
The book under review is part of the series *Oxford Approaches to Classical Literature*, which aims to provide a guide to a single work for those reading it in English. The editors’ foreword proclaims that such a reader may “need more guidance in interpretation and understanding… than can usually be provided in the… introduction that prefaces a work in translation” (v). Batstone and Damon have therefore attempted to provide a relatively brief but sophisticated introduction to the literary and political context of Caesar’s civil war commentary. Because Batstone and Damon’s text assumes a fairly thorough familiarity with the late republic, it may prove frustrating for its intended audience in spite of some very interesting content. I will first survey the main topics the authors cover and then close by explaining the difficulties this book might pose for the novice student.

The chapters are organized loosely around themes rather than chronology. Chapter One discusses the genre of the *commentarius* and Caesar’s selection of material. Chapter Two describes how the narrative structure serves as a form of argument. Chapter Three touches upon Caesar’s audience and then turns to the way he characterizes Varro, Curio, Pompey, Labienus, and Metellus Scipio. Chapter Four is concerned with Caesar’s self-presentation and his emphasis on *fides*, while Chapter Five evaluates stylistic issues, including the third person voice Caesar employs. The whole is capped by an epilogue that describes Caesar’s abandonment of the *Bellum Civile* upon recognizing that he was unable to win the personal loyalty of those whom he had defeated. Although Batstone and Damon individually wrote initial drafts of certain chapters, I will refer simply to ‘the authors’ throughout.

In the first chapter, “Choices: Genre, Content, Style”, the authors describe the genre of the *commentarius*, both by considering Caesar’s *Bellum Gallicum* and by quoting what has been said about the lost commentaries of Cicero and Atticus. Their general approach is to provide a literary context for the *Bellum Civile* by juxtaposing Caesar’s writing with other texts. Thus, they first turn to Cicero’s letters about his activities in Cilicia to show the sort of reportage provided by a general in the field. Next, Caesar’s account of Corfinium is compared to those provided by Appian, Plutarch, Suetonius, and Dio in order to highlight those features which are unique to Caesar’s approach and those features which are commonplace in historical narration.

Chapter Two, “Structure as Argument in *Civil War I*”, also discusses the *Bellum Civile* in terms of other texts. The authors cover some of the motifs used to provide closure in Caesar’s *Bellum Gallicum* and the way that his writing contrasts with that of Aulus Hirtius, who penned book 8. The yearly framework that dominates
the *Bellum Gallicum* is violated in the *Bellum Civile*. Caesar instead structures the latter around thematic (and political) concerns. This leads into a discussion of temporal violations in Caesar’s account. The authors show how Caesar’s re-ordering of events makes his march into Italy appear to be the remedy rather than the cause of the chaos in Rome.

A recurring concept that the authors describe in the second chapter is the contrast that Caesar establishes between *res publica* and *res privata*. In the *Bellum Gallicum* Caesar had presented his own actions and interests as coterminous with the interests of the republic. This emphasis remains in the *Bellum Civile*. The Pompeians, on the other hand, are portrayed as interested in administering the state for personal gain instead of for the public good. This conceptual framework is intelligently traced through the opening chapters of Caesar’s work.

The third chapter, “Taking Sides, Making Sides”, is bracketed by a list of senatorial concerns—e.g. the fear of proscriptions—and a discussion of the Pompeian position after Pharsalus. The voice representing these views is mostly that of Cicero. These comments confirm many of Caesar’s portraits and provide a useful reminder that not all is tendentious in Caesar. The authors quote from a selection of Cicero’s letters that betray his frustration with Pompey’s leadership, which of course Caesar also criticized. The analysis of the various players rightly emphasizes the way that Caesar contrasts Varro’s ready surrender to Curio’s decision to fight to the death and anticipates the detailed discussion of *fides* that follows some forty pages later.

In the fourth chapter, “Mastering Victory”, the authors show how Caesar presents himself as a “participant in relationships” (118). Paradoxically, Caesar’s goal of saving the *res publica* from those who wanted to despoil it resulted in an emphasis on personal loyalty to Caesar. The *Bellum Civile* demonstrates the reciprocal (and sometimes retributive) nature of *fides* as Caesar distributes rewards and occasional punishments throughout the course of the work. Caesar implies that, after the battle of Pharsalus, his beneficence will continue for those senators who prove sufficiently grateful.

Style is the subject of the final chapter entitled “Writing Fighting War”. In it, the authors treat Caesar’s use of the third person in his narrative—an aspect alluded to in passing elsewhere in the book. The observations on style typically begin with a listing of the plain and efficient uses of a particular stylistic device and then finish with a description of its more tendentious uses. Among the topics touched upon are adjectives, abstract nouns, verbs, subordinate clauses, indirect speech, and ornaments including anaphora, chiasmus, and alliteration. The authors’ attempt to draw attention to features that can be “appreciated in translation” (195 n. 1) is admirable but probably quixotic. Sadly, many of these items will perforce be obscured by the translator’s art.