

LUCAN: LOVE AND STRIFE

CELOTTO (G.) *Amor Belli. Love and Strife in Lucan's Bellum Civile*. Pp. viii + 234. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. Cased, US\$75. ISBN: 978-0-472-13287-4.

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C. makes a bold and very welcome contribution to the study of Lucan's epic by going beyond the traditional study of Stoicism in the poem to foreground instead the *Bellum Civile's* Empedoclean aspects, in particular the dialectic between love and strife. C. shows how the *Bellum Civile* engages with the imagery of cosmic dissolution without entirely doing away with epic norms and structures in contrast with the pervading views of Lucan's epic technique. Despite this intrepid departure from the scholarly norm, C. nonetheless starts from two rather traditional presuppositions – first, a particular reading of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which does not give full consideration to the complexities of light and darkness that wax and wane throughout Virgil's narrative, and second, that the *Bellum Civile* is penned by a 'latter-day Republican' (p. 58) and thus concerned solely with Roman decline – which perhaps limit the nuances that might emerge from this innovative reading of Lucan's poem. Even so, C. addresses a previously overlooked area of the *Bellum Civile* in robust scholarly style and thus opens up exciting new avenues for investigation.

C.'s introduction is largely taken up by a literature review highlighting key trends and milestones in Lucanian scholarship, before moving to outline his focus, rationale for a structuralist methodology, the *Bellum Civile's* adherence to the Aristotelian tragic trajectory (in contrast to the *Aeneid's* ascending narrative structure) and a broad-strokes overview of the concepts of love and strife ahead of their more detailed treatment in the main body of the work. Chapter 1 considers love and strife in Greek and Roman literature, surveying the philosophical background in didactic poetry, which outlines the connection between love and strife, and their representation in pre-Lucanian epic as two balanced forces. This overview is certainly helpful to ground uninitiated readers. However, the treatment of Empedocles in this chapter is rather sparse, and Ovid's conspicuous absence from the epic section is particularly surprising, given that Ovidian influence is treated throughout subsequent Lucanian discussions (e.g. on p. 48). The presentation of the material is repetitive – indeed, this is a recurring issue throughout the book –, and this issue could perhaps have been avoided here (as elsewhere) by taking a more thematic approach. Given the sweeping nature of the chapter, it may have sat better as part of the main introduction.

Chapter 2 demonstrates Lucan's familiarity with the dialectic of love and strife and highlights the richness of the *Bellum Civile's* philosophical background, which is filtered through earlier literary adaptations. C. begins with an analysis of Lucan's proem to show how Stoic *ekpyrosis* is combined with Empedoclean philosophy, mediated through Ovidian models. While this reading undoubtedly offers a new way in which to consider this highly contentious passage, it requires readers to presuppose a decidedly negative understanding of Lucan's discussions of the Neronian Age, and there is some confusion around Lucan's comment on the triumvirate (Luc. 1.84–93) with the outcome of civil war. The discussion of Venus and Mars as synonyms (metonyms?) for love and war, and who are thus connected with the concepts of love and strife, is the richest part of the chapter, and C.'s analysis of the astronomical element of this relationship is particularly compelling and adds an important new dimension to the understanding of the *Bellum Civile's* astral sphere. The third and fourth sections of the chapter, which treat Ilerda and Erietho

respectively, are quite short and perhaps comparatively underdeveloped, but nonetheless offer interesting perspectives on the place of ‘constructive’ love in Lucan’s epic universe.

Chapter 3 focuses on love in Lucan, examining its constructive and destructive instantiations. After considering the loss of ‘constructive’ love as illustrated in the figure of Julia, C. argues that the *Bellum Civile* centres on its destructive counterpart without hope for future regeneration through studies of the relationships between Caesar and Cleopatra (which fails to bear legitimate children) and Cato and Marcia (who do not renew their original marriage and therefore their original ‘constructive’ love), as well as the figure of Alexander the Great (whose childless death leads to civil war, according to Luc. 10.20–46). From this, C. looks outwards to the epic’s Neronian present, to suggest that Alexander’s childlessness alludes to the generative failures of both Caesar and Nero, thus implying a ‘destructive’, rather than ‘restorative’, role for the *gens Iulia*.

Chapter 4 turns to the other side of the equation and interrogates the role and place of strife in Lucan, suggesting that the *Bellum Civile* ‘neglects constructive love and strife’ and instead contemplates only their destructive versions (p. 107). C. reads episodes of the *Bellum Civile* against some key structures and *topoi* of the epic tradition – cosmos and chaos, *virtus* and *aristeiai*, epic games, and clemency – with particular focus on their (constructive) representation in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Lucan’s (destructive) engagement with this precedent. While this chapter offers wide-ranging coverage of the *Bellum Civile* and thus demonstrates the pervasiveness of the core ideas that C. puts forth both here and throughout the book, some of the engagement with major works of relevant scholarship is a little thin – for example, V. Gorman, *CJ* 96 (2001) features only briefly in note 59, while H. Lovatt, *Statius and Epic Games* (2005) is cited in the bibliography but not mentioned in the larger section on epic games. The jump back to Scaeva at the chapter’s close might at first seem awkward, but then might remind readers of the close of Lucan’s work and elicit a little chuckle.

Chapter 5 takes the next logical step in the wake of its predecessors and tackles the interaction of love and strife in the *Bellum Civile*, reading them as ‘complementary’ forces that ‘cooperate to annihilate Rome’ (p. 152). C. builds on the broader equation of love and strife in Latin elegy, recent work on the dynamics of *amor militiae* and studies on Lucan’s engagement with elegy to suggest that Lucan overturns the notion of *militia amoris*. Through a survey of uses of *amor* in the *Bellum Civile*, C. argues that Lucan turns *militia amoris* into the more dangerous *amor militiae*, and contrasts Cato’s ‘constructive’, virtuous and ultimately futile love of strife with the destructive counterpart represented by Caesar. From this, C. proposes that: warfare may thus be understood as a ‘sequence of destructive love affairs’ (p. 161), framing the conflict between Caesar and Pompey as a rivalry arisen from their love of Rome, and the relationship between Caesar and his soldiers as a (destructive) love affair; and Lucan employs the language of love poetry to equate acts of sacrilege with rape. Although C. offers a comprehensive survey of instances of Lucan’s deployment of the language and imagery of elegy, this is the weakest of the main chapters, as many points are supported by limited (and sometimes slightly unpersuasive) evidence, and much greater engagement with the broader elegiac tradition is needed to make the full case that C. claims.

The afterword is, as C. promised, a ‘brief coda’ (p. 9) on the afterlife of Lucan’s take on the cosmological dialectic of love and strife in Flavian epic, which certainly whets the appetite for further study. As noted above, my biggest contention with this book is the repetitiveness of its prose, which can at times frustrate readers and thus distract from the stimulating and thought-provoking discussions that C. puts forward. The book is well presented on the whole, although the occasional omission of book numbers in references is a little vexing. C. has identified and illuminated significant aspects of the

Bellum Civile's philosophical, literary and ideological programmes, and this book will no doubt stand as another key milestone in Lucan scholarship.

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