

BOOK REVIEW

Seneca: Selected Dialogues and Consolations. Translated by PETER J. ANDERSON. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2015. Pp. xxxi + 219. Paper, \$14.00. ISBN 978-1-62466-368-0.

This volume includes an introduction, translations of six dialogues and three consolations, and three sections of supplementary information. The introduction covers what is known about Seneca's life, literary and philosophical background and qualities, and a section dedicated to each of the texts covering the dating, addressees, and general theme or focus. The introduction concludes with a brief list for "Further Reading" geared towards general themes or concerns related to Seneca's life, philosophy, and works. The concluding supplements include a set of brief biographies of key individuals mentioned in the texts, a glossary of repeated Latin words, and an index of historical persons cited or referenced.

The texts are, in order of presentation: "On Providence", "On the Resolute Nature of the Wise Man", "Consolation to Marcia", "On the Happy Life", "On Retirement", "On Serenity of the Spirit", "On the Shortness of Life", "Consolation to Polybius", and "Consolation to His Mother Helvia". The particular selection is credited to a desire for a range of focal themes (xxvi).

Each text is annotated for literary or historical references. There are also occasional cross-references to other texts in the volume, which is a nice touch. The footnotes rarely address philosophical ideas. Instead they concentrate on identifying historical persons and their importance, and basics of Roman culture such as the duties of the Vestal Virgins ("On Providence" 5.3, note 16, page 13). The same is true for the appended materials which include biographical information for "Key Individuals", an "Index of Historical Persons", and the glossary of Latin terms (largely standard cultural concepts such as 'consul' and 'salutatio').

The texts are presented in the order in which they appear in the manuscripts (xxvi), and not chronological order, although chronology is considered in the introduction. As an editorial decision this choice is not uncommon (the *Ox-*

ford Classical Text, upon which this edition is based {xvi},¹ does the same), but given that the rest of the edition suggests use for a beginning student, a few details concerning the textual tradition might have been helpful background to introduce readers to how Seneca's texts and ideas survived through the centuries.

Given the notice paid to literary style in the introduction in the sections concerning "literary qualities" (xiii–xv) and "translation" (xv–xvi), it is surprising that stylistic features are so rarely pointed out in the actual texts. The notes on literary features are almost exclusively limited to identifying quotations or allusions, which is helpful but does little to help readers see Seneca's style in action. In the introduction, there is only one example cited, that of Seneca's use of epigram (xiv). In the texts, the only stylistic device noted is "an extended military metaphor" ("On Retirement" note 5, page 98). A more advanced reader might not require or want such notes, but given the basic nature of the historical and cultural notes, such a reader is not the intended audience.

While the footnotes usually provide welcome historical context, the explanations and details are not always consistent. For example, in "On the Resolute Nature of the Wise Man", at section 5.6 (22–23), the characters of Demetrius and Stilbon are not explained in the notes or the background information after the texts. The particular problem here is that Demetrius Poliorcetes is not distinguished from Demetrius the Cynic (who has an entry in the brief biography section), and a student might easily confuse the philosopher with the Macedonian general-king. In contrast in the following text, ("Consolation to Marcia"), Lucius Sulla has 2 explanatory notes to explain his importance in history and as an example in the current text (12.6, page 50), in addition to a brief biography entry. While Sulla may be the better known historical figure, Demetrius and Stilbon are given more textual space as exemplars, which could be highlighted with some basic background information in the footnotes.

The translations themselves are very readable and easy to understand, if a bit loose at times. For example, in "On the Resolute Nature of the Wise Man", *parum sana verba* is translated as "totally crazy things" (3.1, page 19), and *mutatis rerum nominibus* is rendered "playing with the names of things" (3.1, page 19).² In the introductory notes concerning translation, Anderson states that his goals were to replicate the range of style and effects in Seneca's Latin, and to emphasize

¹There may be a mistake in the Introduction on this point. The edition of Seneca's dialogues and consolations in the Oxford Classical Text series is credited to Lindsay, when it was actually prepared by L.D. Reynolds.

²The Latin text is from TheLatinLibrary.com.

sense over literality (xv–xvi). He succeeds in the latter goal, but the former is hindered by a lack of explanation of the particulars of style and technique, both in the introduction and in the footnotes within individual texts.

In spite of the uneven explanations in the footnotes and lack of stylistic commentary, this edition would be a good one for introducing students to Seneca's philosophical ideas and how they interact with and comment on contemporary Roman culture and history. Much of the information in the introduction is dedicated to basic philosophical concepts and how Seneca engaged with the thinkers of his past and present. The footnotes, supplementary material, and translation concentrate on the basics of philosophy and history. The notes present helpful information for a student new to Roman history, culture, and politics of the early Empire.

KATHLEEN BURT

Middle Georgia State University, kathleen.burt@mga.edu