

BOOK REVIEW

War, Liberty, and Caesar: Responses to Lucan's Bellum Civile, ca. 1580–1650. By EDWARD PALEIT. Classical Presences. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 338. Hardcover \$150.00. ISBN 978-0-19-960298-8.

As the title suggests, Paleit's study explores the reception of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* in England between the years 1580 and 1650. Paleit does an admirable job of putting Lucan's reception in its political and literary context and allows Lucan's early modern readers to find their own meaning in the *Bellum Civile* rather than imposing his own reading on them. In fact, the study explores the multiple ways in which Lucan's readers found meaning in the *Bellum Civile* and used the epic for their own purposes. Paleit justifies the time-frame of this study by pointing out that during this period two editions and three translations of the *Bellum Civile* were published; he goes further and calls this period the "age of Lucan (28)."

Paleit divides the work into two parts: the contexts of reading Lucan in early modern England and the readings of Lucan from this period. Although there are many merits to the book as a whole, I found the first part the most illuminating. For Paleit examines carefully when, where, and how Lucan was read throughout this period. Paleit, for example, points out that Lucan was a rather "marginal poet" throughout the Renaissance on account of the "hierarchy of preference among classical writers (33)" which viewed his Latinity as inferior to other poets such as Vergil, Horace, Ovid, and Terence. Therefore, while Lucan might have been read more during the period of Paleit's study, he was undoubtedly read much less than other Latin writers. This fact may undermine Paleit's claim that there was ever an "age of Lucan" as opposed to an age in which Lucan flourished more than in any other.

This point is further driven home in chapter two on early modern interpretations of Lucan's worth as a poet. In the humanist debates over the aesthetics of poetry, informed in great part by Aristotle's *Poetics*, Lucan fared rather poorly as he was frequently classed as a historian instead of a poet first and foremost. Lucan, of course, had his supporters, most famous among them Thomas May, but given the historical nature of his epic, Lucan faced an uphill battle with the critics.

The second part of Paleit's study focuses on those writers who adapted, translated, and even completed Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. In chapters three through seven, Paleit presents a range of authors from various backgrounds writing in a host of genres, mostly drama and epic poetry. Through these authors, Paleit explores the topics represented in the book's title: war, liberty, and Caesar. He begins chapter three by examining Caesarist readings of Lucan. One of the more compelling questions regarding Caesar's actions in the civil war pertains to the degree to which citizens owe loyalty to their state. Paleit rightly points out that this is not a matter of the constitution—monarchy or republic—but of the right of the individual to resist, or even to rebel with arms, the unjust actions and laws of the state (123–126).

Among the authors covered in this chapter, perhaps the most interesting is Christopher Marlowe, who translated book one of the *Bellum Civile*. Paleit does a close reading of the text, highlighting Marlowe's omission of *libertas* twice in his translation, which Paleit interprets as a marginalization of Lucan's "ideals of liberty, the rule of law, or the obligations of citizenship (104)." Chapter four addresses Lucan's influence on dramatic poetry, particularly the plays of Jonson, Feltcher and Massinger. In chapter five, Paleit looks at Arthur Gorges' translation and Thomas Farnaby's commentary on Lucan, which exhibit multivalent interpretations of Lucan's poetry and politics.

Chapters six and seven are devoted, not exclusively, but in large part to Thomas May, who published a translation of Lucan (*Lucan's Pharsalia*, 1626), a continuation of *Bellum Civile* down to the assassination of Caesar (*A Continuation of Lucan's Historicall Poem*, 1630), and a Latin version of the continuation (*Supplementum Lucani*, 1640). May is one of the most important interpreters of Lucan, and Paleit wonderfully explores and explains the significance of May's literary achievement.

Despite Paleit's merits, there are a number of errors in the text and possible errors of interpretation that detract from the work. Paleit makes two conspicuous errors: he refers to Hercules' opponent in book four of the *Bellum Civile* as Cacus rather than Antaeus (46); in correcting Fanshawe's placement of Caesar's assassination in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter, Paleit makes his own error in placing the assassination in the senate house in the forum rather than the senate meeting at the theater of Pompey (307 n. 197). In addition, there is a good handful of spelling mistakes and other errata throughout.

More importantly Paleit, although unwilling to affirm the definite meaning of English texts, places an undue confidence in the meaning of Roman ideas such

as *libertas* and *civitas* (e.g. 182, “In the *Bellum Civile* citizenship means . . .”). In the same vein, Paleit at times requires absolute literal proof to make any claims about a text (particularly at 18–19, 23, 209, 217, 236); although I agree that scholars should be reticent to assert blindly the truth of a particular reading, there is also the need to appreciate an author’s nuance, irony, and sarcasm, and thus move beyond the literal meaning of a text.

I do not wish to overstate the critiques I just specified, for Paleit has made a genuine contribution to our understanding of English literature and its reception of Lucan. Paleit’s work will be most rewarding to scholars and students of sixteenth and seventeenth century English literature, but the book will also be important for classicists concerned with the reception of Lucan.

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