

Elaine FANTHAM, *Lucan. De bello civili. Book II*. Edited by E. F., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992 (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics), 18,5 × 12 cm, XII-244 p., 1 carte, 13,95 £ (paperback) ou 35 £ (hardback), ISBN 0-521-42241-8 (paperback) ou 0-521-41010-X (hardback).

For decades after World War II, there was not much scholarly interest in Lucan. In recent years, this seems to have started changing. New commentaries and translations have appeared (since 1988 no less than three full scale English translations of the *Bellum Ciuile* (BC) have been published, by P. F. Widdows, D. Little and S. H. Braund). In addition, new studies focus on Lucan's originality and modernism. An era as ours, with its interest in poetics, intertextuality and deconstruction was only destined to discover this side of Lucan. Postmodern studies such as those by J. Masters, J. Henderson, D. C. Feeney and others bear witness to the Lucanean revival. Recently, Ph. Hardie (*JRS* 132, 1992, p. 256), referring to these studies, has even suggested that "a new orthodoxy on Lucan is on the point of emerging".

Now a "new orthodoxy" is probably the last thing that Lucanean studies actually need. It would be quite unfortunate if the new interest in Lucan were immediately restricted to a "politically correct" sort of deconstructionalism. Especially in the case of a poet such as Lucan, a variety of approaches is required. Radical interpretations seem justified, but philological work is still needed, perhaps more than ever.

Mrs. Fantham's new commentary on book II, one of Lucan's less well known books, belongs to the latter class. In accordance with the general aim of the series in which it has been published (the already famous *Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics*), it is aimed at a general readership of students and

scholars, providing a concise introduction to the life and work of Lucan, and a sound text with a brief commentary. It does not so much explore entirely fresh grounds as build on existent scholarship and give practical comment wherever necessary to help the reader understand and interpret the text.

It may be said that Mrs. Fantham has fully succeeded in this task. Her work is an excellent example of sound, "traditional" scholarship. The introduction (48 p.) deals with Lucan's life and work in the Roman literary and historical traditions, with helpful paragraphs e.g. on Lucan's emulation of Vergil, on the influences on *BC* of Stoic thinking, rhetoric and natural science. Furthermore it deals with the historical subject matter Lucan used and his typical language, style and versification. It is concluded by a brief note on the transmission of the text. The book has been provided with a chronological table, three appendices on special subjects (such as Seneca's appraisal of Cato), a short bibliography and an index.

Most of the commentary is devoted to practical explanation and interpretation of Lucan's text. In the case of a difficult, highly sophisticated poet such as Lucan, this is of extremely great value to the reader or student. Mrs. Fantham has a particularly fine sense of the subtleties, double meanings and poetical qualities of the work. She is nowhere provocative, in the sense that she would impose her own ideas upon the text; on the contrary, she always serves her main aim of bringing the reader closer to Lucan, of illuminating rather than obscuring the text.

This having been said, perhaps a few minor points of criticism may also be raised. In a review of a commentary such as this, it is always easy to indicate the omission of specific works. However, I will not enter into much detail here, although I strongly regret the omission of three important studies by P. H. Schrijvers (two of which, dealing with book II, being readily available in *Mnem.* 1988, p. 341 ff. and 1989, p. 62 ff.). Generally speaking, it may be observed that non-English studies tend to be somewhat neglected. An important modern German article on book II, as that of H. Harich on *Catonis Marcia* (*Gymnasium* 1990, p. 212 ff.) ought not to have been left out.

In the introduction (p. 3 with n. 12), I was sorry to see the old myth of Lucan's "last words" emerging once more (on this subject see my *Lucan's Last Words* in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, VI, edited by C. Deroux, Brussels, 1992, p. 390 ff.). Mrs. Fantham's view of Lucan's political attitude seems to owe a bit too much to her view of Tacitus, while the problem of the proem, with its praise of Nero (contrary to the alleged anti-Neronical tone of the rest of the work) is treated in a very traditional way: it is simply declared to be "ironical". A slight touch of postmodernism might have been refreshing here!

Since the commentary deals with countless issues, one could go on to discuss many individual points. However, that is out of place here. On the whole, Mrs. Fantham's sound judgement and prudent scholarship may be fully relied

on. Her work is an excellent and stimulating introduction to Lucan, and it can be recommended to teachers and students alike.

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