



BRILL

---

Review

Reviewed Work(s): La 'guerra civile' di Lucano, studi e prove di commento by Gian Biagio Conte

Review by: V. J. Chr. Hunink

Source: *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 45, Fasc. 1 (1992), pp. 127-128

Published by: Brill

---

GIAN BIAGIO CONTE, *La 'guerra civile' di Lucano*, studi e prove di commento. Urbino, Quattro Venti, 1988. 121 p. Pr. L. 18.000.

In the late sixties and early seventies Mr. Conte published several articles and monographs on Lucan, but since 1974 we have heard nothing new from him on this author. The title of the present book seems to promise a comprehensive view, and perhaps some fresh or ripened ideas.

Considering this, the book is sadly disappointing. It consists almost entirely of reprints of his early work, notably his commentary on the Scaeva-episode (*Bell. Civ.* 6, 118-260) published as *Saggio*

*di commento a Lucano* (Pisa 1974). To this he had added his *Il proemio della Pharsalia* (Maia 18 (1966), 42-53, earlier reprinted in W. Rutz, *Lucan* (Wege der Forschung 235), Darmstadt 1970, 339-53); and his *Ennio e Lucano* (Maia 22 (1970), 132-8). His *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario. Catullo, Virgilio, Ovidio, Lucano* (Torino 1974) had already been reprinted separately (Torino 1985). The only new material is a seven page article 'I giorni del giudizio: Lucano e l'antimodello', in which Lucan is contrasted with Vergil in his treatment of the theme of the final, decisive day. In fact, not even this is really new: in Lucanean scholarship it has become almost commonplace to compare the *Aeneid* as a model of the rise of Rome with the *Bellum Civile* describing *patria ruens*. Only the final paragraph of the article is worthwhile. By his mechanical and incessant inversion of Vergilian motifs and themes, Lucan is said to present a world turned upside down. This comes close to caricature and parody, techniques typical of comedy and satire. But whereas W. Johnson in his *Momentary monsters* (Ithaca/London 1987) highly esteemed the satirical qualities of Lucan's work, Conte considers the *Bellum Civile* a failure exactly because of it. In his opinion it is impossible to write passionately about a serious theme with techniques verging on parody: it leads to 'ossessività ideologica, monotona prevedibilità' (39). Nowadays, such opinions on Lucan are not widely held.

Mr. Conte's commentary on the Scaeva-episode is useful, and we may welcome its reissue, but a simple reprint would have sufficed. His articles are easily available for any scholar, and this volume does not even include all of them. In the preface he suggests that he has changed his mind about their content, but he has not revised them, nor indicated in what respects he no longer supports his former ideas. This book seems to be Mr. Conte's farewell to Lucan: he explicitly acknowledges that the young poet has 'satiated' him.

In short, Conte's book brings almost nothing new, and there seems to be no good reason why it has been printed in this form.