

Writing Latin: An Introduction to Writing in the Language of Cicero and Caesar. By RICHARD ASHDOWNE AND JAMES MORWOOD. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2007. Pp. vi + 186. Paper, \$23.50. ISBN 978-1-85399-701-3.

While Ashdowne and Morwood's (A&M) *Writing Latin: An Introduction to Writing in the Language of Cicero and Caesar* seems quite useful as a grammar review in intermediate/advanced Latin classes (high school or college level), it would not be my choice for a class in prose composition. The author's goal, as stated in the introduction, is twofold: (1) to use prose composition as an aid to gaining mastery of construction ("First, practicing the language in this way helps to fix constructions and vocabulary in the mind, so that a student can read texts with greater fluency, accuracy, and therefore enjoyment," p. v), and (2) to give students a greater appreciation of "the style, artistry and literary qualities of the ancient authors" (p. v). The book offers much review and practice of Latin grammar. It is harder, however, to see that the second aim is fulfilled.

A new composition book such as A&M's invites a reexamination of aims and means in teaching students to compose Latin. More simply put, different textbooks will better suit different classes. As an example of an "old style" prose composition text, consider Bennett's *Latin Prose Composition*. Bennett begins each chapter with references to his own *New Latin Grammar*. The grammatical references are followed by examples in Latin. The scant prose explanations are confined to useful remarks, followed by vocabulary necessary for the exercises (with a full English-Latin vocabulary in the back) and exercises. A&M, on the other hand, offer an abbreviated grammar written with a view to composition, which offers prose explanations and examples, followed by useful notes on the differences between English and Latin. Unlike Bennett's Grammar, which, e.g., devotes ten chapters to the uses of the ablative (and divides them over two halves of the book, Part I based on the usage of Caesar and Part II based on that of Cicero), A&M treat all cases in their opening two chapters, a good approach for a comprehensive review of the major uses of the ablative.

Latin grammar is covered in this summarizing way in 21 chapters. A brief chapter on word order follows, along with some annotated examples of Latin prose style; longer passages for translation; and two appendices (numbers and dates; top irregular Latin verbs), plus the aforementioned vocabulary.

The text is visually packed. While there are some useful bullet lists, breakout boxes, *notanda* (for differences between the way English and Latin work), A&M present much of their information in paragraph form, and it would be easy for students to get lost in the words. Explanations are also confusing at times. In the discussion of participles, for example, A&M observe that “the usual abl. sg. of present participles is in *-i*, except when they are used as nouns or are in the ablative absolute construction (see below), when the abl. Sg. Ending is *-e*” (p. 21). “Below” is one unmarked example in the middle of the next page (*fele dormiente*). Nor are there any examples of the participle used as a noun, although I have found this *e/i* alteration to be a point of anxiety for students. In the same chapter, A&M urge their reader: “Remember that perfect participles which are passive describe nouns that are the *objects* of the actions described” (p. 22). If I had to read this twice, how easy will it be for students?

While A&M often seem to take for granted that students will see points of style by being given points of syntax, the book contains some good pointers on Latin idiom, their command of which leads to felicitous examples of how the language works. In discussing word order, for example, A&M point out that Latin will say “*is est puer quem pulcherrimum umquam vidi*” rather than “*is est puer pulcherrimus quem umquam vidi*” (p. 26), and that the emphatic forms of the verb are made clear by putting the verb first (“*num hoc dixit? dixit hoc,*” p. 43). They also blessedly encourage students to check a Latin dictionary for the final word on usage (e.g. p. 38). The best parts of the book seem to me to be those that address idiom head-on; for example, the break-out box that looks at how to say “without, instead of” in Latin (p. 113) and the chapter devoted to “because, as if, although” (pp. 99–103).

The Latin examples given in the text are very simple, and are not taken from Caesar or Cicero. While that fits with A&M’s goal of updating the approach to prose composition, it does little to give students a feel for the style of ancient authors. The first mention of ancient authors comes at the very end of the book: after a brief and less-than-satisfying chapter on word order, A&M offer a sample of passages illustrating Latin prose style (two from Cicero, one each from Caesar, Livy and Tacitus), each followed by reading notes and notes on prose style. None of the passages is accompanied by a general overview of its style, although the notes point out useful and important features that students could imitate (e.g. fronting of verbs, *clausulae*).

In sum, *Writing Latin* looks and reads as a good review for students “finished” with grammar and about to begin reading ancient authors.

JEANNE NEUMANN
Davidson College