



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago  
Loyola eCommons

---

Classical Studies: Faculty Publications and  
Other Works

Faculty Publications and Other Works by  
Department

---

1-1991

## Review: Lucan's Civil War

John F. Makowski

Loyola University Chicago, [jmakow1@luc.edu](mailto:jmakow1@luc.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/classicalstudies\\_facpubs](https://ecommons.luc.edu/classicalstudies_facpubs)



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Makowski, JF. "Review: Lucan's Civil War" in *Classical World* 84(3). 249.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classical Studies: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
© Classical Association of the Atlantic States, 1991.

nately, the complexity and the price of the work may limit Tritle's audience to those with a serious interest in fourth-century Athens or Plutarchan biography.

*University of Texas at Arlington*  
CW 84.3 (1991)

DONALD G. KYLE

P. F. Widdows (tr.). *Lucan's Civil War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. Pp. xxv, 294, incl. 6 maps. \$47.50. ISBN 0-253-31399-6.

On all counts this translation of the *Pharsalia* is a resounding success and will, one predicts, stand as the definitive English version. Readers discontented with Robert Graves' idiosyncratic and often misleading prose translation will welcome this verse edition by Widdows with its readability, accuracy, and, above all, its poetic sensibility. Lucan *ardens* and *concitatus* in the original is easy to make flat and ponderous in English, but in Widdows' hands he retains his fire and momentum. For one thing, Widdows' choice of meter, the English hexameter, works remarkably well at capturing the nuances of the original. For another, the translator's command of English diction is superb, as a glance at his rendering of the exordium will show. Widdows manages to sustain his capture of Lucan's tone, be it in the narrative sections, the rhetorical ravings of the speeches and apostrophes, or the *sententiae*. To illustrate: here is his rendering of the famous *victrix placuit* passage: "Impossible to determine/Which had the juster cause, for both had impeccable sanction:/Gods on the conquering side, but Cato choosing the conquered."

A number of features accompanying the translation serve to make this occasionally maddening poem more accessible to the layman. The introduction, with admirable conciseness and informativeness, treats Lucan's life and relationship with Nero, the influence of the declamation schools, and several key critical questions such as unity, the identity of the hero, and the poem's putative end-point. The only desideratum would be a section on the Stoic philosophy that underpins much of the *Pharsalia*. Another welcome feature is the notes to each book which are invaluable in elucidating elements that can exasperate the reader of Lucan, such as his astronomical vagaries and his obscurantist use of the mythological and geographical excursus. Finally, one must commend Widdows for the inclusion of six maps, which render intelligible the vicissitudes of the civil war in its many theaters.

Widdows' translation deserves acclaim, and both classicist and student of epic poetry in general will want this edition on their bookshelves.

*Loyola University of Chicago*  
CW 84.3 (1991)

JOHN F. MAKOWSKI

†Roy Davies. *Service in the Roman Army*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. Pp. xii, 336, incl. 78 b/w plates, 9 line drawings. \$60.00. ISBN 0-231-06992-8.

10 papers by Davies, edited after his death by David Breeze and Valerie Maxfield.

Take the highly technical papers of a young scholar who died a premature death, choose only those with a wide focus, banish the footnotes to the end,