

BOOK REVIEW

Lucan: Civil War. By BRIAN WALTERS. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2015. Pp. xviii + 266. Paper, \$17.00. ISBN 978-1-60384-997-5.

If the recent interest among academics in Post-Augustan epic (i.e. Statius' *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*) is to grow among students and non-specialists, then new translations in a vibrant and accessible modern idiom are an absolute necessity. Walters' aim in his new translation of Lucan is to "render [the] epic into forceful and lucid verse in a modern idiom" (xii), while staying "as closely as possible to Lucan's Latin in the *Civil War*, but never so close ... as to dull its capacity as English poetry" (xi). In general, Walters has produced a successful translation on these terms; it is quite enjoyable and charming at times, although not without periodic inconsistencies that could make it difficult for a reader not accustomed to Lucan's rhetorical style.

Indeed, there is much to like about this translation. I commend Walters especially for his excellent ear for 21st century American idiom and diction and the way this helps to create a powerfully simple and clear translation. For example, some of his descriptive word choices will certainly be visually impactful for 21st century students and capture Lucan's epiphastic poetic sense quite well. As an example, I cite the eminently clever reference to the Fury's serpentine hair-do as "cobra-dreadlocks" (1.614-5; *BC* 1.574: *stridentisque comas*).

One of the great strengths of Walters' translation—yet also a source of some unevenness—is its dictional simplicity while attending to Lucan's vaunted rhetorical style. That is, most verses present an attention to clarity of sense when transferring difficult Latin poetic syntactical and rhetorical features (i.e. hyperbaton, chiasmus, anastrophe, and so on) into English. The following passage is emblematic of the power of Walters' simple poetry to invoke Lucan's passionate and emotive style: "Damn these walls founded too close to Gaul, / and damn this place! Peace and quiet reign/ throughout the rest of the world, but we're the spoils/ of madmen, the first place they set up camp" (1.276–279; *BC* 1.248–251: *o male uicinis haec moenia condita Gallis, / o tristi damnata loco! pax alta per omnes/*

et tranquilla quies populos: nos praeda furentum/ primaque castra sumus...).

This simple and clear approach is also able to highlight the energy in some of Lucan's more dynamic passages, such as the terrifying violence of Apollo's (ab)use of the Delphic Oracle: "At last, Apollo mastered her prophetic breast,/ breaking over her limbs like never before/ and expelling her former mind, ordering all/ that was human to depart, to make room for him inside her. Raving mad, she charges through the cave,/ tossing her neck side-to-side ..." (5.181–186; *BC* 5.165–170: *...tandemque potitus/ pectore Cirrhaeo non umquam plenior artus/ Phoebados inrupit Paeon mentemque priorem/ expulit atque hominem toto sibi cedere iussit/ pectore bacchatur demens aliena per antrum/ colla ferens...*).

At the same time, on occasion, Walters' translation has a tendency to lose its clarity in the attempt to stay very close to Lucan's Latin. Thus, we find some passages in which the English syntax of the translation becomes rather strained by an order of clauses that is less clear in English. As one small example, in his translation of Caesar's entry into Rome and the emotional effect upon the common people, Walters gives "The people, believing that he'd snatch the walls/ with black fire and scatter the gods, as if he'd captured/ and sacked the city, were petrified, imagining/ that his power alone outstripped his ambitions." (3.104–107; *BC* 3.98–101: *namque ignibus atris creditur, ut captae, rapturus moenia Romae sparsurusque deos. fuit haec mensura timoris: uelle putant quodcumque potest...*) For the average student reader, this could become jarring, demand a few re-readings, and obfuscate Lucan's sense. Fortunately, these strained passages are far more infrequent than the clear and commendable ones.

In order to make the translation more accessible to student-readers, Walters includes welcome supplementary material, such as a full glossary and a helpful book-by-book structural synopsis. In addition, W.R. Johnson's introduction is provocative and revealing, dealing specifically with the dangerous world of Neronian Rome, Lucan's atypical approach to the gods and the hero, and the *Civil War's* diverse narrative styles. I do wish, however, that Walters had included endnotes for certain passages, those usually dealing with more complex Roman cultural or historical references. Walters purposefully chooses to exclude endnotes, suggesting that "too much supplementary material can be intimidating... [and] the average student reader is now more likely to check online than the back of the book" (xii).

In general, I agree that a full set of notes is no longer compulsory for these exact reasons. Certain passages, however, such as the densely mythological and geographical digression on Thessaly (6.347–430; *BC* 6.333–412) or Cato and

Marcia's marital arrangement and its underpinnings in Roman family law (2.367–430; *BC* 2.326–91), are less likely to be explained in a quick Internet search. Students and non-specialists alike would benefit from a few judicious and well-placed notes. All in all, Walters' new *Lucan* is a welcome option for the classroom alongside the translations of Fox (2012) and Braund (1992), even if it does not offer all the same supplementary features. Walters' clear and 21st century translation may just help hook new fans for Post-Augustan epic.

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