Latin Commentaries on the Web

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Abstract

Two new classical commentary series, one designed for print and one for the web, show the advantages and limitations of different models of on-line publication. Open Book Publishers produces attractive, well-written print books, available on line in forms mimicking the style of the print editions. The Dickinson Classical Commentaries take full advantage of the web, not only including sound and pictures, but linking to other reference sources for geography, grammar, and images. This review discusses each series, in particular the commentaries on Vergil's *Aeneid* from Open Book and on Caesar's *Gallic War* from DCC.

Keywords

commentary, intermediate Latin, on-line publication, open access, Creative Commons, digital humanities

Works Reviewed

Christopher Francese, ed. *Caesar: Selections from the Gallic War.* Dickinson Classical Commentaries, 2010–2013. No ISBN. Free.

William Turpin. *Ovid: Amores 1.* Dickinson Classical Commentaries, 2010–2013. No ISBN. Free.

Ingo Gildenhard. *Virgil, Aeneid 4.1–299.* Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012. ISBN 978-1-909254-16-9 (hardcover). Free online, £29.95 hardcover.

Two new series of peer-reviewed scholarly commentaries, freely available on line, have appeared in the last few years. One, from Open Book publishers (http://www.openbookpublishers.com/section/31/1/classics-textbooks), is fundamentally designed for print. The other, the Dickinson Classical Commentaries (http://dcc.dickinson.edu), is designed for the web. The commentaries of each series are designed for intermediate-level students; the Open Book texts cover some of the texts set for the A-level exams in Britain, while the Dickinson texts range more widely.

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In this review I will consider the presentation and content of each series, with particular attention to the Vergil selection from Open Book and the Caesar and Ovid selections from DCC.

Form

What do these commentaries look like and how do they work?

Open Book publishes inexpensive print books in fields ranging from economics to classics. Each book can be purchased in hardcover, paperback, PDF, EPUB (the XML-based open standard ebook form), or Mobi (a proprietary ebook form used by the Amazon Kindle among others). They can also be read for free on line, either in plain HTML or in a page display form emulating the printed book (using iPaper form, from Scribd, based on Adobe Flash).

The books are designed to be printed; the on-line editions don't take advantage of the web, but are simply copies of the print books. The plain HTML version starts with the book cover, with links marked "Contents" and "Index," both of which take a reader to the table of contents. From there you can go to any chapter of the book, but not to sections within the commentary. The text appears in a single large window; footnotes, on another page, are hyperlinked. There are no links between the commentary and the Latin text, nor are internal cross references realized as links. If you want to see the text and the commentary or study questions together, you can open each in a separate browser window or tab. In short, the plain HTML presentation is rather rudimentary. On the other hand, as it requires no special software, it is usable on any device with any browser.

The iPaper version shows the book, a page at a time, including cover, front matter, and back matter. There is a search tool and a sidebar (normally hidden) with the table of contents. As in the plain HTML version, there are no internal links: if you want to see the Latin text and commentary together, you need to flip back and forth exactly as you would with a printed book.

Some of Open Book's titles include "digital resources" or "on-line supplements." In the case of the Vergil commentary, this is an alternate edition of the text and commentary, hosted at http://aeneid4.theclassicslibrary.com, with facilities for comments (though the site is apparently not monitored, as all the comments on the site are spam). Other books—though none of the classics texts—have links to their authors' blogs, links to related texts in other digital libraries, or relevant primary source materials. Since a web site has no page limits nor any of the other constraints

on a printed book, it's possible to include anything that might be useful to a reader. Open Book's model, however, treats these additions as supplements to a printed book, rather than integrating them into a web presentation of the text.

As books, the editions are attractive. Footnotes are conveniently placed at the bottom of the page, the typeface is clear, and the layout is clean. If Open Book's principal goal is to produce inexpensive, high-quality scholarly books, they are succeeding, but the web editions seem like a bit of a missed opportunity.

[73] Commotus est Dolabella: fecit id quod multi reprehenderunt, ut exercitum, provinciam, bellum relinqueret, et in Asiam hominis nequissimi causa in alienam provinciam proficisceretur. Posteaquam ad Neronem venit, contendit ab eo ut Philodami causam cognosceret. Venerat ipse qui esset in consilio et primus sententiam diceret; adduxerat etiam praefectos et tribunos militaris suos, quos Nero omnis in consilium vocavit; erat in consilio etiam aequissimus iudex ipse Verres; erant non nulli togati creditores Graecorum, quibus ad exigendas pecunias improbissimi cuiusque legati plurimum prodest gratia.

Grammar and Syntax:

- What type of *ut*-clause is *ut … relinqueret*?
- *qui esset in consilio et primus sententiam diceret*: explain the use of the subjunctives.

Style and Theme:

- Identify the stylistic devices that Cicero uses in *ut exercitum, provinciam, bellum relinqueret* and discuss their rhetorical effect.
- Discuss Cicero's use of the superlative in the paragraph, with special reference to *hominis nequissimi causa, aequissimus iudex ipse Verres, improbissimi cuiusque legati*, and *plurimum prodest*.
- How does Cicero discredit the *consilium* that advised Nero?

A Sample Page from an Open Book Commentary

The Dickinson Classical Commentaries (hereafter DCC), on the other hand, have been designed for the web from the start. Each text is presented in sections, with the text itself on the left-hand side of the page and ancillary materials on the

right: notes, running vocabulary, and "media," normally including an audio recording of the text. The texts have macrons. The vocabulary for each section is given in order of first occurrence. Only less common words are glossed. The DCC site includes core vocabulary lists, roughly a thousand words for Latin (http://dcc.dickinson.edu/latin-vocabulary-list) and five hundred for Greek (http://dcc.dickinson.edu/greek-core-list), based on frequency in standard corpora, and words on those lists are never glossed in the running vocabularies.

Media presented with the text include audio recordings, pictures, maps, and animations. For Caesar, for example, there are some animated maps, in which places referred to in the text are colored as that part of the text is read. In the commentary on Ovid, *Amores* book 1, there are pictures of artifacts and of art works that show gods, places, or objects referred to in the text; at *Amores* 1.5, for example, we see a window with its shutters from Herculaneum. The note to lines 3–4, referring to the windows of the speaker's room, includes a link to that image, as does the entry for *fenestra* in the vocabulary.

Links in the notes don't just connect parts of the DCC text, but bring in material from off site as well. Most place names in the notes to Caesar are linked to the Pleiades Gazetteer (http://pleiades.stoa.org/), an open-source database of geographic information for the ancient world, with maps, photographs, and connections to other projects. Grammatical points are linked to *Allen and Greenough's Grammar* from the Perseus Digital Library (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/).

Each DCC commentary has an introduction and a bibliography; most of the introductions are comparable in scope to those of the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (the "green and yellow" series), or even longer. Here, too, material from outside the site is linked where relevant. The introduction to Caesar also includes two fifteen-minute lectures in podcast form, by Loren J. Samons of Boston University, on military topics.

The series is justifiably proud of its roster of student contributors, mostly from Dickinson, who have helped with maps, vocabulary lists, testing, and other tasks.

The DCC web site uses Drupal for content management, though none of the documentation explains what is the underlying form of the texts, that is, whether the texts are actually written directly in HTML for the web or whether they use a standard structured markup scheme like TEI (http://www.tei-c.org). Structured markup, not tied to a particular presentation technology, allows a digital library to change the

way its texts look on line without having to change the texts themselves. As new display platforms evolve, will the DCC site be able to evolve with them?

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OVID / AMORES BOOK I
Notes and essays by William Turpin

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AMORES 1.9

Mīlitat omnis amāns, et habet sua castra Cupīdō;
Attice, crēde mihī, mīlitat omnis amāns.
quae bellō est habilis, Venerī quoque convenit aetās:
turpe senex mīles, turpe senīlis amor.
quōs petiēre ducēs animōs in mīlite fortī, 5
hōs petit in sociō bella puella virō:
pervigilant ambō, terrā requiēscit uterque;
ille forēs dominae servat, at ille ducis.
mīlitis officium longa est via: mitte puellam,
strēnuus exemptō fīne sequētur amāns; 10
ībit in adversōs montēs duplicātaque nimbō
flūmina, congestās exteret ille nivēs,
nec freta pressūrus tumidōs causābitur Eurōs
aptave verrendīs sīdera quaeret aquīs.
quis nisi vel mīles vel amāns et frīgora noctis 15
et dēnsō mixtās perferet imbre nivēs?

notes | vocabulary | media

1.9: Love and War

This is an easy poem to like. Part of the appeal is that, for once, we can place it within a specific literary tradition without the aid of commentaries. We all know that "all is fair in love and war," and poets have understood that young men in war and young men in love have much in common. [full essay]

1–2: **amāns:** = *amātor*. **castra:** "warfare," by metonymy. **Attice:** Ovid addresses a friend (not otherwise known) by name; note the chiastic structure of the first couplet (ABBA).

3–4: **quae:** the antecedent is *aetās*; "the (same) age which." **bellō est habilis, Venerī ... convenit:** the adjective *habilis* ("suited") is linked to a dative of reference (*bellō*), and the verb *convenit* ("befits") takes a dative object (*Venerī*). **turpe:** neuter predicate nominative, supply *est*; "is a shameful thing." **senīlis amor** = *senex amāns*.

5–6: **petiēre** = *petiērunt*; gnomic perfect (AG §475); see note on 8.71. **quōs ... animōs:** "the (same) courage which"; the antecedent (*animōs*) has been drawn into the relative clause. **sociō:** note that *socius* can have military overtones: "ally." **bella:** > bellus, -a, -um "pretty," NOT *bellum*, -ī n.

7–8: **forēs:** Roman lovers conducted long vigils outside their mistresses' doors, as in *Amōrēs* 1.6. **servat:** "guard." **ducis:** "of his general"; understand *forēs servat* from the previous clause.

A Sample Page from the Dickinson Classical Commentaries

Commentaries in both the DCC and the Open Book series are licensed under Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–Noderivs; that is, readers may copy parts of the books, for personal, non-commercial use (for example, as a supplement for a class), provided the copies clearly include attribution to the authors. Creative Commons licenses are a more precise version of copyright, specifying exactly which rights are reserved to the author and how other people may use or build on the work.

Both series are types of "open access" publication, which simply means that the commentaries are freely available on line. The DCC series is supported by the

Roberts Fund for Classical Studies at Dickinson College, and contributors are volunteers. Open Book asks authors to pay for publication, typically between £3,500 and £5,000 depending on the size of the book; it is assumed that the author is a college or university faculty member and that the school, or a research grant, will cover publication costs. Sale of print copies also helps subsidize the on-line publication.

Content

Of course, what ultimately matters is not whether a text is attractive but whether it says useful things. On this score, both Open Book and DCC do well.

Gildenhard's Vergil commentary, from Open Book, covers the opening of *Aeneid* book 4, a set text for A2 from 2013 to 2015. Gildenhard says his goal is not so much to help students with the Latin as "to stimulate critical engagement with Virgil's poetry" (p. 2). The commentary begins with a list of "study questions," some of which are answered in the commentary proper. Many of these are the sort of small-scale questions an instructor might ask in class (for example, "scan line 8 and discuss the thematic implications of the metrical peculiarity," p. 20), but others bring in much larger issues. The very first study question is a good example: "Would you start reading a novel with Chapter 4?" (p. 17). In other words, students are immediately challenged to consider why they're reading only part of the *Aeneid*, and why this part in particular.

The commentary proper follows, including references to other relevant texts—the rest of the *Aeneid*, the *Argonautica,* Greek tragedy, and so on—and to scholarship. Gildenhard gives a lot of attention to meter and sound play, encouraging students to read aloud and to pay attention to the Latin itself, not just to the story. The story is hardly neglected, though, and there are many good observations. For example, on p. 58, Gildenhard notes that in the long sentence 4.9–14, Dido's speech is "palpably out of control," and she calms down somewhat by line 15. The note to 4.90–128 about elapsed time in book 4 is also useful: Vergil is not particularly precise about dates or intervals of time, but then he doesn't have to be.

The first 8 lines of book 4 receive 15 pages of commentary: this is an admirable example of very close reading. Of course such detailed annotation goes far beyond pointing out grammatical difficulties and helping students write the translations their exams will call for. The sort of student who's only interested in doing well on the exam may think there's too much commentary here. But students who read

through these notes will start developing facility at literary reading and appreciation for how Latin verse works; they'll start to see what classical scholarship is all about.

After the commentary come four "interpretive essays," one each on content and form, the historiographical Dido, allusion, and religion. The second, on the Dido story outside Vergil, is particularly interesting. The allusion essay includes a useful explanation of how to read the "cf." markers in a commentary, starting from Pease's note to 4.1–2 and unpacking the references there to Ennius, Catullus, Lucretius, Tibullus, Ovid, and Silius Italicus (or, "nothing less than the entire history of Latin literature from archaic times (Ennius) to the imperial age (Silius)"). Gildenhard explains the citation schemes, reproduces the passages Pease refers to (with translations), cites standard commentaries on those texts, and prompts the reader to consider all these texts as interacting with each other. This exercise is beautifully done and should help students begin to understand what a scholarly commentary can do.

To round off the book, there is a bibliography, with separate sections for editions, commentaries, translations, and scholarly works. Almost all of the scholarship listed is in English, appropriately in a student text. There is no vocabulary list.

The language throughout is breezy, almost slangy: we see section headings like "173–197: The News Goes Viral." Of course this kind of language gets dated quickly, but by the time the phrase "goes viral" starts to sound antiquated, the A-level syllabus will have been revised and students will have moved on to a different commentary. Meanwhile, it is accessible, and a pleasure to read. This commentary could easily stand alone as the main text for a class.

The other commentaries in this series, also by Gildenhard, are Tacitus, *Annals* 15.20–23 and 33–45 (with Matthew Owen; this is a set text for A2 prose in 2013–2015), and Cicero, *Verrines* 2.1.53–86 (AS prose set text, 2012–2014). The Tacitus has a running vocabulary, including the words authors think students will need. On each page, along with the text, are grammar questions and interpretive questions. The Cicero, designed for a slightly lower-level class, has questions as the Tacitus commentary does, but no vocabulary; it also includes a complete translation of the text, at the back of the book.

The DCC commentaries published so far cover Caesar (the sections of the *Gallic War* set for the AP exam, by Christopher Francese), Ovid (*Amores* 1, by William Turpin), Nepos (*Life of Hannibal,* by Bret Mulligan), Sulpicius Severus (*Life of St. Martin of Tours*, by Christopher Francese), and Lucian (*True Histories*, by Evan

Hayes, Stephen Nimis, and Eric Casey); commentaries on Greek texts have been announced but have not yet appeared.

Francese's Caesar commentary is a compendium of notes from older commentaries, one as early as 1848 (J. A. Spencer) but most from 1870–1920, some complete and others treating only certain books. All the commentaries are also available on line, for example in Google Books, and the DCC site supplies links to them under the heading "Sources of Notes."

Most of these notes are intended to help a student translate the text literally. Arguably this may be helpful in an AP course, but an instructor working on getting students to read *without* translating may find these notes get in the way. An example is the note to 1.3 taken from the 1909 commentary on book 4 by Harry F. Towle and Paul R. Jenks: "*cuius pater ... appellatus erat*: this clause is parenthetical; in working out the sentence, omit it until the rest has been thoroughly grasped. Then go back and read this clause; then read the entire sentence." Of course it's useful to say that a clause is parenthetical, but the implicit assumption is that students are "working out" sentences like so many logic puzzles.

Aside from grammatical notes, other notes explain dates, Caesar's choice of verb tenses, idiomatic senses of words, and so on. Each note is attributed; sometimes Francese has included more than one commentator's note to a given phrase, as on *ea res* at the start of 1.4. Here Moberly says Caesar uses the general *res* where English prefers more specific words, and Harper and Tolman point out that "No word in Latin admits such a variety of meanings as *res*."

In general the notes explain constructions or vocabulary, without providing translations, but also without considering the larger issues raised by the text. All of the notes pertain to specific phrases or sentences in the text, not to larger sections. There's nothing in the notes themselves to use as a starting point for literary or historical discussions, or for student essays; for this, the podcasts and annotated bibliography are a good starting point.

Each section has a brief summary in English, for example at 1.2, "Orgetorix persuades the Helvetii to invade Gaul." Francese himself has read the text aloud, clearly and accurately. There is at least one map for each section. The maps, images, audio files, and annotated bibliography are a useful supplement to any edition of the text.

A class reading the AP syllabus could use this commentary as its main textbook, if the teacher was willing to provide help with literary analysis. On the other

hand, a class using any other commentary would find the vocabulary and the supplementary materials of this commentary quite helpful. As the text is only the AP sections, the commentary is less useful for classes on Caesar in other contexts.

The other DCC commentaries are newly written, and fuller than the Caesar commentary. All include running vocabulary, glossing words not on the core list; audio recordings of the text; and a variety of images. Each has its own additional features as well. Turpin's commentary on Ovid's *Amores* book 1 has a short introductory essay on each poem.

Mulligan's Hannibal commentary has a long historical introduction, a complete vocabulary list, and an extensive bibliography covering everything from Eutropius books 2–4 (with link to the text at the Latin Library) to movies and novels set in the Punic War period. Articles in the bibliography are linked to JSTOR, books to Google Books.

Francese's commentary on the life of St. Martin includes links to other editions of Sulpicius Severus and to a couple of translations. When the notes refer to other texts, links are provided to the Packard Humanities Institute editions or to Perseus. Post-classical uses are flagged. For example, in 2.4 Sulpicius writes *mox mirum in modis totus in Dei opere conversus,* and Francese comments "having been turned toward (with *in* + abl.). Classical Latin would use *in* or *ad* + acc. with this word."

The Ovid commentary is exactly what I'd want for an intermediate-level Latin class, particularly in college. First, tucked into its introduction is an extensive introduction to scansion of dactylic hexameters and elegiac couplets, written by William Turpin (the author of the commentary) with videos by Christopher Francese. The pronunciation here is excellent: Francese accurately distinguishes long stressed syllables, long un-stressed syllables, short stressed syllables, and short un-stressed syllables. He avoids artificially stressing long elements in the verse, correctly giving each word its actual stress. Although the dactylic forms are explained in terms of "feet," the advice to "become thoroughly at home with the basic unit of ¯˘˘¯˘˘¯" is useful. Students reading other dactylic verse—the *Aeneid*, for example—should review these notes.

The commentary also includes a brief note on the manuscript tradition of the *Amores,* with pictures of representative pages from the four major manuscripts. Although some basic terms (archetype, in particular) are not defined, this is a good introduction to textual criticism and why it matters.

In the commentary itself, the approach is modern: although the grammar is explained, with references to Allen and Greenough's grammar where necessary, the notes generally don't tell the reader how to translate a passage, but rather how to understand it. Scansion is incorporated throughout; for example, at 1.1.2 *materia* we read "scansion reveals that the final *a* is long, and that the word is therefore ablative." The notes go beyond simply establishing the meaning to touch on interpretation of the poems; on the first couplet of the first poem, Turpin mentions the allusion to the opening of the *Aeneid,* the convention of *recusatio* poems, and the cultural position of hexameter meter. The introductory note to 1.7 correctly notes that the poem "plays with a topic about which it is hard for modern readers to be playful, physical abuse." The headnote to 1.14, with similar sensitivity on a much lighter subject, notes that "a major cosmetic disaster of this sort is no time to be saying 'I told you not to do it.'" On the other hand, the *puella* is regularly referred to as a "girl," which is too literal in contemporary English: the speaker's girlfriend is surely a grown woman.

The readings by Laetizia Palladini are particularly expressive. She avoids artificially stressing long syllables but lets the listener actually hear the quantitative meter.

Conclusions

All of the commentaries under review are appropriate for intermediate Latin students. The Open Book series is aimed at British secondary-school students; the DCC series envisions a wider audience and includes not only a text for a standard exam (the AP Caesar selections) but a less familiar text from late antiquity.

Both series have advantages. Open Book provides relatively inexpensive print books, or e-reader or web presentations that exactly emulate those books. These books take no particular advantage of the web except as a delivery mechanism, though the supplements available on the Open Book website, outside the book itself, may use more web-native features.

The DCC commentaries are nothing like print books: they participate in the network of classical scholarship much more actively, with a rich array of hyperlinks to a variety of other projects, they include far more maps and pictures than any but the most expensive print books, and they let a student hear the text as well as reading it. While any commentary refers to other texts, these commentaries make those references immediately available to a reader.

In the classroom, the Open Book commentaries will work just like any other print commentary series. Gildenhard's breezy style and highly detailed notes will challenge the more proficient students while not overwhelming those who are struggling. The DCC Caesar commentary may not be detailed enough to stand alone as the class's main resource, but the other commentaries give all the help a class might need, not only on grammar but on culture, context, and connections.

Certainly both series provide good scholarship and good pedagogy, but it's only the DCC series that pushes the bounds of commentary form. Commentaries have been part of classical scholarship at least since the Alexandrians; they're the most basic way we engage with texts, first as students and later, perhaps, as authors. The Open Book commentaries are not fundamentally different from the 19th-century Caesar texts excerpted in Francese's commentary, nor, even, from the marginal scholia in our manuscripts. The DCC commentaries aim to be something more, both in presentation and in access. There is of course still a place for print books (or their e-reader avatars), but there is also a place for scholarly work that uses the resources of the web, and DCC shows us a model for doing that well.