



Render Unto Caesar

Gillian Bradshaw

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Hermogenes is a young Greek from Alexandria, heir to a noble and vibrant society. But in his youth Hermogenes and his family were held captive to the whims of the queen Cleopatra, whose machinations spelled doom for an entire nation--whose schemes for empire caused the might of Rome to conquer his people. While the citizens of Rome may ape Hellenic ways, the Alexandrian Greeks are viewed as less than human because they are not of Rome.

But a man may win the coveted citizenship in more ways than birth on Roman soil. When Hermogenes father is granted such a boon, it appears as if his family has found favor from the gods--except then a business deal goes sour and Hermogenes father dies at sea. It is left to Hermogenes to reclaim all monies owed to the family... including a debt from a very well connected Roman consul who has reneged on his obligations and refuses to deal with "Greek trash."

Hermogenes will travel to Rome to reclaim what he is owed and finds it is no simple matter. Along the way, he will encounter base desire and power struggles, plots within plots... and a beautiful woman gladiator who is more than she seems. His life is in danger, and ultimately Hermogenes is left with the question:

Can the conferring of a title make one truly Roman? And if not, how far will a man go to satisfy honor?

Render Unto Caesar Details

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Ozymandias says

Plot: 9 (unique and constantly shifting with uncertain ending)

Characters: 8 (likable and sometimes truly special)

Accuracy: 8 (superb research is significantly impacted by modern ideals)

I really liked this book. The book is basically a combination of two things: a slice of life story about everyday life in Rome and the relations between different social units (master/slave, Greek/Roman); and a political thriller about a man trying to claim his money from a powerful Roman and survive doing so. Neither one have been done adequately before in my book. You commonly find both elements in quaint Roman murder mysteries, but those books are so formulaic and modernist that they barely scratch the surface of the issues. This book handles things better.

The political thriller aspect is fairly original I thought. At least for this period. Trying to decipher the political shenanigans and personal relationships of all involved while isolated and separate from any powerful patron who might help make clear makes for good reading. And there is quite a bit of adventure involved here, The Roman who owes the debt proves far more unwilling to pay than seems logical, which means that something else is going on. And that leads to more clues and different approaches and some fine derring do. Plus a lot of escaping and planning.

The slice of life story is interesting as well, giving us some insight into the running of a slave household and what freedom and unfreedom really means. It also delves into issues like consent, status, loyalty, and how slavery mucks about with them. As in her other books Bradshaw's guilty of placing far too modern a viewpoint on all of this in order to make her characters sympathetic, but she's far from alone in doing that. Most writers are much worse and at least she tries to base her justification for such attitudes in the ideals and beliefs of the time. Even if it is all a little too pat.

And of course, one of the really fun bits is the gladiatrix the protagonist hires as his bodyguard. Female gladiators did exist, and this provides the perfect opportunity for a female viewpoint we haven't seen before. And the character is well written and fun. Also, rather kickass without seeming like a superhuman.

The negative bits of the book come towards the end. Once you find out what's going on the story becomes something of a slog as you just wait to find out how things play out. At this point we also get a lot of self-righteous anger at the Roman state that would never have been tolerated by any magistrate or elite. Indeed, it is here that the modern viewpoint appears most strongly as the outrage over the unfairness of the system is presented in a way that makes sense only to an audience with modern preconceptions about the universality and impartiality of justice. Romans (or indeed Greeks) would have just scratched their heads and laughed about naïveté and ridiculous assumptions. Character motivations seem really stretched here.

Still, the core of the book is excellent. It provides us a look into Roman society that we don't often see. So it's definitely recommended from that angle. The modernish political thriller approach that the author takes to the material is also entertaining on its own. And the appearance of a gladiatrix is obviously going to be crowd-pleasing. Well worth a read.

Veronica says

Bradshaw's latest tome leaves the impression that it was cranked out in a hurry, a pale shadow of her previous books. It tells the story of Hermogenes, a moneylender from Alexandria who comes to Rome to collect a bad debt from a high-up Roman. As always, it asks question about identity, about an outsider fitting in -- Hermogenes is a Roman citizen and idealises Roman justice, but to many of the rich, powerful Romans he meets he is beneath contempt as a "Greekling", whose demands can safely be ignored whatever the law says.

The historical detail is as vivid and convincing as ever, but I'm afraid Hermogenes just doesn't seem as complex and sympathetic a character as some of Bradshaw's earlier heroes -- Caesarion, Cleopatra's heir, had his faults, but you came to like him despite them, whereas Hermogenes appears a little too good to be true from the start, constantly concerned about the wellbeing of every slave he meets, able to instantly figure out the complexities of Roman politics within a few days of his arrival, and boldly standing up to consuls and prefects who are threatening to kill him. The plot also is rather too smoothly oiled, with few genuine surprises -- but perhaps that's an after-effect of reading Wilkie Collins immediately beforehand!

That's not to say I didn't enjoy the book, but it is a long way from her best work.

Brittany says

It's just hard to get people excited about the adventures of an Alexandrian money-lender in Ancient Rome. Which is a crime, because this is a wonderful book. And, like someone says in it, it's not really about money--money is just the excuse for the fight. It's an engrossing adventure tale, filled with lovely characters. It's nice, sometimes, to just read about decent people. I don't buy into the whole mindset that in order to be the protagonist of a book you have to have big, dark, inner demons. Interesting things happen to good people, too, and they sure are fun to read about. Add to that the obvious historical veracity of the world-building, and this is a stellar example of historical fiction.

Ursula says

I had the perfect joke review of this book, but as it turns out, it was based on a mashup of two badly-remembered series titles (*Rome* and *Spartacus: Blood and Sand*). It's unfortunate that there really wasn't a series called *Rome: Blood and Sand* but it's not going to stop me from saying what I would title this book if it were to follow that formula.

I would call this one *Rome: Adverbs and Italics*.

Lizzie Ashworth says

In *Render Unto Caesar*, author Gillian Bradshaw delves into the heart of Rome with its sinister underbelly circa the early years of empire. The story follows a young Greek businessman intent on collecting a debt. Encountering troubles of all kinds, he must discern who to trust even among those in high office. He retains a likeable equanimity in spite of alarming incidents, revealing to the reader a character of high ethical

standards and above average intelligence in grappling with powers much greater than himself. The author's detailed portrayal of city life in Rome, from the common man's travails on the streets and in seamy tenements to the excesses of the wealthy rolls smoothly to the reader's understanding. A true pleasure to read for anyone interested in the history of Rome.

Elizabeth says

Oh God I stayed up far, far too late reading this. But it was worth it.

This pushes a button for me. That button is the hero who gets in so over his head, knows it, and grits his teeth and does his damndest. And is **awesome**. Bonus points for people around him thinking he's a total BAMF, and his response being, omgwtf I am so not the droid you are looking for. See also: Season 1 John Sheppard, and whatsherface in Naamah's Curse.

While this doesn't pass Bechdel (on-screen; there's a referenced conversation but it's very brief), I am willing to forgive on the grounds that Maerica kicks every possible variety of ass and the hero clearly adores his (off-screen) daughter.

I love that the book is from the perspective of the conquered peoples of Rome. I love that the plot is explained clearly without a single instance of "as you know, Bob." This is one time when the audience knowing as much as the point-of-view character works really well; pace Lawrence Block, but I find I often prefer stories where the audience knows more than the characters.

Oh, and the treatment of sexuality in early imperial Rome is pretty awesome.

Juan Arellano says

Entretenida novela historica. La ambientacion me parecio buena pero el personaje poco creible, menos aun mientras avanzaba la obra, pero no puedo negar que la disfrute, asi que diria que el balance es positivo.

skein says

Young-ish Greek man visits Rome; gets tangled up in politics and plots; makes vehement speeches about citizenship, slavery, honor; meets brash female gladiator; falls in ~~lust~~ love; writes many sad-face letters to his daughter; returns home.

Gave it three stars, because it's terribly engaging, but it's not very **good** so feel as tho I am being dishonest. Hermogenes is just too freaking perfect. He's clever, he's brave, he's rich, he's forthright and honest. His slaves love him. Other peoples' slaves love him. He makes immaterial mistakes and prays feverently and OH MY GOD I WANTED TO SMACK HIM. (plus: he's cool with homo/bisexuality 90% of the time and lets out with a nasty slur, randomly, why?)

Characterization was an utter fail, & there were too many (useless) info-dumps; and thanks for pointing out how to pronounce your daughters name **yet again**; but the attention to detail caught me now and then. Like: a rag is stuffed in his mouth and it tastes of ashes and oil - it's a rag to clean armor (affecting to me, for whatever reason, but it's another irritant: how and *why* would Hermogenes know this?)

(1/8-1/9, 460 pages)

Adam says

What a wonderful, satisfying book!

I decided to read this book on a whim while bouncing around the Kindle store because I had read Gillian Bradshaw's work before. I'm so glad I picked this one up! I flew through it.

Not only does Ms. Bradshaw succeed (again) in pumping life into the ordinary lives of ordinary people but she has a knack for bringing ancient Rome to life. However, what I really enjoyed was how she developed the differences between Romans and Alexandrian Greeks (cultural, philosophical etc.) She does this seamlessly, and without lecture, so that the reader is not necessarily for or against one civilization or the other. You are for the characters, particularly Hermogenes and Cantabra.

The story is great but the only problem I had is that I wanted it to go on and was so sorry when it finished. There is so much more that could happen and be developed (I'll say no more so I don't spoil things for potential readers). I don't think there is a sequel to this but I do hope one is in the works. I want to read more about Hermogenes and Cantabra!

A note of the actual e-book: I bought this for my Kindle and have to say that the publisher should be ashamed to have put such a great author's work out in such a state. I don't know if they scanned the book with some kind of text recognition software but almost every single 'page' had a typo on it, or missing letters. Very odd and no fault of the author's.

That is not to say I would not buy it again for the quality of the storytelling far outweighs the e-book glitches. Just to say that the publisher should be more careful next time.

Deborah Pickstone says

This is probably my favourite of Gillian Bradshaw's books (the other contender is *The Sand-Reckoner*), a story of a decent man who won't lie down and submit to bullying. I Can't think of a single book she has written that has disappointed me.

Cassandra Kay Silva says

I hate to make this point since it will sound sexist no matter how I word it but this book was obviously authored by a woman. The man was completely unrelatable to his sex. Too mushy, too overly concerned about every damn characters feelings, too observant and so introspective that it was just utterly utterly obviously contrived by a woman. The plot was actually good but how many times do we have to watch our supposed hero get beat up? His fighting is all with his words? Oh wow great I hate it. Someone throw a punch already other than the woman? Yah ok once again written by a woman I get it. The woman is the

tough guy. But the romance was completely unbelievable and unlikable even. It was all together too well tied up at the end for me too. Even the slaves get their happy ending? Every one of them? Life for a slave is never so neat in the end, not that we can't wish or hope things would have been different but they weren't and this stark contrast makes these slaves almost contemptible for their luck in life. Oh gosh, this whole book was just ridiculous and yet during the reading I admit I liked it, there were these massive problems to be sure and it was all together ridiculous but yah I have to admit at the time of reading it I was actually enjoying myself. So how do you rate a book like that? I have no idea.

Brian says

Set in Augustan Rome, *Render Unto Caesar* is the story of Hermogenes, a merchant from Alexandria, who travels to the capital to recover a debt owed to his late father, only to find himself ensnared in the financial machinations of Vedius Pollio, the fabulously rich plutocrat, notorious for feeding unsatisfactory slaves to the lampreys in his pond. Refusing to be intimidated by Pollio who seeks to brush him aside as an impudent barbarian, Hermogenes, politely persists with his requests until he finds himself arrested and accused of plotting to kill a consul.

Still refusing to be cowed, Hermogenes sets out to discover what is really at the bottom of the plot to kill the consul. When his own life is threatened he gets himself a bodyguard in the form of a celebrated female gladiator fallen on hard times. Together they manage to outwit the cabal of monstrous Roman aristocrats.

Well researched and full of colour, *Render Unto Caesar* brings first century Rome to life with all its arrogance, cruelty and splendour.

Nikki says

I struggled with this one for a long time. Much as I've enjoyed other books by Gillian Bradshaw (I think I gave *Island of Ghosts* 5/5 stars!), this one really didn't work for me. It's easy enough to read, and the research and detail seems as solid as I've come to expect from Bradshaw, but I just didn't enjoy myself. I didn't get involved with the characters or plot, which is too bad considering it involves figures like a female gladiator.

I kept putting it aside for when I felt more like it, but months have passed without me being any more 'in the mood', and I've even read another Bradshaw book in the time which had similarities in terms of the tone and pace, but which I loved and read compulsively.

I'd say I'll give this another chance someday, but I think I've given it a pretty fair one already. Bradshaw had me enjoying even a gutting of 'Bisclaveret'; this just didn't work for me. Time to cut my losses and move on to Bradshaw's other work, which I will most likely enjoy.

Olethros says

-Los ciudadanos son todos iguales, pero unos más iguales que otros-.

Género. Novela Histórica.

Lo que nos cuenta. Hérmodenes, ciudadano romano residente en Alejandría, viaja a Roma para reclamar una deuda bastante considerable y que forma parte de la herencia que recibió de su padre. El problema es que el deudor es cónsul, general y amigo personal del emperador Augusto.

¿Quiere saber más del libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

Vicki Cline says

Around the middle of Augustus' reign, a young Alexandrian businessman, Hermogenes, comes to Rome to collect on a debt an important Roman owes his uncle. The Roman is determined not to pay and is actually insulted that a foreigner would try to get money from him. When Hermogenes is set upon and nearly killed, he's saved by a former female gladiator (yes, there were such people). She becomes his bodyguard as he tries various ways to get the money. It's a very interesting story and an important background is about the relationships between masters and slaves.

May says

Gillian Bradshaw is an underrated historical fiction writer. I have read most of her books (I'm still working on the rest of them), and she does an excellent job integrating a compelling plot with interesting characters set in a historical time period. She does especially well with the Roman Empire, where many of her books take place.

In this particular book, we learn much about the intrigues surrounding the Roman Empire and the relationship between Rome and her colonies as a result of an Egyptian merchant who inherits a large debt owed by an important Roman politician. As a result of the merchant's attempt to collect this debt, there are attempts made on his life, and he gets sucked into the vortex known as Roman politics. In between the assassination attempts, we learn about slavery, the gladiator school, and the role of women in the Roman Empire (among other things).

I don't think this is one of the author's best books, but she is such an excellent author that it doesn't matter. Her characters are interesting, and the historical detail well-integrated into the novel. If you're interested in this time period, this is a definite recommended read!

Rusty says

Oh dear! This book just irritated me. A reasonable plot dragged down by poor writing and an absurd characterisation of the main protagonist. His excessive concern for every porter and slave he met was unrealistic even by modern standards, let alone Ancient Rome. The romance near the end was just silly. This is my sixth Bradshaw novel - maybe I've read too many in a row - but she fails each time to make me feel really immersed in whatever era she is writing about. The attention to historical detail is thorough but it's as though this keeps the author outside of her story, rather than being a gateway to culture and times, worrying over meticulous attention to furniture or such. Despite her academic rigour - and she always has an afterword justifying her historical accuracy, as if that's the most important aspect of writing for her - she is no Mary Renault or even a Wallace Breem when it comes to gripping storytelling or feeling for ancient cultures. In this book I found myself skipping large passages of description, pages even, not matter how well researched,

yet still finding the plot easy to follow.

And the main character himself doesn't feel authentic or even believable. It is too feel-good, his story, the good guy winning out despite all the evil, powerful Romans he tangles with.. In reality he probably wouldn't have made it through the first attempt on his life. And if he had, would have sensibly run for his life.

Ray S says

Good intertwining of Roman and Grecian themes and reads well until near the end where it slows down a bit.

Peter says

OK, so it's kind of a thriller, not so much a "whodunnit" but a "whyhedoit." So, I guess it is a genre book after all. And there is a romance component, so, boom, another genre. But Bradshaw really excels at bringing the setting (the late part of Augustus's reign) to life -- she had a way of adding texture to every scene, so you get an image of what Rome must have smelled and sounded like as well as the rest of it. If you like Lindsey Davis's or Seven Saylor's Roman mysteries, this is a no-brainer; if you are interested in the ancient world or Rome or just like a good thriller, you could do a lot worse.

Shari says

Bradshaw's history is always exciting and true in her novels. In this book she takes on Rome in 16 B.C.E. through the eyes of an Alexandrian businessman who has come to Rome to collect a debt inherited from an uncle.

Her characterizations strengthen her narrative, and she presents a picture of Rome from an unusual angle in fiction. Business connections and personality types rampant in early imperial Rome who are meant to uphold Roman law and quite often abuse it. Roman attitudes toward Egyptian/Alexandrian citizens and other people of the Empire -- conquered peoples all, and the workings of gladiatorial schools are on the page for our examination. This is largely a story of private citizens trying to get fair treatment under Roman law and how that law could vary from one individual to the next -- each of them supposedly meant to render that law and respect it.

There is a smart study of relationships between masters and slaves within ordinary households, and forays into the city of Rome that describe the various neighborhoods and how they interact and change. The local gathering places where people meet and exchange pleasantries and gossip; where rumor and falsehood complicate everyday survival. In short, it is a story of personal injustices and political intrigues, many layered with subtexts that enrich or entangle the lives of the populace of the Empire.

Bradshaw's author's note at the back of the book is a breath of fresh air. To the point and informative and much appreciated, giving the primary sources and academic histories that support her narrative.
