⁸⁰ ‘This topic reminds me of a passage in Lucan of Corduba [Cordova], a man of lively talent and intelligence, which is the pathway to great heights as well as the precipice. When he felt himself already quite advanced in his studies, though still young considering his age and his initiatives, and elated over the success of his works, he dared compare himself with Virgil. Reciting part of the book about the civil war [*Pharsalia*], which he left unfinished when he was cut short by death, he said: “What will it take for me to match the *Gnat* [*Culex*]?” I am uncertain whether one of his friends then answered this insolent question, or what the answer was, but ever since reading it I often answered that arrogant fellow silently and indignantly as follows: “My good man, nothing prevents you from matching the *Gnat* but a great deal indeed from equaling the *Aeneid*”. Why, then, should I not appreciate your humility which prefers me to you in your opinion more than the boasting of that writer who put himself above Virgil or equal to him?” (*Sen.* V, 2, 10–11; transl. A. S. Bernardo, S. Levi, R. A. Bernardo, *Francesco Petrarch; Letters of Old Age*, New York, Italica Press, 2005, vol. I, p. 159).

⁸¹ Petrarch asserts Lucan’s poetic inferiority to Virgil also in *Contra quendam* 96.

⁸² *Sen.* V, 2, 15.

⁸³ When dealing with the matter of Virgil’s possible rivalry with, and superiority over, Homer, Petrarch is either reticent or overtly in favour of the Roman poet (e.g., *Fam.* VI, 4, 12; XXII, 10, 6; XXIV, 4, 8–10; cfr. *Fam.* I, 2, 23; XIII, 6, 4; XIII, 7, 12, 17; XXI, 15, 5, where Homer and Virgil are praised in conjunction; see M. Feo, *Petrarca, Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, vol. VI, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1988, pp. 53–78, at p. 70). An extended account of Petrarch’s opinion of Dante is contained in his well-known letter to Boccaccio (*Fam.* XXI, 15).

XXIV, 11, a poetic letter addressed to Virgil. This epistle opens with a praise of the author of the *Aeneid* as the most splendid master of eloquence and Rome's true glory. Petrarch asks which part of *Avernus* Virgil inhabits, the palace of Hades or the Elysian fields (ll. 4–8). If Virgil is in the Elysian fields, Petrarch continues, he will be in the company of Orpheus and Horace, but surely not alongside Lucan and Lucretius, who killed themselves and have thus been placed in a different region of the underworld (ll. 9–17):

Et simul unanimis tecum spatiat^{ur} Homerus
 Solivagique canunt Phebum per prata poete,
 Orpheus ac reliqui, nisi quos violenta relegat
 Mors propria conscita manu sevice ministri
 Obsequio, qualis Lucanum in fata volentem
 impulit — arterias medico dedit ille cruento
 Supplicii graviore metu mortisque pudende —;
 Sic sua Lucretium mors abstulit ac ferus ardor
 Longe aliis, ut fama, locis habitare coegit.⁸⁴

This opening part of Petrarch's poetic letter evokes Suetonius's and the ancient biographers' account of Lucan's suicide within a refined web of intertextual allusions.⁸⁵ Petrarch's lines on Virgil's and Lucan's afterlife lend themselves to be read as a correction of Statius's *Genethliacon Lucani* (*Silvae* II, 7), where Lucan's inspiration is praised as superior to Lucretius's 'furor arduus' (l. 76), the *Bellum Civile* is extolled as worthy of Virgil's veneration (ll. 79–80) and Lucan is said to be either in the heavenly paradise or amidst the woods and beaches of Elysium (ll. 107–23).⁸⁶

Petrarch's passage seems also, and especially, a polemical response to Dante's grouping of Lucan together with Virgil, Horace and other classical poets in the same region of the underworld (*Inf.* IV, 85–93). In Petrarch's opinion, Lucan's suicide is ethically disqualifying and a distinction must be traced between him and the other *spiriti magni*. Voluntary death connects Lucan, rather, with Lucretius, with whom

⁸⁴ 'And does Homer, who was of one mind with you, roam with you? And do Orpheus and the other poets wander alone through the meadows, singing the praises of Phoebus, all but those whom a self-inflicted and violent death and servile homage to a cruel lord have banished to another region? Such was Lucan, who was driven willingly to his death, offering his artery to the doctor out of fear of a more painful and bloody punishment and a shameful death; such was Lucretius, whose death and savage fury, they say, compelled him to dwell in places apart' (transl. A. S. Bernardo, *Francesco Petrarch; Letters on Familiar Matters*, New York, Italica Press, 2005, vol. III, p. 340).

⁸⁵ Suetonius, *Vita Lucani*, 23–26; Eusebius-Jerome, *Chronicle*, ed. Helm, p. 183; see also *Vita III*, ed. Braidotti, 9–11.

⁸⁶ Scholars tend to agree that Statius's *Silvae* were unknown in the Middle Ages until their rediscovery by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417. However, the *Genethliacon Lucani* was separately transmitted in Florence, Laur. 29, 32 (9th century); moreover, Billanovich and Brugnoli have suggested that the Paduan protohumanists and Petrarch were familiar with the *Silvae*. See M. D. Reeve, 'Statius', in *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983, 394–9, at p. 397; C. Caruso, 'Una nota sulle *Silvae* di Stazio nel Medioevo', *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 44, 2003, pp. 303–7, at p. 303; Gu. Billanovich, "'Veterum vestigia vatum" nei carmi dei preumanisti padovani', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica*, 1, 1958, pp. 155–243; G. Brugnoli, 'Le *Silvae* di Stazio e Petrarca', *Critica del Testo*, 6, 2003, pp. 295–321.

he also shares an ‘ardent’ temperament and inordinate *ingenium*⁸⁷: Lucan and Lucretius are represented by Petrarch as both poetically and morally inferior to Virgil, ‘the most splendid of bards’.⁸⁸

Following Suetonius, Petrarch states that Lucan killed himself because of his fear of a more severe punishment and a shameful death.⁸⁹ Such a reconstruction denies any heroism in the poet’s death. In this account, it should be noticed that Petrarch’s attitude to Stoic suicide is also much more condemnatory than Dante’s in the case of Cato Uticensis, whose self-inflicted death Petrarch fiercely denounces, in contrast with Dante’s moral absolution and glorification of the character praised by Lucan.⁹⁰

Petrarch’s biographical approach to ancient Latin epic and his emphasis on the dynamics of competition internal to the ancient canon appear to have influenced the reception of the figure of Lucan by later humanists, and by Boccaccio in particular.⁹¹ Like Petrarch, Boccaccio regards Lucan as a crucial poetic model and yet expresses some misgivings about his moral attitudes.⁹² Drawing upon Suetonius and Tacitus, and under Petrarch’s likely influence, Boccaccio refers to Lucan’s arrogant challenge to Virgil and his violent suicidal demise in the short biography of the Cordovan poet that he provides in his ‘literal exposition’ of Dante’s *Inferno* IV, dating from late in his life.⁹³ Here, Boccaccio concludes that Lucan’s self-comparison to Virgil was seriously misguided⁹⁴; in fact, in Boccaccio’s as in

⁸⁷ Petrarch’s description of Lucan in *Sen.* V, 2, 10 bears some similarities with the portrayal of Lucretius and his death in *Fam.* XXIV, 11, 7 and in *Sen.* V, 5, 18. In *Sen.* XI, 17, 6 Lucan’s and Lucretius’s voluntary deaths are contrasted with Virgil’s.

⁸⁸ *Fam.* XXIV, 11, 8; transl. Bernardo, *Letters on Familiar Matters* (n. 84 above), vol. III, p. 340.

⁸⁹ *Fam.* XXIV, 11, 15.

⁹⁰ See G. Crevatin, “‘Fu vera gloria?’”. La *vanitas* di Catone nel *De gestis Caesaris* del Petrarca’, in *Tradizioni patristiche nell’umanesimo: atti del Convegno, Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Firenze, 6–8 febbraio 1997*, Tavarnuzze, Impruneta, SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000, pp. 3–22. See also D. Carron, ‘Le *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam* de Benvenuto da Imola et le débat sur Caton dans l’Italie du XIVe siècle’, *Rassegna Europea di Letteratura Italiana*, 35, 2010, pp. 135–52. As I aim to discuss in a future study, Petrarch’s acceptance of Lucan’s Stoic views is, in general, more cautious and limited than Dante’s. In particular, Petrarch lessens the rigour of Lucan’s stance on *paupertas* and distinguishes his own sober life from Amyclas’s extreme poverty: see *Fam.* XIX, 5, 2–3; *Secretum* II, 7, 4 (ed. U. Dotti, Rome, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1993): Lucan. IV, 381; cfr. *Variae* 17, 40–51 (*Lettere disperse: varie e miscellanee*, ed. A. Pancheri, Parma, Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1994).

⁹¹ The rivalry between Virgil and Lucan also appears in Politianus, *Nutricia*, 499–519; *Epigr. lat.* XXXVII, 15; on Petrarch’s influence on Politianus’s view of Lucan, see T. Leuker, *Angelo Poliziano: Dichter, Redner, Stratege: eine Analyse der Fabula di Orpheo und ausgewählter lateinischer Werke des Florentiner Humanisten*, Stuttgart, Teubner, 1997, pp. 220–25.

⁹² On Lucan’s importance for Boccaccio, see Velli, *Petrarca e Boccaccio*, 77–113 (n. 74 above) with bibl. (after A. Quaglio, ‘Boccaccio e Lucano: una concordanza e una fonte dal *Filocolo* all’*Amorosa Visione*’, *Cultura Neolatina* 23, 1963, pp. 153–71). Many of Boccaccio’s allusions to Lucan are highlighted in the commented editions of Boccaccio’s works collected in the series: *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, a cura di Vittore Branca*.

⁹³ Bocc. *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 127–33; Suetonius, *Vita Lucani*, 2–5, 23–6; Tacitus, *Annales* XV, 49–51, 56–7 (see Padoan, *Esposizioni*, [n. 17 above], p. 829). A potentially relevant source is also Vacca, *Vita II*, ed. Braidotti, 29–39.

⁹⁴ *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 128–9.

Petrarch's opinion, Lucan's greatness does not make him comparable to Virgil.⁹⁵ In keeping with Suetonius and Petrarch himself, Boccaccio depicts Lucan's self-inflicted death as strikingly cowardly and anti-heroic.⁹⁶

Boccaccio's *Esposizioni* also highlights Lucan's anti-Neronian sentiments, which are not mentioned explicitly by Petrarch.⁹⁷ In his biography of Lucan, Boccaccio follows Tacitus as well as Suetonius in mentioning Nero's envy towards the Cordovan poet and the latter's involvement in Piso's conspiracy.⁹⁸ This matter is discussed at length in a later passage of the *Esposizioni*, where Boccaccio attempts to explain and justify Dante's surprising choice to place in Limbo such sinful ancient characters as Lucan, who claimed for himself the right to punish Nero for his excesses.⁹⁹ Boccaccio thus emphasizes, and condemns, not only Lucan's inglorious self-murder, but also his choice to violently oppose Nero.¹⁰⁰ To some extent, Boccaccio's notion of Lucan's anti-tyrannical stance might have influenced his reading of the *Bellum Civile* as an anti-Caesar text: indeed, for Boccaccio, Lucan is clearly the poet of Pompey rather than Caesar.¹⁰¹ However, Boccaccio's re-reading of the *Bellum Civile* is not a strongly or consistently politicized one, as I hope to show in a future study.¹⁰² Moreover, Lucan's possible Republicanism does not seem to make him an anti-Virgil in Boccaccio's eyes. Also in the *Esposizioni*, after all, Boccaccio's rhetorical strategy serves to support Dante's placing Lucan with Virgil among the great poets of the Limbo, refuting any potential objections concerning Lucan's inadequacy for the role.¹⁰³

In his *Esposizioni*, Boccaccio considers some further contrasts between Lucan and Virgil, such as the difference in their styles. However, Boccaccio aims at conciliating, rather than stressing, these oppositions. Boccaccio's biography of Lucan reports the widespread opinion according to which Lucan's style was more suitable to metrical historiography than poetry; Boccaccio admits that Lucan's style

⁹⁵ Also in *Buccolicum Carmen*, XII, 197–8, Lucan is indirectly represented as inferior to Virgil, as well as to Petrarch (*Buccolicum Carmen*, ed. G. Bernardi Perini, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca, vol. V.2, Milan, Mondadori, 1994).

⁹⁶ *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 132–3.

⁹⁷ In *Contra med.* IV, 164, Petrarch reuses Lucan's problematic address to Nero (Lucan, I, 52) in a highly ironical way, but does not attribute irony to Lucan himself (in this regard see also *Francesco Petrarca; Le postille* [n. 76 above], vol. I, pp. 467, 546).

⁹⁸ *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 130, 132–3.

⁹⁹ *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 370–78. Boccaccio's commentary adduces two possible explanations for Dante's decision to locate such sinful ancient characters as Lucan in Limbo: he states that, first, the vices defiling these souls are much more evident in others among the damned and, second, that Dante has privileged the virtues of these figures over their faults.

¹⁰⁰ On this passage, see Padoan, *Esposizioni*, [n. 17 above], p. 850.

¹⁰¹ On this point, see Facchini, 'Petrarch's Lucan' (n. 73 above), n. 81.

¹⁰² In his study of Lucan in the *Filocolo*, Velli has already pointed out Boccaccio's fundamental indifference ('disinteresse concettuale') to the ideological implications of the *Bellum Civile* (Velli, *Petrarca e Boccaccio* [n. 74 above], 99–100).

¹⁰³ In *Esp.* IV, esp. all. 49, Boccaccio points out that, unlike earlier classical authors, Lucan and his contemporaries lived in an era in which Christian doctrine was preached everywhere, so that their paganism is inexcusable. However, Boccaccio's commentary also reasserts Lucan's moral and intellectual merit as a master in the liberal arts (see *Esp.* IV, esp. all. 55–61).

is indeed different from Homer's and Vergil's heroic style and other poetic styles. Yet, Boccaccio concludes that, whatever style he may have adopted, Lucan was undoubtedly talented ('ma come ch'e' si trattasse, meravigliosa eccellenza d'ingegno dimostra').¹⁰⁴ As Velli has noted, Boccaccio's concluding statement is a clear attempt to redeem Lucan from the insinuations made by medieval commentators.¹⁰⁵ While Boccaccio's observations speak to his familiarity with late-antique and medieval exegetical debates on Lucan, they do not trace a clear-cut distinction between the *Bellum Civile* and the *Aeneid*, which are often combined in Boccaccio's own works.¹⁰⁶

To conclude, therefore, Petrarch's and Boccaccio's emphasis on Lucan's biography is an element of discontinuity from Dante, one consonant with their early-humanist interest in the lives and personalities of the great authors of antiquity. Unlike 12th-century scholars, however, Petrarch and Boccaccio underscore Lucan's 'anti-Virgilianism' as a biographical trait more than as an element which become part of ideologically characterized readings of the *Bellum Civile* as an anti-*Aeneid*.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

¹⁰⁴ *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 130–31.

¹⁰⁵ Velli, *Petrarca e Boccaccio* (n. 74 above), pp. 93–5; see also Martellotti, 'La difesa' (n. 5 above) on Boccaccio's re-elaboration of the controversy on Lucan's identity as a poet or a historian in *Gen.* XIV, 13, 14. In *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 134–5, Boccaccio highlights the differences among the subject matters dealt with by Virgil, Lucan and the various members of the *bella scola*, explaining that, notwithstanding their diversity, the five ancient authors can all be honoured as 'poets'.

¹⁰⁶ See for example, *Filocolo* V, 97, 4–6; *Epist.* 4, 12; *De vita Francisci Petracchi* 6 (*Filocolo*, ed. A. Quaglio, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca, vol. I, Milan, Mondadori, 1967; *Epistole e lettere*, ed. G. Auzzas; *Vite di Petrarca, Pier Damiani e Livio*, ed. R. Fabbri, ibidem, vol. V.1, Milan, Mondadori, 1992). In all these passages, Boccaccio mentions Lucan alongside Virgil, as well as Statius, as a great poetic model.