

*A Lucan Reader: Selections from "Civil War."* Edited by SUSANNA BRAUND. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy–Carducci Publishers, 2009. Pp. xxxiv + 134. Paper, \$19.00. ISBN 978–0–86516–661–5.

Though scholarly interest in Lucan has flourished over the last 35 years, the task of bringing his poem to the collegiate classroom has gotten few takers. [[1]] Braund's (B.) reader marks a significant step forward, and will be welcomed by all who wish to introduce the *Bellum Civile* to undergraduate students.

This is the first to be published in a series of Latin readers (edited by Ronnie Ancona) intended "for intermediate or advanced college Latin study." According to the inside front cover, the series aims to keep the selected passages at 500–600 lines in order to be "ideal to use in combination." So perhaps the greatest challenge for the editor of this volume is selecting from Lucan's epic of over 8,000 lines a small set of passages that reflect the character of the poem. On this count, as I discuss below, B. has chosen fitting excerpts, though she seems to conspicuously avoid some of the poem's more problematic and thus thought-provoking passages.

Accompanying B.'s selections, which *in toto* add up to 620 lines, are a wide-ranging introduction, a detailed commentary on the selections, a full vocabulary for the passages, and a map of the Eastern Mediterranean in Caesar's day.

The introduction (pp. ix–xxxiv) has 16 sections on the context of the *Bellum Civile* and on aspects of the poem itself. [[2]] Most substantial are the thorough discussion of Lucan's life and times (pp. ix–xii), an historical contextualization and recap of the war between Caesar and Pompey (pp. xiii–xvi), and a section on the hallmarks of Lucan's Latin—his frequent use of *sententiae* and paradox, and the horrific realism of his diction (pp. xxx–xxxii). In the introduction B. also addresses important literary issues such as Lucan's (not uncommon) choice of epic for this historical topic (pp. xvi–xvii); the influence of Stoicism on the poem (p. xxiv); Lucan's unique incorporation of the supernatural (pp. xxiv–xxv); and his diverse but famously hero-less cast (pp. xxv–xxviii). An up-to-date list of suggested reading (pp. xxxii–xxxiv) offers ample resources for further inquiry. Absent is a section on meter; teachers will need to supplement the volume with separate material on dactylic hexameter.

Of great use in the introduction is a detailed outline of the poem (pp. xvii–xxii), which serves to contextualize the excerpts and helpfully summarize the contents of each book, including those (namely Books

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2, 4, 5 and 10) that are not represented in the reader. B. concludes the outline by writing that in Book 10 “our text breaks off, curiously at the same point as Caesar’s narrative of the civil war in his commentaries” (p. xxii); then in her section on the scope of the poem (pp. xxii–xxiii) she considers only that the poem might have been unfinished at the time of Lucan’s death, or that the remaining text was lost. The curious end of the *Bellum Civile* has been the subject of much debate, with ramifications for our understanding of the poem. Though this volume is no place for a full engagement in the discussion, B. might have directed the reader to Jamie Masters’ influential argument for the poem being finished as it is, and so for a deliberate “endlessness” to Lucan’s civil war. [[3]] Masters’ argument is in fact in tune with the reading of Lucan as a convention-bucking, “perverse” epic poet that B. emphasizes throughout her introduction and commentary.

The passages B. has selected allot equal coverage to Lucan’s two main characters, Caesar and Pompey. After the presentation of the war’s causes and the initial portrait of the two men (Book 1.67–157), we are given Caesar at the Rubicon (1.183–227), chopping down the sacred grove in Massilia (3.399–445), on the battlefield after Pharsalia (7.728–46, 760–811), and visiting the ruins of Troy (9.961–99), a passage also important for its programmatic assertions about Caesar’s, and Lucan’s own, *fama*. For Pompey, we have the visit of the ghost of Julia (3.8–35), his departure from Pharsalia (7.647–82), his death and final words in Egypt (8.542–636, 663–88), and Cato’s funeral oration (9.190–217). Caesar’s assault on the sacred grove (which B. at 59 neatly brands a *locus horridus*, an inversion of the *topos* of the *locus amoenus*) and the account of Erichtho’s preparations for a necromancy (6.624–53) serve as nice representative slices of Lucan’s interest in the mysterious and macabre.

The first selected passage is, naturally, Lucan’s proem and exposition of his theme, followed by the beginning of the poet’s address to Nero (1.1–45). But B. does not include the section of the address (1.45–66, considering in detail which celestial seat will best suit the deified emperor) that is most extravagant (and peculiar) in its praise, and thus suspicious in the eyes of those who read the passage as ironic or even subversive. [[4]] In her introduction B. writes that “it is certainly possible to take Lucan’s praise of Nero as the expected tribute paid by a poet to the autocrat who held absolute power in the Roman state” (p. xi). But without seeing this passage in full, students will miss out on a debate suitable to—and stimulating for—readers of the poem at any level. Another problematic and thus important

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passage that suffers a curious omission is from Book 7. B. includes 7.617–37 (the conclusion of the Battle of Pharsalia) and 647–82 (Pompey's flight), but leaves out the intervening verses. These nine lines, in which Lucan casts contemporary Romans as slaves living under a master, are perhaps his strongest condemnation of the principate that resulted from Caesar's victory at Pharsalia. B. states in the introduction that "to my mind, there is no reason to posit any growing discontent with either Nero or the Principate" (p. xii). But passages such as this one (as well as e.g. 7.440–59, 695–6—both also missing from this volume) invite us to read the *Bellum Civile* as a critique of the principate, and correspondingly to question the fulsome praise of the emperor at 1.33–66.

B. states in the preface that Lucan's Latin "can be very difficult and the articulation of his ideas sometimes seems downright perverse" (p. vii). Few who have read the *Bellum Civile* would disagree. To this end, her commentary is at nearly every turn helpful to and appropriate for the student with only three or four years of Latin. Each excerpt is introduced in the commentary by a clear contextualization of the passage. The notes that follow address chiefly grammar, syntax and vocabulary, while also explaining relevant historical and cultural details, and noting some literary features. B. is especially helpful when reordering Lucan's often terse and twisted sentences (such as 1.13–14 and 3.14–15) or unwinding his "tangled thoughts" (as she accurately describes 7.784–6). Thankfully, she also addresses a common classroom problem, by regularly encouraging students to translate ablative absolutes as separate clauses (on 1.501, 1.503 and elsewhere). And B. has a close eye for Lucan's repeated use of paradox, as in his presentation at 1.486–504 of Rome as an *urbs capta* (though it has not in fact been sacked), and for important thematic words such as *furor* and *nefas*, whose presence and potency she notes throughout.

The commentary is perhaps *too* helpful in its discussion of morphology and syntax. For example, we read on 1.81–2 that *hunc* agrees with *modum*, when there are no other nouns in the accusative or singular in this sentence; and we are told on 7.617 that *inpendisse* is a perfect infinitive. These are forms an intermediate or advanced college student should be able to identify. Also, throughout the commentary (on 1.82, 1.129 and *passim*) B. notes that 3<sup>rd</sup>-person plural perfect active indicative forms ending in -ere should be read as -erunt. As in many Latin authors, in Lucan -ere is by far more common (e.g. 35 times in Book 1, vs. 12 appearances of -erunt; in Book 7 the numbers are 25 and 5). Explaining every occurrence (even when

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the form cannot be confused with a homonym) may be counterproductive for a student adjusting to reading real Latin.

These are minor critiques of what will be an immensely valuable book in the collegiate Latin classroom. Though many teachers will want to supplement B.'s selections to better represent the poem's complexities, on the whole this much-needed reader makes an excellent introduction to, and guide through, Lucan's world. [[5]]

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[[1]] Commentaries on single books that remain available and are suitable to undergraduates at various levels of experience are R.J. Getty on Book 1 (London, [1940] 2007); Elaine Fantham on Book 2 (Cambridge, 1992); O. Dilke on Book 7 (London, [1960] 1998); Roland Mayer on Book 8 (Warminster, 1981); and David Kubiak on Book 9 (Bryn Mawr, 2001).

[[2]] The introduction is to a great extent a shortened version of B.'s introduction to her 1992 translation of the poem (Oxford, 1992) xiii–liv.

[[3]] Jamie Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's Bellum Civile* (Cambridge, 1992) 216–59.

[[4]] Discussing the range of interpretations of Lucan's invocation of Nero, and referring to further scholarship, are Frederick Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction* (Ithaca, 1976) 47–9, with n. 54; and Shadi Bartsch, *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's Civil War* (Cambridge, MA, 1997) 61–2 and 173 n. 46. A compelling ironic reading of Lucan's panegyric is made by Stephen Hinds, "Generalising about Ovid," *Ramus* 16: 4–31, at 26–9.

[[5]] I spotted just three typos: on p. 71 the word "from" belongs before "sticking and congealing"; on p. 77 read "Pompeians" for "Pomprians"; and on p. 97 read "2.67–233" for "2.16–33."