

Anatomizing Civil War: Studies in Lucan's Epic Technique. By MARTIN T. DINTER. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012. Pp.viii + 186. \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-472-11850-2.

Scholarship has often regarded Lucan's *Bellum Civile* as a fragmented, episodic work.

Dinter's monograph sets out to combat this idea by tracing the recurrent images, motifs, and stylistic techniques that serve to unify the epic. The book comprises four chapters, which examine respectively Lucan's body imagery, the role of *Fama*, the narrative and thematic function of *sententiae*, and poetic patterns of repetition. Throughout, Dinter argues that the *Bellum Civile* achieves coherence precisely via its most disjointed elements, which bind the epic at the same time as they represent the disintegration caused by civil war. Though promising, this premise fails in the execution and Dinter's book suffers from its own lack of unity, cutting from topic to topic without engaging in the sort of prolonged analysis that would establish clear links between its various arguments.

The first chapter is by far Dinter's strongest. Lightly reworked from two previously published essays,¹ it examines the central theme of bodies and body metaphors in Lucan's epic. Dinter presents a useful overview of how corporeality pervades the *Bellum Civile* at the various levels of cosmos, state, army, human individual, and text. His analysis of heads (19-21) and hands (22-27) is particularly thought-provoking, yet also too superficial to be fully satisfying. An unfortunate result of Dinter's overall approach is that he avoids close readings and too often cites a dizzying sequence of passages without pausing to discuss all their implications. A brief example: Dinter uses *BC* 5.252 ([Caesar] *tot raptis truncus manibus*) to illustrate the metaphor of army as body (22), but does not examine how this image of Caesar recalls that of Pompey at *BC* 1.139-40 in a manner that links the military *corpus* with the cosmic one.

¹ Dinter, M. T. 2005. "Lucan's Epic Body" in C. Walde (ed.) *Lucan im 21. Jahrhundert*. Leipzig: 295-312; and Dinter, M. T. 2010. "...und es bewegt sich doch! Der Automatismus des abgehackten Gliedes" in N. Hömke and C. Reitz (eds.) *Lucan's Bellum Civile: Between Epic Tradition and Aesthetic Innovation*. Berlin: 175-90.

Similar problems hinder the treatment of *Fama* in Chapter 2. After listing numerous instances of fame, repute, and rumor in the *Bellum Civile*, Dinter concludes with the bland statement that in this work, “fame is the main concern” (62). Curiously for one analyzing the fame conferred by epic, Dinter never refers to Homeric *kleos*. Nor does he resolve his contradictory proposition that Lucan’s epic perpetuates *fama* at the same time as it leaves the majority of soldiers nameless (80-81 acknowledges the issue, but skirts it by talking about *gloria* instead – hardly the same thing as *fama*). That said, there are some strong sections in this chapter, such as when Dinter compares Lucan’s Erictho to the personified *Fama* of Ovid and Vergil (68-75) and when he examines Lucan’s epitaphic language (82-87).

The second half of Dinter’s monograph shifts focus from content to style. Chapter 3 strips back the *Bellum Civile* to a skeleton of epigrammatic statements, and shows how these *sententiae* articulate the paradoxes inherent in civil war. Lucan’s rhetoric of guilt and forgiveness is a particularly interesting topic, which Dinter summarizes well (103-105) despite omitting any reference to Matthew Roller, whose 1996 article on Lucan deals with very similar material.² The section on the “Antiproverb” (111-14) likewise constitutes one of this chapter’s highlights. Once again, however, Dinter moves through Lucan’s text too rapidly and relegates almost all Latin quotations to the footnotes (page 108 has a footnote for every sentence).

The fourth and final chapter examines verbal repetition as Lucan’s way of evoking cosmic and historical cycles, and poetic recycling. Dinter argues convincingly that Lucan’s repetitive language reflects the endless, cyclical nature of civil war in the *Bellum Civile*. Less convincing, though, is the chapter’s final section, where Dinter quotes at length Mediaeval and Renaissance sources that supplement the abrupt ending of Lucan’s epic. Connections between this section and the rest of the chapter are tenuous at best and, in the absence of any

² Roller, M. 1996. “Ethical Contradiction and the Fractured Community in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*” *CA* 15: 319-47.

formal conclusion, these last ten pages leave Dinter's own analysis feeling somewhat 'open-ended'. Such disunity sadly characterizes Dinter's monograph overall; it is difficult to see how the topic of each individual chapter relates to any other, not least because Dinter links his ideas at a metaphorical rather than literal level, which occasionally results in him placing undue weight on the concept of 'anatomy'.

The book also contains some typological errors, of which I list the most glaring: 'I am' for *iam* (146); 'vigils' for *vigiles* (71 n.90); repeated translation in n.90 and 91 (71); 'in' for 'is' (99 n.56); a translation that exceeds the quotation from Caesar *Civ.*1.7.1 (135). The presence of such errors is a great pity because, alongside the disjointed argument, they mar a study that displays strong potential and could, ultimately, have had a lot to offer.

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