

REVIEW

A COMMENTARY TO CAESAR'S SETBACKS IN GAUL AND BRITAIN (*BG* 5 AND 6)

Jennifer Gerrish, ed., *Julius Caesar: The Gallic War, Books V–VI*. Aris & Philips Classical Texts. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. Pp. 228. Paperback, £24.99. ISBN 978-1-80207-468-0.

Books 5 and 6 of Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* take us from Britain, where the Romans struggle, to Gaul, where the Romans suffer heavy losses, and finally to the Hercynian Forest across the Rhine, where strange creatures dwell. Jennifer Gerrish has succeeded in making these books accessible to her readership, consisting of students of Latin and those who do not read Latin.

Overview

The book contains an introduction with a brief bibliography, the Latin text with facing translation, a commentary with separate notes on the Latin and an index. The introduction presents information about Caesar's life and career and his works. It is a useful overview of scholarly discussions about, for example, the publication date(s) of *Bellum Gallicum* and the purpose of the work. The books themselves are summarised and discussed from a thematic (*Themes*) and narratological angle (*Narrative Features*). Footnotes and a selective bibliography provide suggestions for further reading, such as relevant chapters from the Cambridge Companion edited by Luca Grillo and Christopher Krebs.¹ The section *Notes on the Text* is introduced by a concise but clear explanation of manuscript transmission, which is likened to a game of 'Telephone'. Gerrish effectively guides students through the stemma of the text as presented in Hering's Teubner edition. This discussion is one example of the way in which Gerrish succeeds in making the Classics research field accessible to users of her book.

A map with the most important places and people is printed at the end of the introduction (as well as on the cover). A map is absolutely necessary for the

¹ L. Grillo and C. B. Krebs, edd., *The Cambridge Companion to the Writings of Julius Caesar* (Cambridge, 2018).

comprehension of *Bellum Gallicum* 5 and 6, especially in *caput* 5.24 in which Caesar splits up his troops and sends them to several regions and peoples in Gaul. A minor typographical error in the map is the name of the Suebi (it says ‘Seubi’). More problematic is the size and colouring of the map in the printed version: it is quite small and does not distinguish between land and sea. The distinction between land and sea is clearly visible in the PDF version, however.

Text and translation face each other in a pleasant layout. The text used is that of Hering’s Teubner edition (2008). I have not checked the text systematically, but it struck me that the full stop between *essent* and *de* in 5.9.1 results in the absence of a main clause for the subordinate *ubi*-clause. When I checked this in the Teubner edition, I discovered that Hering prints a comma, but unfortunately this comma is not fully printed in the pdf of the edition. This comma, with only half a tail, is easily recognisable to the human eye, but less so to OCR software. Thus, this (minor) textual problem makes a nice addition to the above-mentioned section *Notes on the Text*. I would definitely point it out to students as a relatively new type of possible errors in text transmission!

The commentary contains summaries (with captions) for every two to five *capita*. Virtually every *caput* is provided with a section commenting on the content of the text and a separate section with notes on Latin vocabulary and grammar. There is an index with names of people, places, and concepts from politics and warfare (e.g., ‘ambush’, ‘autochthony’, ‘bridges’).

Themes and Information in the Commentary

Gerrish discusses three themes of Book 5 and 6 in her introduction. These themes are ‘Justification of Caesar’s Command’, ‘Allegiance to the *populus Romanus*’, and ‘Reframing Setbacks’. The discussions of these themes (about two pages each) help students connect specific passages from the text to their historical context. In addition, they also encourage readers to think about the worldview of Caesar and the Romans. In her discussion of the justification of Caesar’s command, for example, Gerrish refers back to her introduction of the political situation in Rome and explains that the antagonism from Cato and the *optimates* required Caesar to highlight why his presence in Gaul was necessary. She enumerates the specific passages in which he does this. Gerrish addresses how Caesar’s justification is valid only from a Roman perspective and contrasts this with modern perspectives, in which we may evaluate Caesar’s actions as colonial overreach.

I would have expected references to these discussions of themes in the commentary, especially because Gerrish identifies and enumerates relevant passages so specifically and systematically in her introduction. References to this part of the introduction could have been included in the lemmata, but

these mostly focus on information necessary for a more local understanding of the text and the plot.

The lemmata provide relevant background on geography (including modern names), weaponry, and persons. They also discuss existing observations and interpretations of passages, with further references. An example is the death of the Aeduan Dumnorix, who was disobedient and rebelled against Caesar. Gerrish quotes Mommsen to point out the contrast between the matter-of-fact style in which Dumnorix' death is narrated and the chilling effect it must have had on the Gallic aristocracy (*ad* 5.7.9). The focus in this lemma thus lies on Caesar's relation to the Gauls. But the relation to Rome seems just as important here, as Gerrish herself shows in the introduction (30). She there connects these exact sentences on the death of Dumnorix to the justification of Caesar's command and presence in Gaul. It would have had added value if an explicit reference was made in the commentary to the earlier discussion of this bigger theme.

Narrative Features

Gerrish connects her discussion of narrative features to larger themes and purposes of Caesar's text. She thus points out to her readers that narrators' choices to insert certain literary and historiographical devices are not random but may be a point of departure for further thought and interpretation. She selects two important narrative features for discussion, that of geography and ethnography and that of speeches.

The geographical and ethnographic descriptions of Books 5 and 6, Gerrish explains, are as elaborate as those common in the historiographical genre. She enumerates all digressions in the introduction and comes back to this narrative feature at these places in her commentary. The introduction includes a discussion of the functions of the geographical and ethnographic descriptions, preparing readers to ponder the question *why* Caesar would have inserted a digression when he does. Gerrish offers several types of answers and directions, pointing out, for instance, that these descriptions reflect Caesar's colonial world view, while emphasising that Caesar also may have had specific political and rhetorical goals with his description of Germany as dangerous and unfamiliar. She explicitly invites readers to engage with the text when she writes 'These digressions also encourage us to revisit the question of Caesar's literary ambitions' (36), a nice prompt to use in class when discussing them.

The narrative feature of speeches, too, is first introduced by giving a sketch of their appearances in historiography, distinguishing between the less frequent and (thus) more salient direct speech and the more common indirect presentation of speeches. The freedom of ancient historiographers to invent speeches is briefly addressed. Gerrish points out Caesar's preference for

indirect speech and then rightly gives most attention to the exceptional direct speeches in Books 5 and 6, briefly discussing each of them. She connects the use of speeches to the context of detailed vignettes and could have made a connection to another important narrative tool, that of the pace of the narrative. Lengthy indirect speeches and direct speeches tend to slow down the pace of the narrative, while Caesar's preferred narrative style tends to be higher-paced, giving all the more reason to think about the functions of speech and thought when they do occur.

The way in which speeches function in characterising both Caesar and other characters is discussed, but rather briefly and only in relation to direct speech. An example is Labienus' exhortation speech, in which he asks his soldiers to fight as if Caesar were present (6.8.3). The speech thus characterises Caesar, as well as the subordinate position of Labienus. Gerrish comments 'Labienus gets the speech, but Caesar is still the star, as the brief *oratio recta* serves to manifest him at an event for which he was not present' (38).

In her discussion of Sabinus' speech (5.30), Gerrish focuses on its function to alert the reader that his words are fateful, as they anticipate the impending ruin of these legions. We could, however, also explore the characterising function of this speech. Especially so, because it emphasises the contrast between Sabinus and his colleague Cotta. The speech is part of the heated debate between Sabinus and Cotta (5.29–31). Confronted with the presence of many Gauls and Ambiorix' warning that more enemies are on the way, the Romans disagree on Ambiorix' sincerity when he promises them a safe passage. Sabinus' loud voice and the presentational form of his speeches (a direct speech and, earlier, a lengthy and rather unstructured indirect speech) underline his hot-headedness and the rashness of his decision. In contrast, the preceding speech by Cotta and others is presented in two clear parts, each depending on its own verb form. First, they explain what they think is necessary (*existimabant*), then they present their arguments (*docebant*). The effect of this form of speech presentation is that of a calm, deliberative, and well-thought-out plan of action. The forms of the speeches chosen by the Caesarian narrator contribute to the characterisation of the two parties, as well as signalling the outcome of this episode. Thus, these forms add to observations made by Gerrish and Grillo about the role of this episode in the historiographical and epic tradition of the 'quarrelling generals' topos.² In reading these speeches in class, students can be invited to think about the way in which the narrator influences our idea of a character by means of speech presentation.

² Gerrish includes this observation in her comment on 5.28.2 and discusses it more elaborately in J. Gerrish, 'Heroic Resonances in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* 5', *CW* 111 (2018) 351–70. The intertextual aspects of the scene are discussed in L. Grillo, 'Caesarian Intertextualities: Sabinus and Cotta in *BG* 5.26–37', *CJ* 111 (2016) 257–79.

Translation

The translations closely follow the Latin text and thus aid both groups of intended readers. Those who do not have Latin get an impression of Caesar's style and can experience for themselves some of the observations made on Caesar's prose style in the introduction (17–18). For those who do read Latin, the transparency of the translation makes it a good reading help. The order of clauses is generally kept the same for instance, thus enabling an easy comparison between Latin and translation. Furthermore, Gerrish usually explains deviations in her translations. When these are of a syntactic nature, she shows what she has done in the notes on the Latin. An example is her note on *toto in hoc genere pugnae* (5.16.1), which she classifies as a 'tricky phrase', as the literal translation ('in this whole type of fight') makes little sense. She goes on to explain how she arrived at the translation 'the whole battle'.

Gerrish points out at 5.1.1 that the narrator generally keeps himself hidden but sometimes does use 'our' or 'our men' (*noster* and *nostrī*). She enumerates the instances where he shows himself by means of these first-person possessives. In most of these cases, the translation renders the first person, making this communicative and perhaps even affective strategy accessible for those who cannot read the Latin. However, this is not always done and at 5.32.2 it reads 'most unfavorable to them' for *iniquissimo nostris loco*, thus passing over the strategy of the contrast in the text between 'the enemies' and 'our men', *hostes* and *nostrī*.

Technical military terms are translated while the Latin word is given in the commentary. In 5.42, the translation reads, for example: '[the Nervii] made grappling hooks and protective covers, all as the hostages had taught them to do'. Here, the English translation helps to mentally picture these objects, while the commentary points out that these are *falces* and *testudines* with a brief description of these devices. This is excellent because it enables students to look up and further investigate these military devices.

Notes on Latin

The notes on Latin syntax are aimed at students at an intermediate level. These students should be familiar with and have access to the Latin grammar by Allen and Greenough (A&G), as the notes regularly refer to it. This is understandable, given the widespread use of this grammar. But in my opinion (a simplified version of) the terminology used in the *Oxford Latin Syntax* (Pinkster (2015), (2021)) would have enabled a more adequate and up-to-date explanation of Caesar's grammar and would have prepared Latin students to use the *Oxford Latin Syntax* at a later stage in their career. At some occasions, Gerrish indeed adds an alternative formulation to that of Allen and Greenough that is

in line with more modern views on Latin. An example is the use of an *ut*-clause to express an indirect command such as at 5.4.2, where Allen and Greenough are relegated to a remark between brackets:

- Latin: *consolatus Indutiomarum hortatusque est, uti in officio maneret.*
 Translation: Caesar reassured Indutiomarus and encouraged him to remain steadfast in his loyalty.
 Note: *uti ... maneret*: indirect command governed by *hortatus est* (also called substantive clause of purpose; A&G 563).

Gerrish might have done this more often, for instance in the case of another type of *ut*-clause. In 5.41.5, for instance, it would have been more helpful to say that the *ut*-clause presents the content of the noun phrase *hoc animo* (and, thus, is an attribute) instead of the mere label of ‘substantive clause of result’. I would think that here students are helped more by the transparency of the translation than by the notes:

- Latin: *sese tamen hoc esse in Ciceronem populumque Romanum animo, ut nihil nisi hiberna recusent atque hanc inveterascere consuetudinem nolint;*
 Translation: Nevertheless, regarding Cicero and the Roman people, the Nervii [= *sese*, SA] were of the opinion that they would refuse them nothing except for accommodating their winter quarters, which they did not want to become a habitual practice.
 Notes: *hoc ... animo*: ablative of quality (A&G 415).
ut ... recusent ... nolint: substantive clause of result (A&G 571c).

Several notes address somewhat more infrequent uses of cases (e.g., an accusative of specification, a double dative) and the historical infinitive. Most notes have to do with the subjunctive in subordinate clauses, including subordinate clauses in indirect discourse or implied indirect discourse. Lengthy and syntactically difficult sentences are broken up typographically and Gerrish tends to explain how she has broken up a complex sentence into multiple sentences in her translation. I especially like these comments because they not only explain what this translator has done at specific occasions, but also provide students with strategies to handle similar sentences themselves.

Readership and Use in Teaching

This book is part of the series of *Aris and Phillips Classical Texts*, in which volumes are designed to be accessible to those without Greek or Latin and support those learning the original language. Gerrish definitely meets this aim. Therefore, the book can be used in a class for students with an intermediate knowledge of Latin or in a class for students with no Latin. I can even imagine that the book is used in a heterogeneous class with a mix of Latin and history students. Learning objectives could range from getting better at Latin to reflecting on Roman imperialism or on perspectives in ethnographic descriptions.

I expect it to be a pleasure to teach a course using this book. The primary text offers eventful episodes of warfare, presented in a relatively wide range of narrative styles. It affords rich class discussions on Roman imperialism, on the presentation of ‘the other’, and on strategies in war as well as on strategies in communicating about war. The introduction, translation, and commentary definitely help students prepare for such discussions, as they provide insights and background on all levels of text comprehension and interpretation, from the lexicon and Latin grammar to the Roman context in which this text was written.

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